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**Rethinking the Teaching of English in  
Schools: Theory and the Politics of  
Subject Identity**

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requirements for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

To Domini

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relations between English teaching in state schooling and critical theory. The published works develop a position on English teaching that reinterprets the grounds of its claims to integrity and authority. They present a series of arguments for the transformation of the subject based on rethinking its premises in the light of critical theory. They also propose ideas and materials to provide directions and specific practices for change. The published works express a developing concern with the cultural politics of the subject and its role in state schooling arguing that dominant forms of English teaching are rooted in ideas and practices that are culturally and linguistically restricted and exclusive. The argument for the transformation of the subject is most fully developed in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* which attempts to offer an accessible account of poststructuralist theories and applies them to three main areas of English teaching: reading, writing and oracy.

The deposition demonstrates the personal-professional context in which theory became a significant mechanism for change. The deposition goes on to outline the development of the published works and demonstrates the range of critical theory brought to bear on English in them. Aspects of critical theory are explicated in relation to their relevance to English teaching. These include the 'classic' sociology of education, poststructuralist theories of meaning, discourses and subjectivity, postmodernist accounts of culture, sociolinguistics, Cultural Studies and Media Studies. The relations between the different elements of theory is explored. The impact of critical theory on English in higher education is also examined. Key positions and texts are outlined for their implicit critique of the familiar assumptions of English teaching. The history of English teaching in state education is then investigated through an account of what appear as its key lines of development and is then examined through three main and different positions: the liberal version of progress, the ideological critique and 'governmentality'. The recent history and contemporary state of English teaching is also explored in the light of these different versions of subject history. Some attempt is made to account for current positions in relation to English teaching, including perspectives from other national contexts.

The conclusion of the deposition engages with a critical rethinking of the function of critique through a 'governmental' perspective that emphasizes the 'deep' pedagogical structures at work in the English classroom and asks questions about how the published works may be reconsidered in the light of this perspective. The conclusion returns to the question of the cultural politics of subject content, attempting to reconcile the critique developed through the published works with the governmental position - in order to propose a role for theory that takes account of the historical and institutional context of English teaching.

## Published works

1. An article: 'Othello: A New Approach to A-level English' in *2D*, Vol. 3, no. 3, Summer 1984.
2. An article: 'Redefining A-level' in *The English Magazine*, no. 17, Autumn 1986.
3. A chapter: 'GCSE Post-Structuralism: It Can Be Done' in Mick Burton, ed., *Enjoying Texts*, (London: Stanley Thornes, 1989).
4. A chapter: 'Never Mind English: This is Theory in the Classroom' with Paul Moran in Peter Brooker and Peter Humm, eds., *Dialogue and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 90-105.
5. An article: 'NATE and the Politics of English' in *English in Education*, vol. 24, no. 2, Summer 1990.
6. An article: 'Hanky-Panky' in *English in Education*, Autumn 1991.
7. An article: 'LINC: Reading The World Of English' in *English in Education*, Autumn 1992.
8. A book: *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (London: Routledge, 1993).
9. A chapter: 'Key Stage 4: Back to the Future?' in Peter King and Robert Protherough (eds.), *The Challenge of English in the National Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 164 - 181.

## INTRODUCTION AND AN ACCOUNT OF PUBLISHED WORKS

English teachers and other advocates of the subject have been wary of theory as dangerous, anti-liberal, anti-social and irrelevant. English in schools remains though one of the last bastions to have resisted the implications of the theoretical critiques offered by deconstructive theories of language textuality and of culture. How has the institution of English maintained this not so splendid isolation? Why have English teachers distrusted theory? Why are the reading practices of English so narrowly restricted? What's at stake in the maintenance of the anti-theoretical position shared by advocates of liberal English and Patten alike? What would a theorized practice of language and textuality look like? These questions will be broached, if not finally laid to rest, in this seminar.

Nick Peim: NATE 1994 York conference seminar brochure.

The published work I am presenting for consideration for the award of PhD was undertaken during the period running from 1985 to 1995 (see list of published works, p. 4). The main item for consideration is the book, *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (1993). As a body of work it constitutes an attempt to elaborate the theme of the seminar I held at York in 1994, outlined above. The main focus in the published materials is the teaching of English in schools, conceived as a kind of mass project to which the population of schooling is subjected as a whole.

My published work on English teaching argues for a rethinking of the foundations of the subject in the secondary school sector and seeks to promote changes in its specific practices in the field of language and literacy. The main burden was to 'take on' English in secondary schooling in two main ways: firstly, to offer a critical analysis of the structure of the subject; and secondly, to provide a set of proposals for reorientation of the subject (or a subject structured under different principles). Throughout there was a conscious intention to apply 'theory' to English in the school curriculum, specifically in the upper secondary context where I was working throughout the period of the publications in question.

What follows includes a description of my published work on English teaching addressing questions of the identity and authority of English. The introduction will provide brief accounts of the various contexts of my published work on English teaching and the theoretical position that I developed. The following chapters include a fuller account of the elements of theory that influenced my thinking on English

teaching and an attempt to describe conceptions of English in education embodied in various versions of the emergence and development of the subject. In the conclusion I consider the challenge to the position I developed from the perspective of 'governmentality' by way of reconsidering its relevance to contemporary conditions in and discourses in state education.

### **Literary Theory and Beyond**

Theory is an uncertain, historically shifting term, but was commonly used during the period of the work for consideration, where the term operates as a kind of shorthand for a reorientation of practices and ideas in the field of cultural knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton refers to the proliferation of 'theory' as being symptomatic of a condition of crisis and acute self-reflection, concerned with signifying practices and modes of understanding them.<sup>2</sup> During the period in question 'theory' became a catch-all term for post-structuralism especially; but I developed a use of the term to refer to a particular kind of reflexivity in and around the subject, English, and that extended into elements of social theory. Theory for me would incorporate sociology, sociolinguistics, media reception theory, elements of cultural theory, the history of education - discourses that would clarify the context and structure of the subject English in state education. While '*literary* theory' offered a starting point, it was necessary to go beyond the literary to furnish some account of the social and cultural institutional processes of English in schooling. The intention, to use a psychoanalytic metaphor, was to bring to consciousness and confront elements of the subject's identity - conflicting accounts of its history, for example - that were not present or foregrounded in its characteristic, dominant self-descriptions.<sup>3</sup> Theory offered analytic and productive tools for performing that reflexive operation and for realizing practices - in the field of textuality and language that English occupied - that would be quite different from the dominant form of the subject.

By an uneven process of accumulation, fusion, modification and development it was possible to assemble a body of theory from textual and linguistic philosophy, sociology, sociolinguistics, cultural theory, histories of subject identity and more general histories of state education, and to produce alternative perspectives for the analysis of English than were available within the subject itself.<sup>4</sup> Examining the structure of early pedagogic relations in the management of urban children, for



example, or the formation of the teacher as an 'ethical persona' or the cultivation of the self-reflective individual within regimes of pastoral surveillance, meant that the simplest and apparently most fundamental scenes of classroom practice could not be accounted for in terms of the available historical and contemporary descriptions of English.<sup>5</sup> Both liberal and traditionalist versions of the teaching of English have had to - or have 'chosen' to - operate without reference to these perspectives, and others. In reaction to the static form of the traditionalist/liberal binary,<sup>6</sup> my main intention was to deploy theory to render 'strange' the everyday practices and beliefs of English teaching in schools, to rethink the textual, linguistic and therefore cultural orientation of the subject and its role within the education system - 'deconstructing the obvious' in Stuart Hall's phrase.<sup>7</sup> Deconstruction in this sense has the political purpose of reaching beyond existing perspectives - 'the obvious' - to open spaces for change. In effect, the theory assembled in the work in question gave rise to an attempt to foreground the *politics* of teaching English.

This emergence of theory coincided with shifts in the definition or application of the term 'politics'. In certain academic discourses in the humanities - particularly in Cultural Studies and in Media Studies - there was an attempt to identify the political in the specific details and practices of everyday life. The political was revealed to be at work in language, in the various fields of culture and cultural life, in education, in socio-sexual life and in social relations generally: anywhere and everywhere in social and 'private' life.<sup>8</sup> After the influence of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci, cultural theory and Cultural Studies refreshed old marxisms and produced new forms of social critique based on a reconnection of the relations between base and superstructure,<sup>9</sup> allied with newly emerging theories of subjectivity, meaning and discourses via post-structuralism. In feminism, the fusion of the theoretical, the political, the cultural in everyday lived experience seemed particularly clear. Chris Weedon's *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1987) offered an exemplary case of the deployment of poststructuralist theory into the specific politics of everyday institutionalized practices and revealed the political at work in reading practices.

### Personal Context / Historical Juncture

My own career as an English teacher follows a certain trajectory through contrasting models of subject identity. At the beginning, I was working in a school department operating a fairly complex post-Bullock model of English.<sup>10</sup> This project was an unlikely and unusual amalgam of tendencies in progressive education, a strong commitment to the new politically conscious, egalitarian project of comprehensive schooling (the school had been built in 1970; I joined in 1976), a Leavisite view of culture and literature and a liberal English emphasis on creativity, oral participation and workshop models of English pedagogy. In the work of this unusual English department, there was a self-conscious desire to provide a framework and practice of access for all students in the comprehensive school's catchment to what were perceived to be significant cultural experiences. Significant cultural experiences took the form of 'real' literature, such as *Rasselas*, *Silas Marner* and the novels of Turgenev. Canonical literary texts were taught to year ten and year eleven CSE classes in the belief that they were worthy of the 'finest' and could engage more meaningfully with 'real' literature than with the 'ersatz' literature conventionally served up on CSE English textual menus, such as *Kes*, *Joby* or *Zigger-Zagger*.<sup>11</sup>

This complete commitment to the literary canon made the teaching of 'great' literature a moral cultural enterprise. It was imperative for the English teacher to make literature accessible and meaningful. There was a similar, absolute commitment to writing in English as a form of creativity, self-expression and mode of personal growth/development, giving particular emphasis to creative and expressive forms of writing. Aspects of this whole position of English teaching were expressed partially in elements of the work of David Holbrook, Anthony Adams and Patrick Creber.<sup>12</sup> Adams and Creber had particularly been responsible for the development of revised models of professional identity for English teachers in state education in relation to the still relatively new comprehensive school idea. In *English for the Rejected* (1964) David Holbrook, a student of F.R. Leavis, proposed a model of creativity in English teaching for children labelled as 'less able' providing specific examples of psychologically sensitive modes of 'reading' the power of expression in the non-standard writings of such 'rejected' children.

Crucial to the motive force of the department's ideas and practices was a kind of 'left-Leavisism', within an environment of shared ideas, where banks of resources

were communally produced. The department was characterized by an ethos of commitment and positive regard for a predominantly working-class clientele, classroom practice being mobilized towards enabling high levels of participation. While the departmental 'creed' was powerfully influenced by the idea of literary value and Leavis's sense of cultural crisis, it had transposed the cultural mission into a social context that Leavis would probably have felt as utterly alien: the modern, mixed-ability comprehensive school.<sup>13</sup> A belief in the essential human value of literature drove much of the work of the department. There was a serious belief in the quality and significance of the cultural experience of making Eliot, Blake and Shakespeare available to *all*. A belief in the politics of action also expressed itself in the context of the classroom as a commitment to reading that enjoyed considerable success in getting working-class school students to read 'quality' fiction on their own in a carefully monitored environment where free choice was subject to firm pastoral moral/spiritual guidance.<sup>14</sup> Literature, rather than presenting a cultural barrier, was seen as the means for realizing access to cultural development and the refinement of sensibility rather than social mobility. A strong departmental commitment to this position helped to ensure it worked in practice. This formative departmental experience was to provide an important model of cultural/political practice for my later work with 'theory' and English teaching as the head of an English department in an upper secondary school.

My gradual engagement with theory partially problematized the model for English I had invested in so strongly. I had long been familiar with Wittgenstein's philosophy of language expressed in *Philosophical Investigations*, and with the emphasis given to 'language games' and to the relations between language, specific language practices and forms of life.<sup>15</sup> This was hardly disconcerting for the integrity of subject model I'd been working with, although it did seem to offer an anti-essentialist theory of meaning - 'Don't ask for the meaning; look at the use!' - and seemed to propose an anthropological view of subject identity.<sup>16</sup> It was later, in relation to readings of Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Ian Hunter that Wittgenstein reappeared in a more deconstructive incarnation. Questions about the function of English in schooling - what were the relations between the language game(s) of English and its 'form of life'? - may have pointed towards its local and provisional nature, but didn't undermine its claims to cultural authority.

Wittgenstein's emphasis on the significance of forms of life in relation to meaning did not push for the re-exploration of the relations between forms of life, differentiated language practices, institutions, power, culture and class. Language issues, though, had appeared from time to time as problematic in my own consciousness of professional identity and practice. Forms of public assessment in English seemed unable to recognize the power of articulation in writings such as those analysed by Holbrook in *English for the Rejected*. Non-standard written performances of students at CSE were destined to be graded negatively despite their often alarming intensity, their linguistic and communicative power.<sup>17</sup>

As a PGCE student I had been briefly introduced to sociolinguistics in the context of schooling. I had been vaguely aware that there had been considerable discussion about the positions of Basil Bernstein and M.A.K. Halliday.<sup>18</sup> I had known something of sociology, but had displaced its critique of schooling as a form of social exclusion with an inclusive notion of creativity. Later in my first teaching appointment, a close colleague was seconded to do research in education at Oxford and began to read Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>19</sup> and these ideas began to destabilise my world view of English teaching. In 1983 I received from the same colleague Francis Mulhern's *The Moment of Scrutiny* (1979) and a pre-publication copy of the early chapters of Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (1983). It soon became very clear that the identity of the subject was being called into question, and that theory was directly related to this process. The hitherto unheard of dimension of the political was being discussed in relation to the process of questioning English, albeit almost entirely in the context of H.E. *Re-Reading English* (1982) contained a number of significant pieces confronting various aspects of the subject, including challenges to the supremacy of literature and specific suggestions for alternative reading practices contained in Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (1980) indicated interesting new techniques for reading allied with powerful arguments against the established assumptions of literary practices. To a limited extent poststructuralist theory had featured in accounts of English teaching, notably Richard Exon's 'The Post Structuralist Always Reads Twice'<sup>20</sup> and there appeared occasional challenging critiques of English as *the* liberal subject in the journal *English in Education* by Terry Eagleton, Catherine Belsey and others.<sup>21</sup> In the face of a

growing body of theoretically-oriented literature, the foundations of the cultural mission I had been involved in as an English teacher were considerably less secure.

### The Theory in Question

Increasingly, poststructuralist theories of language and meaning appeared to be of great significance in relation to rethinking the politics of English teaching. Certain discourses in education were also deploying poststructuralist theories and vocabularies to reinterpret education practices in relation to questions about culture and power.<sup>22</sup>

Key poststructuralist works and writers dealt with linguistic/textual issues that seemed to demand a sustained rethinking of the English curriculum and its relations to language and culture. Derrida's work on signification, textuality, writing/speech and language - especially in 'Structure, Sign and Play', in *Positions* and in *Of Grammatology* - proposed a more mobile and decentred theory of language and meaning than any imagined by English teaching.<sup>23</sup> Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1977) seemed again to emphasize the provisional nature of meanings, in the end implying the close relation between meanings and specific social practices. His later thesis of a shift in the nature and scope of government also seemed to have serious implications for the normative practices of education, and was particularly interesting in relation to the personalist elements of English.<sup>24</sup> Lacanian theory on the subject of language, the positionality of the subject and the symbolic order (reworked by Althusser as interpellation) rendered the central idea of writing/speaking as self-expression problematic and inverted the established, common-sense assumptions of liberal and traditional models of English about language, meaning and the individual.<sup>25</sup>

It became difficult to see how English could continue to claim to be the all-embracing, liberal space on the curriculum where its subjects could enjoy self-realization through writing and the free exploration of self and 'world' through literature.<sup>26</sup> Writing turned out to be much less about self-expression than English teaching had imagined: writing was an institutionally determined discursive practice that positioned subjects differently. Literature similarly interpellated its subject differently. The emphasis that the practices of English gave to single texts, authors, personal responses, creative writing, with its necessary exclusions of alternative forms of expression and cultural experiences, now seemed questionable - especially in

relation to the normative judgements made by examinations that had significant social consequences. The subject, English, could not, within this developing theoretical framework, claim to speak univocally to disparate social groups with an evenly distributed cultural orientation. If textual meanings were partly dependent on the positioning of subjects, and if the identity, status and even the *being* of texts were already dependent on a textual field rather than being intrinsic, this seemed to pose questions for the subject as a social practice in the field where culture and education meet most glaringly. Similarly, if language constituted a symbolic order that positioned subjects differently, what sense could it be to make judgements of value and quality where one discursive formation dominated others? A return to sociolinguistics grimly confirmed the analysis of a structurally-loaded language environment unconsciously designed to limit access.

The decentring effects of poststructuralist theories of text and language emphasized the question of the social context of the subject and linked with social theory in the form of sociology and sociolinguistics. A break with liberal and traditional versions of English teaching and with the 'settlement' represented in *The Bullock Report* involved developing a conscious theory of the institutions of education.<sup>27</sup> This meant rethinking the more or less 'functionalist' view that had characterized my affiliations with the subject - and that had seemed characteristic of a significant mode of professional identity. Powerful, critical, contemporary social theory became available (though hardly through ready-to-hand professional channels) to effect this shift in the form of the sociology of education, in sociolinguistics, and then in the expanding domain of the sociology of culture. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, symbolic violence and 'habitus' in *Reproduction* (1977) and Paul Willis's study of counter-cultural resistances in *Learning to Labour* (1979) provided a means for re-interpreting the grounds of educational success and failure. A powerful if starkly deterministic counter to liberal/teleological versions of state education systems was evident in the major study of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis: *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976). Similarly the work of William Labov and M.A.K. Halliday, among others, on language, culture and identity, even when not directly addressing the field of education, seemed to have powerful implications for the linguistic assumptions of education generally and very specifically for English.<sup>28</sup> Later Norman Fairclough's critical linguistics provided theories and examples for dealing

differently with both language practices and textual material.<sup>29</sup> Some of these ideas seemed to be appearing in discussions about English and were disseminated even in popular materials indicating possible new orientations for language work that would be more sociolinguistically attuned.<sup>30</sup> Harold Rosen's 'Language in the Education of the Working Classes'<sup>31</sup> gave a populist account of a Hallidayan position that was made accessible to English teachers via the mainstream channels of ideas appearing in *English in Education*.<sup>32</sup>

The accumulated impact of critical sociology, critical sociolinguistics, cultural and 'literary' theory provided a theoretical nexus for me, enabling a critical rethinking of the school as socio/cultural milieu, and alerting me to the cultural bias of the curriculum and the language of schooling. English, as I and others like me had known it, had been thought of as the space on the curriculum for creativity, for empowerment, for self-realization and for the free exploration of self and world through literature - a powerfully embracing form of education, always reaching beyond itself. In the light of theory, English now seemed pre-eminently to be that segment of the curriculum concerned with naturalizing normative forms of language assessment, and with promoting a normative view of *significant* cultural experience - especially in the way it divided off certain cultural objects, icons and reading practices (established in the discourses of literature) from popular culture.

Postmodernist accounts of culture that were increasingly influential in Cultural Studies and Media Studies proposed quite different models of culture from those associated with the form of left-Leavisism that had been my experience of English in the comprehensive school. These were also quite different from the dominant liberal English model. Counter theories of cultural meaning elaborated by Media and Cultural Studies reinforced and developed the sense of the arbitrary imposition of models of culture and cultural significance at work in English teaching. Key studies on the consumption of popular culture seemed to argue against the reductive idea of popular culture as simply hegemonic material imposed on an uncritical, passively consuming public. John Tomlinson's (1991) survey of positions and general thesis in *Cultural Imperialism* indicated a more interesting and more complex sense of the interactions between media and media users. Audience theory produced some convincing and often bracing ethnographic studies of popular culture: the work of Eric Michaels,<sup>33</sup> for example, and Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas* (1985). Ien Ang's

subsequent elaborations in *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (1991) and *Living Room Wars* (1996) epitomized a movement away from a monolithic view of popular culture. John Fiske and others gave credence to the significance of popular cultural practices in specific accounts, eliding the distinctions between text, language and lived experiences within institutional formations.<sup>34</sup> Although not directly related to education, nor to the specific cultural practices and habits of thought of English, this work seemed to suggest that the popular was being excluded on notional grounds of cultural superiority. The questioning of the category of literature implicit in the history and deconstruction of textual identities suggested that the realm of literature, even its more generous, liberal formulation, was a 'cultural arbitrary' imposed on the curriculum and was the symptomatic trace of a lingering Leavisism in English.

Bourdieu's study on culture and social class differences, *Distinction* (1986), closely elaborated the identification of forms of culture with social class. Different class groups were found to be differently interpellated by different forms of cultural expression. Patterns of use and attitudes to cultural products and processes could be identified as being specific to class groups - echoing Labov's correlation between class and specific language forms.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the history of imperialism seemed to suggest that current forms of English were not entirely unrelated to a history of cultural colonialism - whereby English was an element in the imposition of cultural norms on subject populations. Edward Said (1978) and Gayatri Spivak (1990) had written about the post-colonial in relation to the field of literature and others had also indicated the use of English as a vehicle for cultural hegemony in India and other colonial contexts. Again, the significance of English - language and culture - seemed to be related to maintaining a kind of cultural dominion. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* by Gauri Viswanathan (1989) gives an account of the imperialist significance of literary study and the practices of English teaching and offers an alternative view to the singular development represented as *the* history of English in familiar historical accounts of English as a narrative of liberal progress.<sup>36</sup>

Other specific critiques of liberal, personal versions of English appeared. According to Ian Hunter, the centrality of English in state education curricula was not simply about naturalizing dominant forms of language and specific configurations of culture as embodied in literature; it was more importantly about a specific mode of engaging with the self, via cultural objects, and was fundamentally a particular form



of cultivation of the self.<sup>37</sup> Terry Eagleton identified the personalist mania of English in a series of questions:

Why does it insist so dogmatically on abstracting personal values and qualities from the whole concrete context - political society - in which they are embedded? Why does it continually offer us the cerebral abstraction of something called 'interpersonal relationships' or 'personal growth' or 'immediate experience', when a moment's thought is enough to reveal that such things gain their fully concrete significance only in the whole political and historical context which shapes them?<sup>38</sup>

Hunter's work on the figure of the English teacher and the role of English in state education in *Culture and Government* (1988) foregrounds the significance of the personalist discourses of English and makes this aspect of the subject the basis for its very existence and the explanation for its persistence. It is, for Hunter, precisely as a form of 'moral technology' that the reading practices of English are put to work - with their emphasis on the adjudication and adjustment of personal responses, providing a mechanism for the production of the intransitively self-reflective subject. It is the cultivation of this form of subjectivity that Hunter sees as explaining the centrality of English in the curriculum. For Hunter, the self-monitoring, self-regulating subject is the historically-rooted end point of mass education systems as developed in the nineteenth century. The logic of 'pastoral discipline', elaborated extensively in *Rethinking the School* (1994), can be seen at work in the context of English teaching. It is possible to reinterpret Hunter's notion of pastoral discipline as the pedagogic mechanism supporting the role of literature and standard English as markers of 'distinction'.<sup>39</sup>

The elements of theory I had put together seemed coherent in suggesting the textual practices of English were limited, culturally biased and orientated significantly towards traditional literature and a limited range of reading practices. Theory had put canonicity and the concept of literature as a discrete, self supporting textual realm at least under provisional erasure. Theory as I read and constructed it denied the essentialist view of literature as a discrete category or distinct set of practices. The valorization of literature was a particular form of institutionalized discursive practice, modelled on a quite distinct notion of literacy. Theory revealed the reading practices

of English as being overly invested with the personalist discourses of liberal education that denied the social and political contexts of meaning and that operated reading modes and techniques that were neither transparent nor explicit nor accessible equally to all the subject groups of English in schooling. As Brian Street has argued, literacy is a contested field and definitions of it involve the interplay of ideology and power.<sup>40</sup> The particular form of English I had been working with, and the dominant, mainstream forms of English teaching operating at the time, had no means of addressing such issues opened up by theory.

### **The Project of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher***

The task of taking on English that found its fullest expression in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* wasn't designed to displace and unmask the ideological structure of English in order to reach towards an ideologically free identity and practice. Nor was its intention to restore the subject to its true liberationist mission. The idea was rather to promote a theory and practice of the subject in schooling that was aware of various elements that had not been accounted for in the dominant versions of the subject. I had developed a position via theory that had the effect of destabilizing the idea of literary studies, and problematizing the language practices of English in its institutionalized powerful forms and embodied in its authorized discourses. Although English might have represented itself as open, nebulous and productively ill-defined (as *The Bullock Report* and Brian Cox had claimed in favour of the subject's centrality), English was actually powerfully specific and instituted. Exam syllabuses, institutionalized ideas and ingrained habits at all levels determined English as a restricted set of practices.<sup>41</sup> The culturally biased practices of English in the field of literacy and language had been thoroughly institutionalized according to normative models of competence. Variations between traditionalist versions, liberal versions and utilitarian versions could not conceal an underlying substratum. *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* wanted to counter the hegemonic version of English by insisting on foregrounding the cultural politics at stake in the subject. In this latter phase of my published work on English teaching the offer of alternative ideas and practices was intended to take English on at the *constitutional* level.

During the period of the writing of these pieces and of the production of the book *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, I was a full-time English teacher

(latterly becoming also a teacher of Media Studies) leading a large English department in a 14 - 19 state secondary school. For the English teacher, the period from 1983 to 1995 was marked by significant changes, and the occasional flaring of often polarized debates about the proper identity, structure and function of the subject (latterly as the centrepiece of the National Curriculum).<sup>42</sup> As a practising English teacher and department head I was involved in the day-to-day implications of changing the subject - becoming more consciously aware of the various forces at work in the process of challenging and sustaining models of subject identity.

### Conditions in English Teaching

During the period of the publications, an extraordinary degree of freedom had been granted to teachers by Sir Keith Joseph's reforms of 16+ examinations (1987). The amalgamation of GCE and CSE schemes into the unitary GCSE exam had produced a sudden proliferation of 100% coursework GCSE schemes of assessment.<sup>43</sup> Many syllabuses in English were characterized by their open-ended structures: for example, the Northern Examinations and Assessment Board's 'syllabus D' at GCSE and at the AEB 660 syllabus at A level. For the English teacher aspiring to develop a model of the subject based in critical theory, liberal exam structures meant that the possibilities suggested by theory could be realized in practice. The English department could determine the content of the syllabus. Departments could devolve this authority to determine the content of the subject to individual teachers. This was a heyday of professional autonomy for the English teacher. A gradual influx of newly-qualified graduates whose experience of theory on degree courses was part of their experience of English promised to be a significant factor to impel change. On the other hand, the powerful determinations of subject identity - specific to English in schools - meant that the wider political forces were able to reinstall a more or less traditionalist version of the subject via the National Curriculum.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 and its 'sister act' of 1992 changed the context, significantly reducing teacher autonomy at the level of the curriculum. In addition, it has to be conceded that the freedoms ostensibly allowed by 100% coursework schemes in English at GCSE had been largely unrealized. Coursework for assessment had remained organized by the dominant categories of literature, personal response and creative writing, while practices of assessment had remained dominated

by standard English. While the installation of the National Curriculum meant that English syllabuses at 16 + became, at a stroke, much more bounded and controlled than 'mode three' schemes and gave much more prominence to exam assessment, there was no huge shift in professional orientation required of the majority of English teachers. The content of the curriculum confirmed the primacy of literature, the centrality of Shakespeare and made demands for the study of pre-twentieth century literature. The new curriculum insisted on a thoroughly functionalist view of standard English. This 'right turn' failed to engage any political protest by English teachers. As I attempted to indicate in *The Challenge of English in the National Curriculum*, it was the professional identity of English teachers (with its complex relations to issues of class identity and social status) and the ready-made assumptions and forms of the subject in English teaching - largely unaware of theory in the sense I had defined it - that enabled the new form of the National Curriculum to be imposed.<sup>44</sup> The new curriculum keyed into practices that were routine elements of English teaching at large. There was a similar story in the case of A Level English Literature, where coursework was also reduced, exams restored to the majority of the assessment and opportunities for challenging the boundaries of the subject (as described, for example, in 'Redefining A Level'<sup>45</sup>) were severely restricted. Experience at A Level had found that apparently liberal 'mode three' schemes (UCLES 1000/10 and the AEB 660) were in fact carefully policed in many cases by moderators who expressed an attachment to a properly 'literary' content for the coursework component schemes.<sup>46</sup>

There was in all this the sobering realization that the political project of changing English was not merely a matter of demonstrating that it could be done, nor of producing (what I took to be) effective arguments about why it should be done. The persistence of English in a more or less recognizable form with its own specific characteristic pedagogic style - gave more than a little credence to Ian Hunter's analysis of education, schooling and English as elements of governmentality. There was no need to be a conspiracy theorist to see how in the National Curriculum various predictable elements had combined to reaffirm an allegiance to literary practices and standard English. The transition to the National Curriculum in English without dissent was possible due to the still largely literary basis for the professional identity of English teachers. The post-Thatcher new right return to a 'common-sense' accommodation with time-honoured features of the subject was clearly related to

professional-social investments in literature in Higher Education and the absence among English teachers of any significant critical language awareness.<sup>47</sup>

### **The English Question and Recent Debates**

More recent historical accounts of the emergence and development of English as a subject in H.E. and in the school curriculum have tended to emphasize either ideological pressures for cultural coherence and national identity<sup>48</sup> or democratic pressures from emergent movements for consciousness and self-realization of class groups.<sup>49</sup> Alternatively, as in the case of John Dixon (1991), there is a clear desire to represent the history of the subject as a process of consistent, accumulating, self-adjusting progress. The external machinery of government may intervene in the form of exams and public pressures, but the essential spirit of the subject persists. Ian Hunter proposes a quite different genealogy of the subject, tracing its features in the migration of practices formed in the (post-renaissance) emergence of the self-regulating subject. For Hunter, English expresses quintessential features of the form and function of the education systems of Western societies as they were constructed in the nineteenth century out of the ready to hand bits and pieces of practice and thought. Foremost among the human technologies deployed in the emergent system was the technique of pastoral surveillance. For Hunter, the distinction between English and government was never more than a self-deluding ruse.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, different histories represent different positions taken in relation to English. Eagleton describes the rise of English from an avowedly socialist position seeking to recover the true democratic roots of the subject; Dixon as a 'believer' in the progressive history of the subject towards greater inclusivity and liberality; Hunter as a super-cool and detached meta-theorist for whom pedagogy provides the singular key to the meaning of the subject in all its variations. In recent accounts of the 'struggle' for the National Curriculum in English there is general agreement that English occupies a central role in the curriculum and is particularly the focus for debates about the cultural / ideological function of schooling:<sup>51</sup> 'since the beginnings of public education in England and Wales the teaching of English has been a focus of keen political interest and political control.'<sup>52</sup> Brian Cox refers grandiloquently to 'the *great battle* from 1991 to 1995 for control of the English curriculum'<sup>53</sup> (my italics) in terms that emphasize its all-embracing significance: 'The teaching of English is not

just a matter of developing skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing, but affects the individual and social identity of us all.’<sup>54</sup> In recent times conflicts over the identity of English have been represented in broad terms as difference between (i) a liberal model of the subject (albeit still rooted in time-honoured deference to literature and standard English), antipathetic to or at least less concerned with the staged measurement of progress (tiers), and structured also around a creativity model, and (ii) a more traditionalist line closely tied to more or less canonical literature with an emphasis on the explicit teaching and testing of grammar, and with a commitment to the unproblematic testing of tiered, staged progress. Both elements can trace their ancestry to a deep if not always distinguished past. The liberal lineage can be seen to reach back into post-Rousseau romantic nineteenth century notions that influenced the rise of child-centred pedagogies; the imposition of tiered assessments can trace a similarly ‘deep’ heritage in the stark requirements of the Revised Code of 1862 that came in the wake of the Newcastle Report.<sup>55</sup> The Bullock Report, a key historic document in English teaching, incorporates elements of both polarized positions and represents a moment of transition to official recognition of the validity of liberal ideas and approaches, while maintaining faith with literature and with the centrality of standard English. The Report also echoes the time-honoured idea that English is about much more than itself. English teaching is no mere academic pursuit: hence the ambiguities of the title, *A Language For Life*. The report also characteristically avoids committing the subject to any specific content:

It is a characteristic of English that it does not hold together as a body of knowledge which can be identified, quantified, and then transmitted. Literary studies lead constantly outside themselves, as Leavis put it; so, for that matter, does every other aspect of English.<sup>56</sup>

The Bullock Report had defined and officially enshrined some of the key features of the liberal model of English, with its emphasis on oral work (especially on group talk), on the significance of reading, on the value of literature (though not necessarily canonically defined literature), on the importance of collaborative learning methods, with the role of the teacher as pastoral guide in all aspects of reading and oral English, even in its recognition of the value of multicultural work in English and the significance of ‘empathy’. Like literary studies, every other aspect of English leads

beyond itself: English is about nothing in particular but also, therefore, about everything.<sup>57</sup> The Report also confirmed the subject's attachment to normative processes of language teaching, albeit qualified by recognition of sociolinguistic perspectives on language in education.

In recent times, advocates of liberal English have tended to represent themselves as experienced exponents of a practised profession, more or less uniformly committed to certain inclusive language practices in the classroom. Government is seen as interfering in the essentially democratic tendencies of the state education system, embodied especially in avant-garde English.<sup>58</sup> In recent times, this position gave rise to apparently strange alliances. Brian Cox, a black paper author, established a compromise position incorporating elements of liberal belief and practice, while retaining a firm conviction in the intrinsic value of literature and standard English. Alastair West, chair of NATE,<sup>59</sup> wrote against an interventionist, ideologically motivated government imposing a bureaucratic machinery onto the essentially democratic tendencies of English teaching and Cox championed West's position.<sup>60</sup> In fact, many of the most influential statements on the teaching of English in recent times have consisted of more or less uneasy admixtures of liberal, post-Britton tendencies to emphasize the validity of home language, the importance of creativity, the pleasures of reading, multiculturalism and more traditionalist beliefs in the intrinsic merit of literature (more generously conceived of than canonical English Literature), in the necessity of standard forms of language, the importance of spelling, grammar and clear expression.<sup>61</sup>

### **New Bearings in English**

My own position - expressed in the published material - differs significantly from both traditional and liberal models and the mainstream accommodation between them outlined briefly above. My position has been founded on a re-reading of the identity and history of English - to be elaborated in this deposition. Arguments about English have a history of opposed positions that nonetheless agree on the particular, central significance of the subject in the curriculum. English has also from time to time been central in debates about the proper direction and function of state education as a whole. English has been the site of struggle for competing versions of national identity - via language and culture<sup>62</sup> - from before The Newbolt Report (1921)<sup>63</sup> to the

NATE statement, *Learning to be Literate in a Democratic Society* (c. 1990). There is clearly discernible strand - running from The Newbolt Report through The Bullock Report to the present day - of public rhetoric about declining standards of literacy, lowering quality of language, often related to discourses of cultural decline that bemoan the damaging effects of popular forms of media on the spiritual and mental health of the nation. There is a similar strand running through the same trajectory of the spiritual value of literature and of the significance of creative language practices.<sup>64</sup> In all of this English is represented as being of particular significance to the cultural - and also linguistic - hygiene of the nation.

My work is intended as a distinctive contribution to discourses concerning the contested site of English teaching and is mainly focused on the specific arena of English in the upper secondary school in state education. It emerged from a contradictory tension of allegiances and developed into what I believed to be a more thoroughly self-conscious, historically and sociologically informed theoretical position. As a practising professional I was able to put this model into practice and to consciously promote it in professional arenas. This project wasn't intended to escape the structures of pastoral surveillance that characterized the human technology of the school, nor to construct some ideal form of English that would resolve the contradictions and oppositions that structured the institutionalized form of the subject. While attempting to forge a different kind of subject in the field of textuality and language, it was necessary also to recognize institutional conditions: 'we are faced with English: realistically, we have to accommodate theory alongside/within/against English' and from that recognition, to cultivate an awareness of the subject's institutional situation, its histories, its tensions and an awareness also of the cultural political of engaging with these things.<sup>65</sup> To paraphrase Richard Johnson, any English teaching which is not ironical, self-critical and which does not 'explain itself' is likely to impose arbitrary standards on culturally diverse populations.<sup>66</sup>

All of my work was published with a particular audience in mind, an audience not academic in the sense of journals addressing intellectual workers in Higher Education. Hence the form of the work is different from the standard form of writing in Higher Education journals and books. It is often polemical and lacks detailed referencing and tracing of sources - partly as an attempt at direct access, but also as a deliberate choice to refuse the conventions of academic writing for academic



audiences. I was keen to change the thinking of English teachers. I was also used to working in a comprehensive school with fifteen and sixteen year olds with whom I shared the ideas. It seemed usefully liberating not to follow academic conventions that attribute ideas to specific sources and named authorities. It seemed more useful, in fact, to think of doing 'deconstruction', or 'psychoanalysis' or 'discourses', than to think in terms of doing 'Derrida', or 'Lacan' or 'Foucault'. I believed there was some political point in eschewing some of the academic conventions.

### Publications Context

The period 1984 - 1995 saw a growing literature addressing changes in English prompted by theory. Challenges to subject identity informed by various forms of theory had been mounted, indicating a concern with the cultural politics of textual practices and with reinterpretations of the history of subject emergence.<sup>67</sup> The *New Accents* series (published by Methuen and then Routledge) proposed a variously alternative agenda for literature, offered introductions to elements of theory and addressed a range of topics in Cultural Studies. The *Rereading Literature* series offered theorized modes of engaging with canonical English Literature.<sup>68</sup> These publication projects were generally aimed at redefining the discourses of literary study on English degree courses in Higher Education - particularly changing frameworks for reading practices. In some cases they had the effect of changing the field of English, shifting its boundaries to incorporate, for example, women's writing, post-colonial writings, elements of popular culture (usually popular fictions), and, in other cases, they may have shifted approaches to the familiar material of English studies, to promote reading through gender, 'deconstructive' readings and approaches to textual interpretation borrowed from narratology. Modular degree courses in Higher Education, under the influence of a movement reflected in these publications, often had the effect of enabling a more fluid concept of subject identity and more boundary crossings than within traditionalist subject frameworks.<sup>69</sup>

Along with material published directly on English, the emerging literature in theory and Cultural Studies included both explicit and implied critiques of traditional literary based educational practices. Both feminist theory and film theory had promoted poststructuralist theories of discourse, subjectivity and meaning that challenged the dominant habits of thought of English.<sup>70</sup> The emergence of specifically

feminist reading practices were involved in re-reading the canon, introducing the idea of women's writing as a distinct subject area.<sup>71</sup> There were critiques of the socio-cultural orientation of the subject English challenging canonicity from a position of cultural relativism that often made powerful claims for the rights of the popular.<sup>72</sup> Proposals appeared that offered starting points for alternative reading practices in the name of cultural materialism against what was taken to be a moribund liberal humanism.<sup>73</sup> Poststructuralist re-readings of Blake, Dickens and the Brontes (in the *Rereading Literature* series) aimed to alter the terms and reading practices of literary discourse and in many cases to politicise it - while remaining within a field that determined Blake, Dickens and the Brontes as significant foci.<sup>74</sup>

In the context of English teaching in schools multi-culturalism had had a hand in the expansion of the category of literature to incorporate writings from post-imperialist contexts - 'writing from other cultures'.<sup>75</sup> 'Narratology' had been found to be congenial and was applied by Harold Rosen to literature via Barthes and Genette, allowing for the valorization of the inclusive category of narrative, characteristically narrowed in English teaching to 'stories'.<sup>76</sup> Reader reception theory was also found congenial as a way of enabling the liberal tendency of the subject to accommodate 'theory': liberating meaning from texts themselves, so making an opening for generic reading and for the consideration of 'popular' fictions, but most importantly reinforcing 'personal response' as the central form of reading within English.<sup>77</sup> There had been some occasions where theoretically informed alternative visions of English were proposed in the mainstream organs of English teaching<sup>78</sup> and the journals *The English Magazine* and *English in Education* had included articles referring to theory, articles on Media Studies and articles on language practices influenced by sociolinguistics.<sup>79</sup> For the 'cognoscenti' there was the 'Literature Teaching Politics' series.<sup>80</sup> These publications indicated tendencies that were not, however, explicitly concerned, as my work increasingly was, with complete reorganization of the English curriculum in the context of secondary schooling. Neither had they systematically addressed the question of changes in practice in the key areas of English teaching. It seemed to me that, in the wake of much theory, English in schools faced different issues from English in Higher Education. The function of English in schools was different in so far as it largely defined what reading, writing and oracy *were* - how they were defined and institutionally endorsed - for the population. English teaching,

since Newbolt (1921), at least, has a significant role in defining literacy, in defining what writing practices counted as significant and what forms of speech were legitimated within a significant portion of the social sphere. English teaching in schools examined, charted and ordered the population accordingly via inescapable 16+ examinations. My published work became concerned increasingly with the regulatory function of teaching, and this concern was most fully elaborated in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, where the constitution of English was subjected to critique and a programme of alternative practices proposed. The following account tries to outline the movement towards *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* while defining also what each piece was concerned with and its approach via theory to English.

### Introduction to Published Works

The circumstances of the publication of various pieces was contingent, their occasions varied; they were produced for different purposes, for different publications and at different stages in a still developing interrogation arising from the collision of theory, English and English teaching. In all cases they were commissioned and written by invitation. In some cases they were edited. The retrospective coherence offered in the following pages will no doubt suggest a line of development more logical and tight than it really was. It does, however, seem that the sequence from the first piece on *Othello* (1984) to *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (1993) forms the - albeit uneven - development of a position consistently addressing the problematic of English subject identity. The movement is increasingly towards a critique of the institutionalized practices of English. Arguments become more insistently directed towards a rejection of liberal ideas and practices, and their supplanting by ideas and practices organized by a kind of cultural materialism. I move from exploring Shakespeare's *Othello* as an individual text from the point of view of alternative reading perspectives to a fundamental displacement of foundations and contents of English teaching, proposing the redefinition of the field of language and textuality. Accordingly, I have divided this section into two phases. The initial phase is concerned with importing theory to shift emphases in English teaching and to offer alternative approaches. The second phase, including the book, *Critical Theory and the*

*English Teacher*, is concerned also with constitutional questions of English in education.

This movement of approaches to English was a movement from the application of theory to established material and practices, grafted on to an explicit call to completely reconstitute the disestablished subject within an alternative theoretical consciousness. Initially, the precise and more modest aim involved the application of drama pedagogy - rethought through some roughly sketched elements of poststructuralist theory - to an exemplary text (*Othello*) of English. Later the perhaps over-ambitious aim was to 'deconstruct' the entire discursive regime that gave rise to *Othello* occupying its significant place on the curriculum. There was a movement, then, towards a more comprehensive and more thoroughly critical reappraisal of the subject, its identity, and its institutional place, power and effects. The progression could be defined as travelling from a Barthesian poststructuralist sense of textual ideology, semiotics and reader agency to a radical poststructuralist sense of the unrootedness of meanings and subjectivities and its absolutely necessary social corollary - the institutionalized determination of meanings and subjectivities. From this latter position, as an English teacher, it became necessary not just to think of texts, readers and textual practices, but to consider the cultural field in education, to construe an awareness of dominant, historical practices of the subject English as ensconced in institutions, exam practices, teacher consciousness, habitual pedagogic modes and contents, publications, subject organs and bodies. Taking on English in this enlarged sense involved the synthesis of different elements of theory, going beyond theory as literary or textual and linking in with larger social theory - hence the significance of Althusser, Bourdieu and various elements of sociology and Cultural Studies. The attempt was to see English in schools on the one hand as a specific cultural practice located in and shaped by various specific institutional forces, and on the other hand to acquire some awareness of its whole context, to theorize its place, as it were, in the order of things.

## The Published Works: The First Phase

### *'Othello: A New Approach to A Level English' (1984)*

This piece was conceived of as an innovatory intervention into A Level. It describes an approach to a central component of the English curriculum informed by textual theory embodied in specific pedagogic techniques. Shakespeare represents a symbolic cornerstone for definitions of the subject, and textual/reading practices described in the piece were designed to promote awareness of perspectives, multiple readings, intertextual linkings and positionality which were not the accepted stuff of English classrooms at A Level. These modes of engaging with the text offered an implicit critique of established practices, since neither traditionalist author-centred models nor more liberal reader oriented models habitually read Shakespeare through the categories of interpretation defined in this piece. Proposing a significant shift in terms of attitude towards textual meaning, the article therefore constituted an alternative to institutionalized reading practices. The shift may be accounted for by saying that in *'Othello: A New Approach to A Level English'* meaning is figured less as something to 'unlock' or 'discover', more as something to construe and construct, the text being conceived of less as a repository than as a pretext.

The 'drama' based pedagogy belonged to the best liberal traditions, and in this case, admittedly, was deployed as a tactic for textual reading to shift emphasis from authoritarian readings to reader-centred 'play' activities.<sup>81</sup> Their emphasis on an individually-oriented sense of meaning has been an exemplary feature of classic liberal practices; but the fusion of drama technique with poststructuralist theory, as I saw it then, offered a synthesis that enabled readings to be situated within an awareness of positionality and multiple readings. Students were invited to explore and experiment with readings, but guided to do so from specific perspectives, rather than to reveal the truth of the text, or to explore the authenticity of their own valid readings (as with reader-centred, liberal approaches). Drama pedagogy was deployed to show how multiple readings of an apparently singular text may be *produced* according the ideas or perspectives applied. Again this multiplicity isn't produced as a menu for individual choice, but to suggest how different reading perspectives might be socially

constructed or motivated. In this early piece gender politics provides one instance of a grounding for reading that clearly indicates the positioning of readings beyond the vagaries of personal response.

The *Othello* piece predates much of the reorientation of Shakespeare studies that 'theory' was to propose, moving away from reverential modes of reading the hallowed text, and from historicizing modes of reading that extrapolated a sense of period or culture, to readings that recognized the 'contemporary' politics of Shakespeare at the textual and institutional level.<sup>82</sup> In this new wave of 'cultural materialist' criticism, Shakespeare was represented as multiple, historically produced and reproduced, historically relative and as belonging to the institutionalized practices of the subject English.

Theory had provided some models designed to alter established models of textual encounter, opening up textual approaches hitherto unrealized. In 1984 A Level reading practices were clearly open to serious challenge - for example, for their blindness to gender as a significant or necessary reading category. At this stage of my work the radically deconstructive potential of this line was not intently pursued, giving way to a more genial concern for releasing a new sense of the 'pleasure of the text' and the pleasures involved in more active meaning-making textual exercises, offering freshly-defined roles to the 'reader' - in this case the A Level English student. The question about the provenance of the individual reader - classically expressed in English in schools as 'personal response' - was to crop up later in the circumstances that gave rise to a more thoroughgoing critique of the framework of ideas in liberal English in 'NATE and the Politics of English' (1990). The question of the provenance of the personal in English teaching was to precipitate the more radical rethinking of subject identity later pursued at length in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (1993).

### *'Redefining A Level' (1986)*

'Politics' was a key word triggering this piece initially offered in response to an open invitation to respond to Terry Eagleton's 1985 NATE conference address that had offered a challenge to conventional liberal subject identity.<sup>83</sup> I was invited to write about some of the work I was involved in as an A Level English teacher striving to

redefine the subject and to realize what I took then to be its unrealized political dimension. The piece included references to 'political' textual matter that was beyond the conventional scope of English at A Level - *Woza Albert*, for example, and the songs of Billy Bragg, but also ventured further to include references to Susan Meiselas's photographs from Nicaragua and the 1984 miner's strike (after Eagleton's 1985 invitation to consider this contemporary 'text'). Reading practices were also addressed so that reference was made to students being asked to consider gender politics in *Othello*, to read Billy Bragg songs alongside Blake poems, both for their explicit political content, without reference to the dominant reading category of personal response. The editors of *The English Magazine* had also asked for a glossary to be included in the piece, to make some of its terminology, borrowed from poststructuralism, accessible to an audience assumed to be completely unfamiliar with the discourse.

The general position expressed in this piece was more aligned with what might be termed a 'Cultural Studies' approach. Texts of disparate identity and from different textual orders, it proposed, might be brought together to highlight the perspectives from which they were being read. The technique of reading one text against another very different type of text was developed in my teaching and in my writings on English teaching. The idea of this procedure was to open up the textual field of the subject, to emphasize issues about genres and orders of texts and their meanings. 'Redefining A Level' sought to bring to light the very (phenomenological) fact that readings *are* positioned and that positionality might be made more conscious than English teaching been able to realize. The problem of the powerfully institutionalized form of the subject was not being explicitly addressed in my writing and thinking of this period. The piece did not begin with any critique of English, its unwritten liberal constitution and its restricting habits of thought and practice.

However, responses to the work I was doing at A Level from two quite different quarters were to precipitate precisely that collision with official and semi-official English, and indicated the extent to which the kind of theory and application of theory involved in 'Redefining A Level' was felt to be hostile to subject integrity. One source of conflict was from a representative of NATE who attacked my 'Redefining A Level' piece as anti-personal response and therefore excluding.<sup>84</sup> The other source of conflict was the University of Cambridge Local Examination

Syndicate moderators who were becoming increasingly impatient with coursework that they felt was beyond the pale of the subject. I had in fact been strongly advised by the editor of *The English Magazine* to suppress comments I had made about the examination board's concern with the content and direction of our A Level programme. I heeded this advice, and didn't include the potentially offending paragraphs, but this didn't avert a confrontation in later years. The chief moderator of the classically liberal 9000/10 scheme declared of our coursework in danger of being declared invalid, as it failed to address appropriate literature in the proper spirit or, when it did address literature failed to appreciate the essential 'spiritual values of literature.'<sup>85</sup>

*'GCSE Post-Structuralism: It Can Be Done' (1989)*

Newly introduced 100% coursework GCSE schemes offered in effect opportunities to extend the boundaries of what was understood to be English, while observing the official structure of the subject and its assessment mechanisms. The boundaries between the literary and other kinds of writing could be interpreted openly and the new GCSE schemes therefore offered considerable scope. English (formerly English Language) and English Literature were in some cases joint syllabuses where the divide between the two aspects of the subject was considered to be at least flexible if not non-existent. The openness of these new syllabuses offered the opportunity to promote a more theoretically structured form of English at work. The gap between the aspirations of innovatory practitioners and syllabus demands seemed to have vanished. *Enjoying Texts* (1989), which featured the above chapter, was commissioned in the spirit of promoting new ideas and methods, introducing new approaches rather than contesting the ground of existing English practices. It was conceived of as a user-friendly invitation to share ideas and practices in the hope of enthusing its readership into following suit. Once again, as if to indicate the alien nature of ideas from theory, there was a glossary provided in the collection to assist the uninitiated.

The piece in question refers to the teaching of narrative, using television drama, rethinking reading and inviting students to do textual work with genres. It was essentially, an attempt to demonstrate that 'theory' was applicable to GCSE and not



an academic side-show irrelevant to its immediate and more mundane concerns. The strategy adopted was to promote the case for alternative practices by presenting poststructuralist theory as offering an interesting, enlivening extension of existing English practices, moving away from but not directly challenging traditional and liberal modes. Narrative offered a strategically useful starting point, given the currency of the idea in certain more avant-garde modelling of English of the time.<sup>86</sup> Narrative usefully offered an extension to literature and to the special textual category of 'stories' while also offering theoretically informed reading practices. In English teaching, narrative had been essentialized ('a primary act of mind' according to Barbara Hardy in an often-quoted statement used to valorize a limited textual field<sup>87</sup>) and provided the subject with a coherent principle for holding together disparate texts, as well as providing a rationale for their centrality. Narrative might embrace Shakespeare, fairy stories, children's literature, short story collections as well as autobiographies and other personal forms of writings by students (though still unlikely to include many forms of popular media narratives and most of the narratives in fact which shape people's consciousness of things). These different fragments of subject identity could be brought together through the master category of narrative that would render them relevant, meaningful and universal.

One key problem within English as I saw it was that the relations between disparate elements of subject identity seemed unprobed. Their respective, relative places within a textual field that was ordered according to certain privileged terms was not being explored or even acknowledged. It seemed to me that narrative was a way of linking the culturally loaded models of English that one might label traditionalist, with their emphasis on canonical literature and that were subject to the critique of being culturally exclusive, and the more liberal, embracing ideas about subject identity that structured its sense of things round categories of the personal: personal creativity, personal expression, personal response.

The piece was one way of making an intervention into this terrain, of promoting ideas from theory in a way that would avoid head-on confrontation with dominant ideas in English teaching, but would hopefully suggest alternative practices, and by implication problematize the textual field of the subject.

### The Published Works: Second Phase

The mode of the pieces so far described had been to suggest modifications to existing practices rather than to address directly the idea of transforming the structure and fundamental orientation of the subject. In this phase A Level had seemed initially the most productive area for the introduction of theory and for testing out new models of the practice within the subject. A Level English seemed closest to English in Higher Education where much of the literary theory was appearing, even though it was GCSE that seemed to pose the significant questions, being more or less universal for the school population. As indicated above, GCSE, during this pre- National Curriculum period (1985 - 1994), offered the most flexibility in terms of what was permitted by the controlling authorities and seemed the most relevant and productive ground for the pursuit of critical theory in English teaching.

Assessment at GCSE, though, presented a thorny problem for the practitioner intending to extend the scope of the subject by deploying new theoretically informed models. Niggling doubts about the transformative meaning of these moves in practice arose when assessment of students' work remained loaded in favour of certain predictable social groups of the comprehensive school population whose linguistic habits and cultural orientations were attuned to the linguistic and cultural environment of the school. The sociological/cultural issues of the relative exclusivity of the subject - defined in terms of Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital and habitus - remained an unresolved problematic for the would-be advocate of theory interested in addressing the politics of the subject.<sup>88</sup> In my case, this demanded a rethinking of the philosophical issue of the constitution of English teaching that could not ignore the sociological question of inequality of access and cultural bias. This led me to a consideration of the deep rooted linguistic and cultural assumptions embedded in English teaching. It also led to an interest in discourses emerging from Media Studies and Cultural Studies that were challenging negative definitions of popular culture: via John Fiske (1987, 1989), Meaghan Morris (1988), John Tomlinson (1991), Ien Ang (1985) and others.<sup>89</sup>

*'Never Mind English: This is Theory in the Classroom' (1989)*

'Never Mind English: This is Theory in the Classroom' - jointly written with an influential departmental colleague - made some attempt to work around different strands of the problematics we thought we were dealing with in relation to English. We examined the existing structure of the subject at GCSE, its forms of assessment, the problem of literature, the linguistic field and an implicit Halliday / Labov sociolinguistic critique.

The problem we confronted was expressed as the idea of transforming subject identity - working within and against English, so that the very name 'English' was increasingly felt to be a problematic definition. This question of the name 'English' identified a nexus of problems about the subject in relation to key aspects of its cultural and linguistic biases. In this piece we described how teaching English as theory had confronted public expectations of the subject. The institutionalized identity of the subject was also a powerful force to be reckoned with. Hence 'the phenomenology crisis' referred to.<sup>90</sup> First-hand experience had reinforced the sense of English as deeply rooted in a number of contexts, forms and at a number of levels. One of the things we briefly addressed in the chapter - of particular current professional interest to myself - was the training and induction of the newly-qualified teacher into the profession. We had found that the ready made form of the subject represented a powerful symbolic order for the initiate that was difficult to refuse or get around. In contemporary terms, this general force has been strengthened by the ready-made form of the subject inscribed in the juridical status and specific details of the National Curriculum in English.<sup>91</sup>

*'NATE and the Politics of English' (1990)*

The politics of English was explicitly addressed in this piece written for the organ of the very organization it challenged. Questioning the discursive structure of the subject, its given identity, its institutional practices, the article propounded a critique based on a sociological analysis of its cultural orientation using theory to pose questions about the 'deep' assumptions of the subject. NATE was, and remains, the body that most represents liberal English. I had detected an official liberal orthodoxy in NATE and decided to take this on by extracting sections from articles that had appeared in recent

times in *English in Education* and to re-read the extract through a critical theoretical perspective - paying close attention to their assumptions about the nature of English teaching. The articles referred to were selected for their thoroughly representative quality. In its original form the piece was longer, including a section on the identity of English in relation to theory.

A feature had appeared in a book published by NATE that commented on the 'Redefining A Level' piece I'd written for *The English Magazine*, claiming that the theory I proposed introducing into English was essentially external, imposed and that it would deny the free play of responses, interfering with the student's ability to engage with texts on a personal level. This advocacy of the personal, and particular of personal response, was to clarify a crucial element in the structure of the subject and its current, powerfully embedded identity. English teaching appealed quite specific (modernist) discourses about personal identity and personal choice. I proposed that the rhetoric of reading and personal response had a strong connection with 'Thatcherite' political rhetoric of the eighties, denying the social and emphasizing the individual. The connection between ostensibly liberal discourses and right-wing thought became a key feature of the position I was developing. The established liberal discourse of personal response in English - with its emphasis on personal ownership - could, I contended, be directly related to Conservative government housing policy. The point was to problematize the liberal position. Far from being 'liberal', liberal English according to my account of it was actually operating a limited set of ideas in relation to reading, for example, offering freedom of choice - in true *laissez-faire* style - where choice was always already circumscribed by the restricting power of existing and very much dominant reading practices.

*'Hanky-Panky' (1991)*

The published version was a heavily-edited version of a longer piece - originally including the 'subtitle', 'Madonna, English Literature and English: Deconstructing the Identity of the Subject' - concerned again to raise questions about the identity of English in relation to the concept of literature. The editing usefully compacted what would have been a more substantial and probably more turgid argument, making its structure much more pithy. The piece as published was based on some teaching I had

been doing at the time with GCSE students. It was simply structured around a comparison between Marvell's poem 'To His Coy Mistress' (in the original work the poems 'They flee from mee ...' by Thomas Wyatt and 'Goe Lovely Rose' by Edmund Waller had also been examined as instances of classic/canonical English Literature) and Madonna videos. The organizing idea was to take an exemplary instance of English Literature alongside an instance of popular culture. Reading through the category of gender, it was possible to question the authority of the Marvell poem and to undermine its claim to an elevated status. Reversing the characteristic estimate of value of each piece in relation to one another was a rhetorical device for pursuing questions about English and the textual field it defined for itself as appropriate for engagement. The unpublished sections included a more theoretical questioning of the identity of English - focused on the centrality of literature, problematizing its claims to authority, significance and relevance, developing the argument pursued in the writing about Madonna and Marvell.

*Critical Theory and the English Teacher (1993)*

I was commissioned to write *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* by the general editor of a series of books on English teaching who knew of my work on theory through NATE.<sup>92</sup> The book was a full statement of the position that had been developed in my teaching at GCSE. It strove to be both explanatory and polemical and aimed to examine the assumptions of the mundane practices of English, to indicate gaps and inconsistencies and to elaborate theory. From there it sought to re-examine the central practices of English - reading, writing and oracy - and to propose a range of approaches to these things and a range of activities for teaching that would produce a different kind of practice. Much of the work in the more practically oriented section of the book was a kind of crammed short-hand version of teaching I had been engaged in (along with colleagues). The teaching examples represented an increasingly self-conscious attempt to displace English with practices I referred to as 'language and textuality', partly to distinguish what it was from English and partly to suggest a problematization of the restricted definition of both language and textuality that English seemed to me to embody.

A major aim of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was to present theory in terms that would be accessible for English teachers and for student teachers. The book didn't take the conventional form of the carefully referenced academic exposition. There were plenty of handbooks on theory available. *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was attempting to do something else, while also implicitly, at least, proposing that working with theory (often stigmatized as abstruse) with GCSE students needn't carry with it some of the additional baggage of academic publication, such as the need to refer to specific, often dense texts and their authors. If theory was to be democratized in the sense I was proposing, academic references - as a way of authenticating a position - ought not to have been necessary or desirable. (This issue was fully discussed with the editor.)

The structure of the book is as follows:

- the everyday assumptions of English teaching
- introducing theory
- rethinking reading: with exemplary materials
- rethinking writing: with exemplary materials
- rethinking oracy: with exemplary materials
- literacy, language values and English
- the subject in context
- some questions for English

The book also made an attempt to locate English in its full institutional context and to present an argument about English and literacy, and concluded with a series of questions, intended to return to the problematization of English in its current, hegemonic form. In short, *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* represented an attempt to pick up on the themes of theory and apply them - in some detail - to the specific practices of English teaching at the upper secondary level. That work was to be done from a perspective that was critical of the idea of a distinct culturally, socially independent textual realm - literature - and critical of the dominant language practices of English teaching. Although *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* included

practical teaching, it was entirely concerned with theory as a means of rethinking the *fundamentals*, rather than as a set of ideas that might offer interesting new variations on the existing ideas and practices of the subject. The book was an attempt to address directly the fact - as I saw it then - that hegemonic liberal models of English failed to offer anything other than an essentially Thatcherite version of language and text, relying heavily on the idea of the free expression and free responses of the individual in relation to texts. The problem with this position - as is famously the case with Thatcherite economic policies - lies in its failure to take social differences into account. Success and failure are ascribed to natural or naturalized individual differences. English on this liberal model - classically expressed in John Dixon's *Growth Through English* (1967) and reaffirmed as official policy in The Bullock Report (1975) - probably remains the dominant model, now accompanied by traditionalist strains in the National Curriculum that explicitly made standard English, Shakespeare and (some thinned down) elements of canonical literature the centre of the subject. The contradictory amalgam - liberal with traditional - seemed characteristic of the ideological structure of the subject and its favoured practices. *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* aimed to address the ideological structure of the subject in a radical transformative way. The treatment of text and language was reconstructed along lines that seemed to me more (a) theoretically informed, and (b) informed by an awareness of the social and cultural conditions of schooling, and the cultural politics of language in education, especially in English. If English had made textuality its business then the textual field English addressed seemed arbitrarily - and anachronistically - restricted. While Cultural Studies and Media Studies were mobilizing wholly different fields of text and theorizing the relations between readers, texts and institutions, English teaching seemed unaware that there were even textual relations or theories at all and seemed blind to the self-imposed restrictions on its textual field.

In relation to reading, I proposed a different set of categories for engaging with texts and set these against the favoured modes and methods of textual analysis within English teaching. Semiotic analysis would look at texts as assemblages of signs organized into particular generic patterns. Students would be invited to learn about codes, genres, perspectives, rather than being invited to tread through the already heavily laden, opaque categories of 'character' and 'personal response'. Another

strand of the approach to reading I offered was the radical extension of the textual field addressed by the subject. Liberal English teaching may have got so far as to question the *absolute* authority of the canon (for reasons of its own health and safety it had never been finally able to do away with it), but remained in practice happy to work with literature and with the untheorized expansive category of 'stories' (narrative) and poems. This expansion seemed to have been made through an unconscious evolution retaining literature as a distinct and special category of text and activity. Liberal English teaching had also flirted a little with its own limited and usually text-focused version of Media Studies, without following through the implications of developments in Media Studies for redefining its textual field. At the centre of liberal English teaching there remained the category of literature, expanded to include the curious phenomenon of the sub-canon that had acquired the status of 'standards': *The Lord of the Flies*, *Of Mice and Men*, *An Inspector Calls*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Talking in Whispers*, *Sumitra's Story* and others.

Literature and the wider category of stories and poems seemed increasingly arbitrary, especially given the plethora of canon-questioning that was current in the wave of theory in English studies, and the emergence and expansion of Cultural Studies and Media Studies. Theoretical publications were redefining textual relations, breaking down the idea of meanings simply embodied within single texts. Virtually any text might serve as a starting point for an analysis, description, or exploration of cultural phenomena. The 'text itself' - a phenomenologically questionable term - was not felt to be the necessary and issuing source of meaning. Any justifications for the category literature - and as the category had become so well institutionalized, justifications were not always necessary or required - came from the dual sense that (a) stories and poems contained valuable inherent meaningful experiences, and (b) that engaging with stories and poems was a key means for self-reflection and for reflection on the nature and conditions of the world, aspects or elements of the world being communicated through the ordinary, but special medium of stories and poems. Of course, stories and poems could never be delimited clearly as a category; but at the same time, for all the liberality of the concept and field, stories and poems had to exclude many types and categories of writing.<sup>93</sup> Certain kinds of stories and poems (those that appeared in English teaching anthologies, for example, rather than media stories or popular music lyrics, for example) were privileged above others. Others -



albeit unconsciously and by default - were excluded. Stories and poems, then, seemed both to epitomize the foundations of liberal English and to be groundless, arbitrary and to provide an unjustified basis for a subject at the centre of the curriculum. In addition, the universalizing of narrative / stories (as an essential human category) was, inevitably, deeply ethnocentric and followed the liberal tendency to embrace the other as itself, thus negating the difference of the other. To describe the kinship myths of aboriginal Australian peoples, for example, as being in some essential way the same as Ernest Hemingway short stories as the liberal 'universal' idea might propose, is one way of denying the radical difference of aboriginal Australian forms of life.

But if the nebulous and, in fact, strangely limited category of stories in English teaching could not lay claim to universal truth, value and practice, this needn't then be a purely *negative* realization. That was a key point of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*. On the contrary, realizing that the textual field deployed by English teaching and around which the subject was significantly structured was both seriously restricted, blindly constituted and was the expression of arbitrary social power - provided the occasion for a positive rethinking of the subject and all its textual relations. In this sense, the 'deconstructive' tendencies of the critical theories applied - to the textual field and textual practices of English - had the effect of 'prising open' the practices and constitution of the subject to render it much more potentially *inclusive*. This inclusivity was now not only in relation to newly realized plethora of reading perspectives and practices; it was also in relation to the vastly expanded field of textual material that I referred to as 'textuality'.

The concept of textuality as a mobile field was one of the key effects of poststructuralist theory. This was the tendency to work against the boundedness of single texts.<sup>94</sup> From a poststructuralist point of view, texts make sense within a network of signifying events and practices within a vastly interconnected textual field, the phenomenon of 'intertextuality'. The single text as a coherent and self-sustaining entity expressing the intention or insights of the author's conscious mind or embodying (singularly identifiable) meanings, wisdom or insights was no longer a viable proposition. This seemed to render textual interpretation and study as practised through literature obsolete, but it also opened, as I've suggested, a whole new set of more inclusive practices, more attuned to a comprehensive understanding of signifying processes and the textual field. This form of inclusivity would differ from

the liberal embrace, being structurally organized to recognize the condition of difference, rather than, as with the liberal model, to obliterate it. To engage with a text was also to engage with its intertextual relations within complex and overlapping systems of meaning. It was also to be aware of the positionality of 'the reader', or the reading practice, and this meant acknowledging the social group or institution that was crucially involved in the process of making meaning(s).

In effect, this means that no signifying event or text could be meaningfully detached from the textual field, that any reading of an individual text must be highly provisional, that any text might provide the occasion for analysis or interpretation, for an exploration of elements or aspects of the textual field. An example I used subsequently to illustrate this point was a 'found' text, a statement on a war memorial in Honolulu:

IN HONOUR OF ALL AMERICANS OF HAWAII WHO DIED IN  
THIS GREAT WAR THAT THE FREEDOM AND BEAUTY OF  
OUR COUNTRY MIGHT BE PRESERVED FOR ALL HUMANITY

The invitation to consider this text as an occasion for 'reading' in the sense of meaning making, is to consider how we might read it. Through what reading categories and with what extra-textual knowledge and dispositions we might make sense of it. The question is difficult to answer from the familiar categories of reading and interpretation. Personal response, for example, seems (largely) irrelevant and unhelpful. Nor would a semiotic or critical discourse analysis approach yield extensive ideas (though none of these would be entirely irrelevant). Intertextual relations seem significant in this case: perhaps leading to considerations of genre (war memorials of different kinds) and leading into a consideration of the history of the relations between the US and Hawaii, and of how that and related issues might be textually explored. The cultural, historical resonances of the idea of 'humanity' and 'all humanity' might be explored. The historical perspective might seem very significant. The geographic location and social relations involved in the context of the text would also be difficult but important to define. The way texts that get extracted and deployed in an educational context could also be a focus for attention. Why this text would be unlikely to appear in English classes, exams and syllabuses would open up questions about the constitution and disposition of the subject.

*Critical Theory and the English Teacher* approached the reading practices of English critically and offered positive suggestions for alternative practices. The book proposed a phenomenology of reading examining at a fundamental level the relations between texts and readers. This approach was leading to enquiries about what kind of objects texts might be. The chapter on reading also examined definitions and categories of texts, asking about taxonomic and generic issues, exploring how texts get categorized, different modes of categorizing texts, different institutions involved and different constituencies for texts: exploring, for example, different textual orders within popular culture and within English Literature. Some materials dealing with the various contexts of reading were also offered, aiming to identify institutions of reading and how they might determine reading practices and define reading subjects. Within this section there was an attempt to illustrate conventional and alternative ideas about reading. Some teaching strategies were proposed for looking at different conceptions of reading, how it works, what it's for, and so on. There was an attempt to cultivate a sense of different modes of textual engagement: alternative ideas for textual analysis were proposed that had been largely excluded from - or marginalized within - the practices of English. For example: genre, codes, context, identities, gender and gaps were ideas deployed as categories for reading and interpretation. This section on reading also aimed to examine ideology and interpellation, looking at how ideas about the world circulate in texts and work through discourses that position reading subjects differently in many different contexts. All this work was part of a general attempt to redefine the textual field for study, in an attempt to also shift how the educational context might work towards redefining reading and readers in ways that could be more inclusive and in ways that might operate more explicit and therefore more accessible modes of reading and ideas about reading. An ethnography of reading was also proposed, including an attempt to explore what people actually read, in what different contexts, to also explore how and what kinds of meaning people may make of different kinds of textual experiences, and how they might or might not connect these with other linguistic experiences.

*Critical Theory and the English Teacher* also made practical proposals for the teaching of writing and issues relating to writing in the upper secondary school context. The idea was to open an area of study that would be new to secondary schooling, and that would largely displace existing practices. In the first place there

was the idea of questioning the identity of writing, of asking what we understood by the term 'writing', as well as beginning to explore different types and forms of writing. In the attempt to make writing an object of study, taxonomies of functions and contexts of writing were also proposed. Writing was considered within the educational context - and more generally as a differentiated social practice about which there exist discourses and institutions. There was an attempt to promote some understanding of writing as a phenomenon in order to re-examine ideas about writing as communication and to examine conventional and alternative models of writing. Borrowing some of Derrida's terminology, there was an attempt to provide an introduction to 'grammatology' encompassing something of the issues raised by a deconstructive approach to writing - introducing such key oppositions and ideas as reference/metaphor, presence/absence, dissemination, writing and repetition. It also seemed important to propose some examination of writing as technology. This would involve looking at specific forms of writing as technologies and examining the effects of technological forms of different kinds of writing, technologies of distribution and, going beyond the narrow definition of 'technology', examining technologies of meaning. It also seemed important to include material relating to the social significance of writing, written discourses and the organization of knowledge, to explore genres of knowledge and subjects of knowledge. The idea of a 'grammatology for beginners' seemed also to offer the occasion for a reconsideration of the relations between writing and reading. This could involve a critical examination of the way the two had been constructed as separate. A form of teaching deploying the idea of 'textuality', it proposed, might begin to explore the division. The study of writing, after all, always meant some consideration of written texts and their signifying relations. This in turn meant giving consideration to questions about the inside and the outside of texts, questions about the limits of texts, intertextuality, texts and time, texts and 'authorship', linking with material on reading. Critically involved in all of this was also a sense of the importance of questions about writing and representation, about the relations between writing and reality, systems of meaning, orders of identity, writing and truth, writing and regimes of power. A whole discourse about writing and cultural identity could be opened up, it seemed, given the application of a set of ideas that called into question the cultural assumptions embodied in the dominant ideas

about writing that were implicit in the given institutionalized practices of English teaching.

It also seemed that ideas about language that had come from a combination of poststructuralist and sociolinguistics should engender shifts in the teaching of spoken language, in the relatively newly-defined field of oracy. Oracy had conventionally been conceived of in terms of performance, as a means of enabling participation for a broad constituency within the comprehensive school, to some extent recognizing the fact of linguistic difference. The liberal formulation of oracy, though, had never addressed questions of assessment and had never challenged the criteria against which crucial judgements about oral language performances were being made. This seemed to be a necessary consequence of the fact that oracy in English teaching was grounded in an asocial theory of language and communication. To address this gap, the work I proposed on oracy was designed to key into existing emphases on performance, but also, and critically, to include an explicitly sociolinguistic theoretical perspective on oral language that recognized differences. Oral work might address rhetorics of speaking positions in order to examine the way issues in social discourse get discussed in the private and in the public sphere. Students would be invited to take part in activities that required explicit recognition of positions taken, rhetorics available and used within specific social contexts and discourses. In this way students might be brought to an awareness of contrasting perspectives, modalities and registers - in everyday discourses on socially significant issues. Traditionally liberal features of oracy practice, like linguistic role play, for example, could be redeployed to enable some analytical and practical exploration of language in its institutional contexts. Role play could also be a method to explore the determination of roles, scripts and forms of oral expression and exchange. This in turn might develop an exploration of how speech roles might determine ideas and positions of power, for instance. From a sociolinguistic perspective it seemed important to devise activities that would enable the examination of varieties of speech and different ways of defining speech differences. This would entail some exploration of the social contexts of speech differences, the relations between speech differences and ethnicity - including ethnographic work. The characteristic activity of the liberal classroom - small group discussion - could be redeployed to engender explicit knowledge about language. This work might examine how discussion operates within certain specific types of social

group context - for example, the family, the school, the workplace and other locations of social linguistic encounter. Sociolinguistic analysis could also be made explicit: involving teaching about sociolinguistics, about different ways of talking, contexts and definitions of different kinds of oracy. It seemed that a great deal of sociolinguistic work might be done with oral work and media analyses, including projects in an oral ethnography of the media, for example, undertaken to explore sociolinguistic issues - looking at spoken language in practice - in different media contexts.

As the contents of these chapters indicate, the aim was to introduce a range of theoretical issues into the subject by offering demonstrations of work in the areas opened up by the theory I had advocated. *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* aimed to offer practical starting points that would enable theory to extend the textual field and the linguistic practices of the subject, going beyond its given constitution. Following the section giving practical examples in the three key areas of work - reading, writing and oracy - I attempted to engage in an account of alternative perspectives on literacy and culture, drawing on reading I had been doing in the fields of Media and Cultural Studies. Also relevant was theory that had broached questions about dominant conceptions of literacy in education and in English in particular.<sup>95</sup> I also attempted to indicate briefly the various ways that English as a school subject was caught up with general features and processes of education, that English was embedded in institutional practices, histories and forces. It was an attempt to indicate that English couldn't be understood as an issue on its own, and that the theoretical questions opened up by poststructuralism, Media Studies, Cultural Studies and sociolinguistics were also about education in general and its proper functioning in the social formation. By way of a conclusion to the book I proposed a series of questions designed to throw the current constitution of the subject into problematic relations with the general textual field and with sociolinguistic perspectives that were intended to echo the argument and contents of the book as a whole.

*'Key Stage 4: Back to the Future?' (1995)*

I was invited to contribute to a collection of essays on the new form of the National Curriculum in English. In the light of the critical account of English I'd offered in

*Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, it was thought I would be likely to represent an alternative position. In response to the invitation, I wanted to consider something of the mechanisms whereby the transition to the National Curriculum had been effected. Here the politics of professional identity related to a summation of the position I'd presented in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*. How was it that the transition from 100% coursework schemes with their potentially varied content were shifted to a much more restricted model of English - and without the obstructive protests of English teachers, now (happily? or in bad faith?) implementing the new orders? The political question about the nature of English seemed to be heightened in the government's direct - and unprecedented - interventions into curriculum matters. While the piece was obliged to offer some suggestions for working within the ambit of National Curriculum English at Keystage 4, it provided an occasion to pose again the problem of subject identity and its relations with textual / reading theory.

### Summary

Reasons for opening up and shifting the subject English went beyond the theoretical and philosophical. There were more significant issues at stake than different reading styles and textual definitions. English has occupied a central position in the secondary curriculum of compulsory state education. If the textual realm of English was unnecessarily bounded, it was for reasons. These could be traced back historically into the formation of the subject and its early definitions in relation to public debates about the roles of literature and language in the education of mass populations - epitomized in the post WW1 Newbolt Report (1921). Ian Hunter (1988) would trace the pedagogical practices of English to the extension of government into the business of person formation in the nineteenth century development of pastoral surveillance as an instrument of governmentality. In other words there were socio-cultural reasons for the evolution and continued dominance of the category of literature - which had come to define literacy in a key public context. Literature was central to how literacy was to be measured, judged and hierarchically ordered via certification practices. The filtering processes of public examinations of literacy through English determined access into systems for the enhancement of class and economic status. Competence in literature - as a key component of English - constituted a form of 'cultural capital'. In this sense, the textual order of English in its attachment to literature was culturally

loaded and was still maintained to be distinct from the mass culture of popular forms. This distinction is expressed in the National Curriculum in English where popular cultural forms are still represented as of inferior quality or status or of reduced significance and relevance.<sup>96</sup> Residual traces of Leavis's apocalyptic view of the state of popular culture remained in liberal English and were evident in National Curriculum statements concerning the quality of media products, as well as in Brian Cox's influential assertion of the centrality of literature.<sup>97</sup> While it's true that liberal English had opened the practices and ideas of the subject, shifted them even, there was no coherent sense of subject identity that would incorporate an awareness of the relations between language, textuality and the social, politics of educational cultural practices. This meant that elements and practices that were culturally biased and tended towards exclusivity remained powerfully embedded.

The project of English in education had been founded on cultural distinction, had evolved and become institutionalized around it. The cultural structure of the subject was a key element in its 'spirituality' and was central to the English teacher's professional status and claims to distinction. To undermine the authority of the textual order was to open up the question of the cultural politics of literature - and the same was equally true of certain self-reflective writing practices. Literature was essentially a 'caste' practice, the cultural habit of a section of the population well favoured to take advantage of what access to social rewards/advancement the education system might have to offer.<sup>98</sup> At one level this was obvious to many comprehensive school English teachers - for whose students the category of literature was largely alien and for whom a substitute canon had to be contrived, or who might readily decide that Literature was not really accessible to all via the processes of streaming and sifting that characterized the upper secondary phases of schools. Part of the project of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was to construct a different practice - working with different guiding principles including redressing the cultural imbalance of the subject - with a different notion of reading practices, and with a sense of the need to reconstitute the textual field of the subject. The project seemed ambitious in scope but necessary. As with the previous collaboration with Paul Moran and as with 'GCSE Poststructuralism ...' the book aimed to demonstrate that 'it could be done'. The idea that was expressed at the end of that chapter was to work from within English and against English at the same time, to use the given structure and the occasion of English to engage in practices that



would disrupt its constitution both implicitly and explicitly.<sup>99</sup> Placing different textual orders side by side and disrupting the hierarchized textual field was a strategy designed to have this disruptive effect. Applying alien concepts of reading and interpretation would have to have the effect of undermining existing dominant practices by indicating their partial, limited and politically restrictive effects.

Equally important, though often less prominent, but necessarily interwoven was the question of the language practices of English. The general position expressed in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was structured around ideas about the explicit teaching and application of sociolinguistic and critical linguistic language theory - not as an additional component (as the controversial LINC materials had been) but as fundamentally informing. While LINC potentially offered the possibility of the intrusion of sociolinguistic perspectives into English, the effect was to incorporate and assimilate the potential disruptive material into an extension of the subject's liberal embrace. LINC had nothing to say about the fundamental issue of language practices in the assessment of English. My own recent experiences of being an examiner in English at GCSE at the 'foundation level' have clearly confirmed the subject's institutional attachment to negative relative assessments of linguistic performances that represent, in fact, perfectly competent forms of non-standard English.

## THE ELEMENTS OF THEORY

The critical reading I propose is informed by my own constructed version of 'critical theory', pieced together from materials that are and have been for a long time now freely available and that do have a significant place in other subject disciplines: an alternative set of ideas about language, texts and institutions. These ideas come from what has been loosely called poststructuralist theory, allied with well established positions in the sociology of education and with developments in cultural theory.

Nick Peim, 'Key Stage 4: Back to the Future?'<sup>1</sup>

### Theory, English and the Social

The originality of my published works on English teaching was in the application of poststructuralism - and related social and cultural theory - to secondary school English. The systematic application of poststructuralist thought to structure the grounds for a constitutional redefinition of subject identity was unique. Theory had a dual role in this process. In the first place, theory questioned the dominant practices that informed the constitution of the subject and was able to account for the persistence of the centrality and authority of those practices. Theory also offered a set of ideas that enabled a new set of practices, totally different from the standard fare of English teaching. The two different functions involved different elements of theory that came together in various kinds of combinations. For the sake of convenience they might be divided into poststructuralist theories of language, text, discourses and subjectivities and more sociological theories of culture and institutions. Dealing with English, it was never really possible to sharply distinguish between discrete aspects of theory, and it seemed at certain points - in the case of Foucault, for example - that different strands of theory could be usefully fused.

As an English teacher pretty deeply embedded within the subject English and writing about changing it, poststructuralism had the significant function for me of offering an alien set of perspectives that would render strange what had been habitual and established. Poststructuralist theory is sometimes negatively represented as being concerned with a kind of academic game playing, 'predominantly taken up by literary and cultural critics', toying around with the meaning of meaning, reducing the history of Western thought to 'a few perfunctory dualisms'.<sup>2</sup> In relation to this kind of reading

of poststructuralism, it may appear that its effects within the field of English have been little more than to enable new, and often arcane ways of doing the same old things.<sup>3</sup> While the intervention of poststructuralism may have changed the nature of the literary critical exercise and may have given rise to some interesting explorations in social and cultural history in the field of literature, it made little difference to the *constitution* of the subject. According to some accounts poststructuralist theory is thoroughly nihilistic and apolitical, closely associated with its more expansive progeny, postmodernism.<sup>4</sup> Within the field of English teaching, 'turgid literary theory' has been castigated for its 'jargon', its 'excesses' and has been described as being in a state of 'exhaustion' by the architect of the subject's most recent constitution.<sup>5</sup> In the work I undertook in the field of English teaching, theory was exactly a means to rethink the textual and linguistic practices of English teaching in relation to the social realities of its institutional context. The positive, productive effect of theory was to enable new practices to emerge and to be consciously developed within the specific social context of English teaching in schools in state education.

For the project that culminated in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, theory was to offer a reconceptualizing of the specific practices of the subject - reading, writing, oracy - embedded in its institutionalized identity and tied to its habitual professional practices. Theory's critique clarified the relations between English, its various institutions, its historical situation, its effects within a larger social/cultural context. Ultimately, theory seemed to raise fundamental, *constitutional* questions liberal functionalist English had effaced from its dominant discourses. Questions about class relations and the practices of schooling had arisen at various times in English teaching. Some key figures in English teaching had for a time shown some interest in sociolinguistics - James Britton and Harold Rosen, especially.<sup>6</sup> But these had tended to be reintegrated into the mainstream tendencies of the liberal subject, absorbed and thereby transformed into less threatening material.<sup>7</sup> The sociolinguistic aspect of Britton's work became displaced by the pedagogical emphasis on the inclusive value of small group talk. In the case of Rosen, a critical interest in language, education and class never translated into a critique of the political biases of English in language and culture. Rosen chose to emphasize the positive in a personalist espousal of narrative as self-expression that was in the end perfectly continuous with liberal thought and practice.<sup>8</sup>

### **The State of Theory in English Teaching**

My encounter with theory occurred at a specific juncture of the post-war history of state education and occurred at a crucial period within my own ideological career as an English teacher. My professional induction had been closely tied to the transition towards comprehensive education. The idea of the comprehensive school had represented a new deal in terms of equity and access for many in my generation of PGCE graduates, and constituted a significant focus for professional motivation. This sense of professional mission was also a form of political consciousness, embraced by a post-Robbins generation of teachers. The concerns of sociologists had been influential in guiding government policy towards the moment of Circular 10/65 that initiated the process of comprehensivization. A wave of popular opinion had seemed to endorse the idea of the comprehensive schooling as a means towards increased access to the benefits of education.<sup>9</sup> The rise to power of liberal English therefore occurred in the context of an enthusiasm for the egalitarian ethos of the comprehensive school project, a new dawn in state education, that was also shared by significant groups of teachers.<sup>10</sup> English teaching appeared to be at the centre of the new movement. In the position promoted by John Dixon and 'the London school' there was the sense of a new, and newly liberated, constitution for the subject.<sup>11</sup> The new emphasis on children's own writings, on oracy and on the expansion of literature to include relevant reading material were all expressions of this new movement.<sup>12</sup> At the same time there was some interest in sociolinguistics and sociology related to matters of class and culture that was questioning the hegemony of the formal curriculum. Some new courses emerged from this more sociological trend, like the Humanities Project.<sup>13</sup> In English, though, the questions that sociology and sociolinguistics had raised in the area of class, culture and language in education were deflected. Concerns with linguistic difference had not been worked into the detail of the subject, partly because the dominant drive towards the new form of subject identity lacked the critical means to effect the wholesale constitutional changes that might be implied by such concerns. This was partly because of the professional attachment to literature, partly because the dominant model of language was a particular reading of Vygotsky, promoted through the key figure of James Britton.<sup>14</sup> Significant shifts, in style orientation and content of English during this period of

explicit liberalization are crystallized in John Dixon's *Growth Through English* (1967), the classic liberal definition of the subject. In Dixon's own later account of the development of English studies, personal growth model English is situated as part of a progression or development towards the establishment of English as, in Ian Hunter's phrase, 'the full development and self-expression of society and culture as the way of life as a whole'.<sup>15</sup> According to this thoroughly teleological reading of subject history, with its assumption of natural progression, English, in the new era of comprehensive education's extended constituency can recover its true, originary and democratic mission.<sup>16</sup> Dixon's version of liberal English that had enjoyed a kind of avant-garde orthodoxy in English teaching, found an influential, if unwitting, ally in the figure of James Britton who was involved in the official government statement on English, the Bullock Report (1975).<sup>17</sup> Britton championed a new consciousness of language and language variation, though as it happened Britton turned out to be more concerned to promote small group talk in the classroom (still to be subject to the normative processes of assessment, of course) than to address issues of class, language and power.

In the era after Circular 10/65, there were those more conscious of the issue of class who were rethinking language in the wake of Basil Bernstein and M.A.K. Halliday.<sup>18</sup> In Tony Adams's *Every English Teacher, Team Teaching and the Teaching of English* (1970), for example, it's possible to detect an uneasy alliance between an explicit belief in the value of literature and personal growth practice in writing while also demonstrating an implicit awareness of sociolinguistically informed relativist accounts of linguistic identity, culture and class. The book is a more or less representative document of a left-liberal position on English teaching. In it Adams expressed a faith in comprehensive education, a commitment to English as a liberalizing force, as well as a suspicion of its cultural/linguistic normative tendencies. In the end, however, as with the more extensive Bullock Report, the compromise effected by Adams's position meant that the fundamental questions about the constitution of the subject in its real institutional practices could not be addressed, let alone dealt with. This gap is a function of the professional identity of the English teacher, and the state of contemporary discourses on education, language, learning and schooling, of course, more than a failing of the individuals concerned to 'see the light'. It is also the case that for Adams, writing in the early 1970s - as for his

contemporaries in English teaching - the theory that might provide a means for rethinking subject identity was not available, though much sociology and sociolinguistics of the time now seems potentially radical in its effects on practices in language, class and culture. Tony Adams represents an interesting example of a central figure (Adams was chair of NATE for several years) in the institutional politics of the mainstream subject. Adams continues to speak for the rights of the working-class speaker and writer, but remains tied at the same time to the liberal structuring of subject identity.<sup>19</sup> This is also true of Harold Rosen - another key figure who takes a more critical position on class and language practices in education but never relates his critique to any sense of political transformation in terms of subject identity and institutional practices.<sup>20</sup> In the mid-1980s, when Rosen enjoyed venerable status within the subject, he became interested in textual theory, especially narratology, but in a spirit that served to sustain the privileged category of narrative or story as quintessential language practice in English. This later Rosen avoids altogether the political implications of his earlier work on language, as well as the political questions that might be asked of the characteristic essentializing of narrative and story in liberal English.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Alastair West, who had written interestingly of interventions in reading practices that might be made in schools, later reverted to a defence of the category of literature as central to the English curriculum.<sup>22</sup> West also ended up defending liberal English when confronted with the more traditionalist interventions of the sponsors of the National Curriculum, becoming seen as an ally by the former black paper author Brian Cox.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, much *practice* of English teaching remained unregenerately illiberal - unashamedly attached to canonical Literature and standard English. Until Keith Joseph integrated the post-16 exam system in the mid-1980s,<sup>24</sup> the division between GCE and CSE was sustained and marked out a clear kind of class distinction at work in English - whether growth model or grammar- and literature-oriented. Literature for CSE candidates was almost invariably the ersatz literature of relevance and accessibility.<sup>25</sup> After GCSE, the exam system offered an almost unlimited freedom, but the new open 100% coursework 'mode 3' style structures in practice produced more of the same. Forms of writing, texts for study, modes of engaging with texts, tended to follow very predictable patterns, indicating a regularity in the subject long before the imposition of the National Curriculum. The assessment of coursework

English at GCSE during this phase was similarly predictable and predictably weighted in favour of the limited forms of expression of standard written English.

In spite of official recognition for liberalized versions of English expressed in Dixon's *Growth through English* (1967) and later in *The Bullock Report* (1975), consciousness of what English was remained unrelated to the social dimension of the subject. For me, the discovery of Althusser and certain voices from the sociology of education insisted that language and culture, the very stuff of English teaching, were actually central to processes of class distinction at work in state schooling systems, even in their most liberal forms. It seemed that there were deep structures at work in the institutions of English - in schools, departments, in professional identity, in assessment processes and examining bodies - unaccounted for by liberal, inclusive definitions of subject identity. Liberal thinking - albeit unconsciously - seemed to be tied to a more right-wing politics that accepted the equation of 'ability' with levels of achievement, that expressed a concealed eugenicist position and that cultivated a sustained ignorance of sociology. The normative exam processes of English persisted with some minor shifts in the surface features of the subject and in its embracing ethos of liberalism. The 'Bullock compromise' persisted and in its inclusiveness was more able to sustain its normative operations. That, at least, was the perspective from which I saw the importance of the intervention of theory into English, offering a critical break with its long established constitution. 'NATE and the Politics of English' was an attempt to indicate unrealized links between the open 'freedom' of 'personal response' and Tory laissez-faire politics with its emphasis on personal ownership.

The liberal model I had been inducted into had taken a *functionalist* view of education in the realm of language and literacy. The Bullock compromise supported this view of English teaching.<sup>26</sup> It remains the case that the liberal components of subject are still working with a deeper structure of normativity. Exponents of the liberal view of the subject - such as NATE - have to struggle to defend their liberal inclinations against the public concern over 'academic standards'.<sup>27</sup> Institutionalized English teaching retains its normative function, so that the liberal model seemed less liberal and more conservative.<sup>28</sup>

### **Social Theory, Education and English**

For me, poststructuralist theory identified with the names of Lacan, Derrida and Foucault constituted a cluster of ideas enabling a rethinking of all the central components of the subject, the unities of its discourse: Derrida, concerned with language, writing, meaning; Foucault concerned with the relations between language and institutions, practices in the form of discourses, with power and knowledge and with the idea of governmentality; and Lacan concerned with subject relations, with the field of meaning and perception, with the role of language in subject constitution and as the expression of an internalized-external symbolic order.<sup>29</sup> In all three cases, poststructuralist ideas seemed to cut across the given common sense of the subject and to challenge its fundamental ideas and practices. In addition, this cluster of theory became meaningful in relation to the critiques of education and cultural theory that had called into question more generally the enterprise of liberal progressive education and that had serious implications for the professional identity and the departmental identity I had been so powerfully interpellated by and constructed within.

The work of Althusser, firstly, then Bourdieu, Willis and Bowles and Gintis provided a larger framework for locating English and the textual and linguistic oriented theory that was to be a means for its deconstruction. I made no strict distinction between Derrida and the social, between the ideas of Foucault and Bourdieu. The body of theory I developed was put together from relevant and available material - not just poststructuralism, but also poststructuralism informed by sociology, sociolinguistics and other forms of Cultural Studies where different elements might take precedence according to context and where some elements might not perfectly complement one another. Used tactically, a Lacanian perspective on language and subjectivity might propose an alternative mode of reading a poem from personal response favoured by English. This might in turn lead to consideration of the role of personal response within the structure of the subject, providing a means for a critique of its centrality. A Lacanian perspective might link in this context with ideas associated with Derrida or with the kind of linguistic analysis enabled by critical linguistics.<sup>30</sup> A more Foucauldian perspective, offered, for example, by Ian Hunter's work on English and 'pastoral discipline', while uninterested in a Lacanian model of subjectivity, might nevertheless provide a complementary sense of the genealogy of the subject.<sup>31</sup>



In breaking the spell of the liberal/functionalist position, critical theory for me initially came in the form of Althusser and critical sociology of education. Althusser's definition of state ideological apparatuses problematized the cultural missionary work of English as I had known it. The active engagement of students - and teachers for that matter - in what seemed to be positive and productive modes of working might be interpreted, from an Althusserian perspective, as no more than the effects of 'misrecognition'. The functionalist view was problematized when the apparent openness of the liberal invitation to participate freely in the practices of English - to 'be yourself', to express your own identity, to explore your world in your own terms - were in the end assessed and graded according to criteria that seemed increasingly questionable in their force and their application. Critical sociology seemed to present a case that recognized this anomaly. While critical sociology provided a powerful means for making visible class relations in the school it didn't yet have the means to delineate the detailed relations between the structure and practice of the subject and class dispositions and their expression in language and culture.<sup>32</sup>

It seemed significant, however, that during the late 1970s the sociology of education was becoming increasingly concerned with the relations between class and culture, and that questions of access and equality and the critical of the failure of state school systems to work towards equality were beginning to be formulated in the area of culture and language.<sup>33</sup> Discourses of access and equality had been central in policy debates about education after 1944 and were significant in the drive towards Circular 10/65. During the 1960s educational sociology had shown an increasing interest in language, in the important cases of Basil Bernstein, then M.A.K. Halliday. Language, culture and class emerged as a significant nexus in maintaining structural inequality in education. English - in my own case, at least - had seemed to be the area of the curriculum where the political could be *suspended* in the name of the cultural (except in certain specific cases, like South African 'poor theatre'<sup>34</sup> or the historically remote *Woyzeck* of Georg Buchner<sup>35</sup>). Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis and Paul Willis seemed to conspire to suggest that it wasn't only James Callaghan that had shattered the moment of optimism in the project of comprehensive schooling.<sup>36</sup>

The rise of Cultural Studies reflected an explicit tendency in academic discourses in the humanities to extend the field of politics and to attempt to theorize the relations between forms of life, their specific and minute cultural expressions and

economic status.<sup>37</sup> An early influential example, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) became of general interest to enlightened comprehensive school teachers - as it sought to explain the cultural affiliations of significant segments of the comprehensive school population in positive terms, offering an intellectually serious alternative to deficit models.<sup>38</sup> The influence of Cultural Studies was also significant in the movement towards theory in English exemplified by *Rereading English* (1982). That migration saw 'cultural politics' that had established credentials in the development of Cultural Studies impinging on English questions - about canonicity, about reading practices, about gender.<sup>39</sup> In the field of sociology itself significant shifts occurred in the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies where a symbiotic relationship with Cultural Studies developed. Key references are often shared and while there may be differences in traditions and emphases there have inevitably been significant coalescences between the two areas.<sup>40</sup>

As Althusser had identified the institutions of schooling as part and parcel of the ISA, so the 'classic' sociology of education that emerged from the late sixties and through the 1970s described the social function of secondary schooling in terms that were the antithesis of personalist, giving emphasis to social and cultural difference. The liberal tenor of the subject English and its more avant-garde advocates was clearly out of key with these harsh sociological critiques of the total environment of the school. Its various regulatory and disciplinary modes of operation, its cultural biases, its minute organization of social relations (including linguistic relations), it transpired, were organized or deeply structured on lines far from liberal and inclusive. Social class differences according to these perspectives were critical in determining success and failure. Social class differences, it turned out, were also - significantly for English - differences in culture.

A number of converging sources had further indicated structural gender and race bias of various kinds and degrees in education.<sup>41</sup> Some of this work had seeped into discourses specifically concerned with the practices of schools and with English in schools with the result that articles in the progressive organs of English teaching addressed race and gender in the context of English teaching.<sup>42</sup> These articles and other writings proposed modes of reading to counter the absence of gendered and racially aware readings in the conventional liberal classroom as much as the traditional classroom. But they were never part of a movement to challenge the

foundations of the subject and to rethink its identity in relation to the potentially revolutionary critiques of Bourdieu, for example, where the very details of school environment were described as designed to promote a certain class bearing and to negate those who were not in possession of it. Race and gender were very much on the political programme of education in the 1980s, following the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Swann Report (1985), in the form of equal opportunities policies, multi-culturalism and anti-racism. Reverberations from these movements influenced practices in English, though without seriously shifting its fundamental premises. Materials produced by the English centre - *The English Curriculum: Race* (c. 1983) and *The English Curriculum: Gender* (c. 1985) being the key examples - provide some sharp and explicitly political material addressing constitutional elements of the subject, while at the same time promoting practices that fall safely within the liberal ambit of subject identity and established practices.

A key section of *The English Curriculum: Race*, however, provided a basis from which to draw together strands of theory and apply them directly to the context of schooling.<sup>43</sup> Stuart Hall's piece, 'Teaching Race', sought to go beyond economic determinism to explain cultural phenomena in relation to questions of race and racism. 'Teaching Race' offered ways of conceiving institutional features of schooling in relation to class, culture and ethnicity that - in a general way - might provide the beginnings of a framework for rethinking how school subjects organize and represent knowledge and institutional relations. In the case of English this was perhaps more readily conceivable. Fairly comprehensive accounts of theories of meaning were already available that proposed what appeared to be new connections between language, discourses, subjectivity and political questions. Rosalind Coward's and John Ellis's *Cultural Materialism* outlined key elements of poststructuralism, explaining theories of language and culture in relation to the politics of representation and identity.<sup>44</sup> In relation to English teaching it was increasingly possible to see how critical theory might take on the subject's organization of the fields of language and literature. A fusion of sociology with sociolinguistics, poststructuralist theories of language and text all enabled the detailed composition of English to be critically addressed. This was the period before the annunciation of the 1988 Education Reform Act and the National Curriculum when transformations in the cultural politics of the curriculum seemed possible, at least, if not likely.<sup>45</sup>

A critical approach to the constitution of English teaching would need to re-examine the functionalist tenor that dominated thinking about the identity and effects of the subject in the state school system. Althusser opened up the conceptualization of the relations between base and superstructure that enabled the formation of the concept of ideological state apparatuses: a development of the concept of government and class relations.<sup>46</sup> The term 'misrecognition', used to define the subject's relations with key ideas, institutions and practices in the social realm, offered the possibility of developing a critique of ideology. It was possible to extend this into the very detailed operations of everyday life, seen as saturated with symbolic meaning relating to cultural differences as expressions of class identity. Even if the original term, 'misrecognition', with its connotations of a duped mass, had to be modified, it was easy to apply this line of thinking to the functioning of the school and specifically to the operations of English, where subjects were invited to recognize (or misrecognize) themselves in relation to the subject's definition of them as readers, writers and speakers.

According to Easthope:

the work of Althusser imported into Britain at least three lines of thought, three conceptualisations, which can be validly regarded as poststructuralist: the account of the historical formation as decentred; the assertion that knowledge as proceeding from theoretical practice is discursively constructed; the account of the subject as effect rather than cause.<sup>47</sup>

The argument that key 'ideological' apparatuses are equally significant as economic conditions enables the field of Cultural Studies to claim a relative autonomy from economics and more empirically-oriented sociologies. Within a reconfiguring of superstructural relations, subjectivity is seen in terms of a complex amalgam of determining forces, and is conceptualized in a new way by Althusser (via Lacan). The relations between the subject and ideology are crucial for Althusser: ideology isn't a force external to the subject and imposed from without, it is the very mechanism by which the subject recognizes its own identity and partakes of social life. According to Richard Harland (1987), Althusser provides: 'a vision that inverts our ordinary base-and-superstructure models and sees what we used to think of as superstructural as having priority over what we used to think of as basic.'<sup>48</sup> Ideology is the necessary

condition for organizing ideas about the world, for perception and knowledge. The subject is always a decentred subject.: 'the human subject is de-centred, constituted by a structure which has no 'centre' ... except in the imaginary misrecognition of the 'ego', i.e. in the ideological formations in which it 'recognizes' itself.'<sup>49</sup> The integrity of the self is a function of ideology. And there can be no 'unmasking' of ideology that can give direct access for the subject to 'the real'. The knowing subject must always operate within frameworks that organize and interpret perceptions. Althusser's reconceptualization of ideology and subjectivity clearly has implications for the role of education in general, but also addresses the central business of English - in so far as it deals in language, textuality, representation and subjectivity. Language is the means or medium through which the 'symbolic order' is internalized in the subject.

Textuality, always deploying language in various forms, must be saturated with ideology in so far as it represents the subject's relations to the world in a given way. Or to put it another way the 'deep structures' of language ('langue') constitute the very condition of statement and text. It was partly through this correlation of language, culture, textuality, the social and the subject that a phenomenology of subject/object (subject/textual) relations could be realized in the form that I gave it in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*.<sup>50</sup> After Althusser it seemed clear that the distinction between politics and culture cannot be sustained and that the institutions of education are saturated with both.

The idea of the school as site where cultural differences meet with the state apparatuses that is implicit in Althusser is developed explicitly in Pierre Bourdieu's and Jean-Claude Passeron's,<sup>51</sup> *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977). This text outlines a view of education and class relations organized around the key idea of 'cultural capital'. This analysis identifies superstructural forces at work in the institutional practices of the school. 'Cultural capital' is based on the exertion of an arbitrary cultural power, in the forms of class-based dispositions that are represented through pedagogic work as educational attainments. Cultural class dispositions are given validity through the education system that presents its operations as culturally neutral. The already given dispositions of the students - the product of details of 'habitus', variously engaged by the processes of schooling - determine their educational destiny. 'Symbolic violence' is the term deployed by Bourdieu and Passeron to represent the arbitrary imposition of dominant cultural

forms on subject groups and to represent these as legitimate, naturalized through the 'habitus' of the school. Bourdieu and Passeron argue that 'cultural capital' is a particular 'form' of capital, convertible with but irreducible to economic capital (itself another 'form' of capital). Cultural capital is perhaps a more mobile, flexible notion than class attribute. It usefully denotes the different dispositions school subjects may have towards the cultural objects and practices set before them. This view of the social uses of culture as a form of capital and an instrument of symbolic domination is clearly incompatible with aestheticist or moralistic claims for the universal value of literature. Literature, in fact, might be taken as an excellent example of Bourdieu's view of cultural capital relating to habitus and dispositions of subjects of education. Similarly standard English may be viewed as a cultural arbitrary represented as an end or good in itself. For English teachers this work, while being perhaps overly deterministic, presents a powerful critique of ingrained assumptions and habits of thought, problematizing the most liberal positions. Of particularly disturbing force is the suggestion that forms of assessment are the enactment of arbitrary cultural power - 'symbolic violence' - on socially subordinate groups, rather than the just expression of different levels of attainment in a culturally neutral and politically free field. This theory of education and of the school provides a powerful motive and occasion for the questioning of the relations between certain institutionalized functions of English, like examining, and aspects of its ideology: its liberal progressive tendencies in particular, as well as its more obviously questionable attachments to canonical literature and standard English. Of further and considerable interest and significance for English teaching was Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) which analyses the entanglement of language in institutional relations of domination and subordination.

For Bourdieu exclusion in education works most powerfully as self-exclusion: and this theme is echoed in Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour* (1979), a fairly detailed ethnographic study of a group of 'lads' in a mid-1970s working-class comprehensive school.<sup>52</sup> Willis's tracking of several 'lads' indicates how they adopt counter-cultural practices that afford them their own means of self expression and dignity. Their rejection of the formal values of state education - expressed in the official culture and ethos and the explicit agenda of the school - while having immediate benefits in terms of pleasure and kudos, also means that they exclude themselves from the social advancement that education can afford. Willis likens the alternative value system they

develop as counter to official school culture to the cultural habitus of the factory and finds the lads 'resistance' a paradoxical form (it is also necessary for the maintenance of social dignity and the positive expression of class allegiance) of quiescence to social destiny. While Willis's study begs many questions and fails to examine how other working-class kids do succeed and with what consequences, it fails also to examine other ways of engaging and disengaging with the official culture ('double voicing' for instance).<sup>53</sup> Willis's account of the school as a site of symbolic, cultural conflict is echoed in other studies: Paul Corrigan's *Schooling the Smash Street Kids*, for example, where the daily subversive tactics and its collisions with the management of school subjects is described as 'guerrilla warfare'.<sup>54</sup> The conflicts foregrounded in Willis and Corrigan involve a dynamic sense of the cultural clashes involved in secondary schooling.

The above positions represent a significant break with the sociology of education of the 1960s in so far as they cease to relate educational failure to cultural *deficiencies*. The theory of education as 'symbolic violence' makes the naturalization of culture as knowledge problematic and seems especially relevant to English where the key areas of engagement are language and culture. Similarly, the grimly deterministic description of the US education system and its reforms by Bowles and Gintis declared that the agenda of schooling was layered and not at all clearly what its rhetoric of access and equality stated it to be, driven as it was by the needs of a capitalist economy for a particular kind of labour force:

the major aspects of the structure of schooling can be understood in terms of the systematic needs for producing reserve armies of skilled labor, legitimating the technocratic-meritocratic perspective, reinforcing the fragmentation of groups of workers into stratified status groups and accustoming youth to the social relations of dominance and subordinancy in the economic system.<sup>55</sup>

It all seemed highly relevant in terms of a rethinking of the relations between schooling, class and culture and especially relevant in the context of English teaching, where avant-garde / 'invisible' pedagogies had been pioneered in the liberal English classroom and where the decentring of teacher authority might be seen, according to Bowles and Gintis, for example, as a further concealment of cultural / political power expressed through the naturalizing processes of schooling and experienced by teachers

as liberal progressive reform. Through an unlikely combination, I also came to associate the work of Bowles and Gintis with the genealogical critique of Ian Hunter in *Culture and Government*. It struck me that the idea of the hidden curriculum propounded by Bowles and Gintis - with its emphasis on a non-explicit agenda in social training - had strong connection with Ian Hunter's idea of a technology of the person at work in liberal pedagogy. Liberal English - with its emphasis on certain kinds of social training via an engagement with the personal through the literary text or through issues and themes - seemed susceptible to similar forms of critique from both positions.

### **Poststructuralism: Language, Discourses, Textuality and Subjects**

While the sociology of Bourdieu, Willis and Bowles and Gintis provided a general theoretical framework for a thorough critique of the social function of the school, poststructuralism became a means for critique of existing textual practices in English teaching. Poststructuralism also embodied theories about language and subjectivity providing ideas capable of breaking through the common-sense habits of thought and deeply established modes of operating. The critique of English teaching developed in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was founded on the assumption that the different set of perspectives offered by poststructuralism would redefine the subject's identity and produce a different set of theoretically informed practices. While the sociology of Bourdieu, Willis and Bowles and Gintis seemed deeply deterministic, as did Lacan's configuration of the subject, combined with Derrida's general 'grammatology' and Foucault's idea of power as a kind of multi-directional force-field, theory offered the opportunity to formulate a micro-politics that might deal with the specific workings of English as a significant curriculum subject.

While poststructuralism addressed significant aspects of English teaching - language, literature, discourses and subjects - poststructuralism also suggested a theory of institutional processes. Social analysis and detailed knowledge of institutions was a necessary corollary of the poststructuralist critique. At some point it became difficult to distinguish clearly elements of thought. Poststructuralist thinking infiltrated other disciplines. Aspects of sociology had been redefined under the influence of Foucault especially. In the work of Bourdieu there was a fusion of cultural theory and sociology. Poststructuralist theories of meaning and textuality



seemed consonant with cultural theory with its analysis of the relations between the school and its social context. Newly evolving forms of cultural analysis - in Cultural Studies and in Media Studies - were clearly drawing on a range of related subject areas whilst also defining their own. In Media Studies, it might be commonplace to find poststructuralist textual theory consorting happily with empirical research framed by a post-Althusserian Marxist social theory.<sup>56</sup> Poststructuralist elements had migrated also into sociology where it became particularly significant in relation to matters of culture and cultural hegemony.<sup>57</sup>

Although apparently remote from the realms of English teaching in the comprehensive school, Jacques Derrida offered a significant contribution to the rethinking of textual and linguistic practices, that combined with sociolinguistics and critiques of cultural bias implicit in aspects of Cultural Studies. Hovering uncertainly between philosophy and language or textual theory, Derrida's concerns with 'writing' seemed to have an enormous impact on how English teachers might conceive of textual identity, textual integrity, processes of meaning, links between texts, texts and subjects. Derrida's decentring ideas about signification seemed eminently relevant to any position taken on language and literature in the context of education. The key texts for my reading of Derrida as applied to English teaching were: *Of*

*Grammatology, Positions*, and some pieces in *Writing and Difference* and *Margins*.<sup>58</sup>

Derrida's key themes return again and again to issues of language and textual integrity: the post-Saussurian analysis of the sign and its instability, the play of signification, the deferral of meaning, the temporality of signification, spacing, the decentred nature of textual being, the idea of writing as system or technology as against the idea of the voice as guarantee of presence. Derrida's radical insistence on the textuality of meanings ('il n' y a pas de hors texte'<sup>59</sup>), along with the radical openness of the concept of intertextual play, negate the idea of intrinsic meaning and value. Textual meanings are mobile, dynamic, always susceptible to 'play'.<sup>60</sup> Liberal English teaching had flirted with openness in relation to textual readings, particularly in its espousal of personal response, but had never theorized the question of textual integrity and reading relations to any serious extent, nor the relations between texts and language beyond this key notion. Liberal English teaching had also unconsciously set strict if invisible limits to the textual field, limiting reading and response and regulating them within the institutional framework of schooling. Derrida's ideas of

dispersal, trace and dissemination, for instance, rendered language and textual material much more mobile and open to more fluid conception of meaning in ways that demanded a drastic critique of the everyday practices of English - as illustrated in chapter two of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*. Derrida's ideas more positively provided some of the impetus for the material of chapters three and four of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* in the attempt there to develop new practices with text and language.

Much of the material in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was based on the realization that the foundations of English were vulnerable to Derrida's anti-structuralist position that emphasises differences and 'play' at work in discourse:

...the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse - provided we can agree on this word - that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.<sup>61</sup>

Here the emphasis on the lack of a centre seems to question the holding principles of textual study as represented by literature and its related reading practices. Certain approaches to literature - author-centred approaches, theme-based work, character analyses, calls for personal response - the everyday stuff of the English curriculum - were problematized by Derrida's insistence on the infinite extension of the 'domain' of signification and its endless 'play'. Similarly the characteristic pedagogic practices of personal response English, where the personal response of the student is constrained in an invisible force field of legitimated meanings or response positions is problematized by the exclusion in Derrida of totalization:

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field - that is, language and a finite language - excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. One could say - rigorously using that word whose scandalous signification is always obliterated in French - that this

movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center of origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence - this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*. The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified.<sup>62</sup>

The key concept of supplementarity - as a kind of constant movement - determines the theory of signification elaborated in 'Structure Sign and Play' and elsewhere.

Supplementarity indicates a paradoxical logic, but a logic that necessarily disables the idea of intrinsic meanings and enforces the idea of the intertextuality of meanings and meaning systems. According to the Derridean position, not only are meanings subject to endless play and endless deferment, meanings are also always dependent on something *else*, something extra (textual), an additional move or element that any given statement or text cannot supply. Meanings are always reading beyond themselves and dependent, at the same time, on something other than themselves.

This idea of signifying instability - or mobility - is significant in relation to *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* both in terms of questioning the identity and authority of literature and in terms of delimiting the textual field. It also provided a theoretical impetus from which to conceive of and construct different practices.

According to Derrida's critique of the Saussurian description of the sign, signification is both productive and utterly dependent. Something of the combination of play and supplementarity is perhaps indicated in the description of deconstruction in chapter one of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* - where it is implied that *Hamlet* can be seen as infinitely interpretable, but is always also dependent on supplementary categories of meaning, modes of interpreting narrative, and so on.

Textual meanings are constrained, but the linked concepts of play and supplementarity emphasise the significance of institutional frameworks for meaning. In the meantime, these concepts may give rise to a liberating freedom in the possibilities of interpretation - putting 'play' into play, as demonstrated in the attempt to describe an analysis of 'The End of Something' in chapter two of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* which explored among other things the possible identity of

the 'empty' sandwich that appears in the story. This theme of play at work in texts is developed in relation to a number of other key ideas.

The *overabundance* of the signifier, its *supplementary* character, is thus the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be *supplemented*.<sup>63</sup>

The principle of supplementarity became a key notion in much of the deconstructive work I was trying to do with texts in English. It seemed important to think of interpretations and structures of meaning as forces at work in the *management* of meanings to supplement the restless interplay of infinitude and lack (finitude) in texts. It also seemed that the whole business of textual engagement could be foregrounded more by pushing the principle of supplementarity towards its related idea of intertextuality - hence the practice of transposing similar and dissimilar texts throwing light on matters of genre and textual orders. And so it was partly through a reading of Derrida that the crucial idea for rethinking subject identity in terms of displacement of the idea of 'English' by a subject that took language and textuality as its terrain. Key concepts in Derrida - such as 'play', 'supplementarity', 'the trace', 'differance' - enabled the conceptualization of an inter-related textual field.

Characteristic expression of a key notion in Derrida's position on language and meaning is found in the following formulation of 'play' as the disruption of presence, a reminder of the temporality of signification.

Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around.<sup>64</sup>

While the vocabulary of being and presence here perhaps betrays a professional absorption in the classic concerns of metaphysics, the discourse also demonstrates a powerful implication for the phenomenology of textual relations, for the identity of textual objects, for reading practices, for fundamental issues in the field of subject-

object relations. In Derrida's account of language presence and absence are necessarily linked with one another:

*communication, which in effect implies a transmission charged with making pass, from one subject to another, the identity of a signified object, of a meaning or of a concept rightfully separable from the process of passage and from the signifying operation. Communication presupposes subjects (whose identity and presence are constituted before the signifying operation) and objects (signified concepts, a thought meaning that the passage of communication will have neither to constitute, nor, by all rights, to transform). A communicates B to C.*<sup>65</sup>

The paradox of supplementarity and play is what makes signification in itself an uncertain business: the meaning of signs - and by implication texts - is always subject to the logic of supplementarity. But the uncertainty Derrida announces in the field of meaning and play has very important implications. The centring of texts - according to principles such as authorship, thematic content, personal response or any other ruse for stabilising meaning - must always be something that comes from outside, that is imposed, as it were, by contexts, discourses and social practices. The conception of endless textual mobility has deconstructive effects not just on individual texts but on the whole business of textual identity; but it also emphasizes the social categorizing of texts into discrete departments. Although this implication is not (always) explicitly present in Derrida's work, it seems to be implicit in all the major statements about signification and seems to be the point at which Derrida's work meets with Foucault's writings on language and discourse especially in 'What is an Author?' and *The Archaeology Of Knowledge* (1977).<sup>66</sup>

Derrida's thesis about the determination of systems of meaning by Western metaphysics, though never elaborated with detailed reference to the languages of everyday discourses, certainly makes more than passing reference to them:

Now, 'everyday language' is not innocent or neutral. It is the language of Western metaphysics, and it carries with it not only a considerable number of presuppositions of all types, but also presuppositions inseparable from metaphysics, which ... are knotted into a system.<sup>67</sup>

It is in this statement that a highly significant aspect of effect of Derrida's critique of the sign can be seen most clearly perhaps - significant for the practices of English

teaching in relation to language and textuality.<sup>68</sup> The conventional practices of English had no way of dealing with the culturally loaded nature of language Derrida implies here. Personal response had neither interest in nor methodology for approaching the metaphysical presuppositions embedded in language. Some of the most fundamental features of language identified and defined had been completely missed by English teaching. By implication the subject must be missing the point about effects and structures of meaning.

In *Positions* Derrida relates the movement of signification to the ambiguous principle of 'differance', once again emphasizing movement, temporality, play and the interplay of presence and absence. These are the structuring principles for the decentred structures of textual / linguistic operation Derrida defines.

the movement of *differance*, as that which produces different things, that which differentiates, is the common root of all the oppositional concepts that mark our language, such as, to take only a few examples, sensible/intelligible, intuition/signification, nature/culture, etc.<sup>69</sup>

It is possible to see here how the principles of play, supplementarity and deferral - all ideas that tend to suggest the multiplicity of meanings in language - are modified, checked by the particular form of Derrida's elaboration of the term 'differance': where movement produces differences, articulations but not endlessly in free play. The proliferating differences in language are organized by 'oppositional concepts'. These concepts in turn are embedded in systems of thought. It is not too much of a leap to relate this idea to the domination of the specific discourse of English teaching by oppositions that have institutional power and that are carried forward in the construction of professional identity, in the authorized practices of the subject, in examination syllabuses, in established publications, in the National Curriculum as well as in the casual professional discourse of English teachers.

The significance of Derrida for my involvement in the process of rethinking English lies partly in emphasizing the potential multiplicity of textual meanings, the interdependence of texts, the constant restlessness of signification, the equally constant deferral of meaning, the unboundedness of texts, the criss-crossing of meanings and the interplay of oppositions and their inverted relations of supplementarity. Derrida also seemed significant in relation to rethinking English

teaching in the problematizing of the distinctions between speech and writing, the radical idea of 'arche-writing' and the sense of a whole signifying field constituted of writing.<sup>70</sup> At one level, Derrida's ideas on supplementarity or his deployment of the idea of the trace could be used to suggest productive methods for A Level work on the interpretation of poetry (liberating personal response from all constraints); at another level, all of those ideas might be directed towards rethinking the textual field of English, finding it arbitrarily limited and its reading practices arbitrarily restricted to a curiously narrow methodology.

Through the notion of general writing, Derrida seemed to be proposing an approach to textual matters designed to break through existing boundaries that limited, in an arbitrary way, the scope of the textual field. Ways of conceiving writing, after Derrida, might be both more openly productive and more socially focused. Identifying characteristic oppositions and the play they engender might be a useful way of exploring meaning systems across a range of specific texts. So it might be interesting to examine elements of the Gulf War in relation to Shakespeare as exemplified in the work of Terence Hawkes on Shakespeare.<sup>71</sup> An equally important effect of Derrida, though, was to raise questions about the systems that that determined oppositions and meanings. Derrida's ideas seemed to suggest that the structures of thought that operated through language were deeply embedded in a system, that the system of thinking might be more visible by articulating oppositions at work, by subjecting them to play - again a potentially productive movement. If textual meanings - and necessarily meanings in general - were subject to the deconstituting logic of trace and supplement, what held them in place? This gave rise to a number of questions about English teaching. What were the forces that determined and sustained not just the interpretative frameworks but the status of Shakespeare in the field of English? Why did English teaching insist so intently on a particular division of the linguistic / textual field? The implications of all this were that textual work could no longer be exclusively 'textual', in the narrow sense, at least.

Derrida's emphasis on the mobility of language and textual meanings seemed to enforce a return to the forces and structures that worked to constrain and delimit meanings. If texts were intrinsically mobile, what were the forces that legitimated and excluded particular modes of relating to texts? Why were reading practices

constrained in different contexts? What was the institutional power determining worthy texts and plausible ways of engaging with them? It may initially have seemed remote from the concerns of English teaching, but there was also something in Derrida's apparent linguistic relativism that implied that the forms of language favoured by the institutions of English were also there by an alignment of historical social and cultural forces and were necessarily an effect of power. Derrida did not represent a libertarian conception of meaning, but implied meaning under constraint and regularity by deep structures 'knotted' in systems.<sup>72</sup> Derrida's 'reminders' of generally unrevealed features of language and textuality - spacing, supplementarity, the trace, and so on - at the same time offered a different set of ideas for constructing practices in teaching.

Foucault's insistence on discourses provides a more institutionally oriented focus than Derrida's more fundamental concerns with unrevealed features of language and textuality. In the context of English teaching it seemed that Foucault might provide a useful balance to the concerns of Derrida's work. In the first place, Foucault is significant for the idea of discourses as historically specific practices that generate 'objects' and an array of effects around them. Foucault's archaeology seeks to dig out layers of historical meaning to reveal how discourses constitute various regimes of truth. Like Derrida, Foucault's work emphasizes 'the culturally produced (as opposed to the natural) character of thought and perception.'<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, Foucault questions the *unities* of familiar discourses on text and language and meaning. In 'What Is An Author?' the singular identity of the 'work' is questioned: 'What is a work? What is this curious unity which we designate as a work?' Difficulties with the concept of the work, the author, and the linked concepts of writing and meaning are pursued. Conventional literary stabilities are called into question:

The author's name is not simply an element in a discourse (capable of being either subject or object, of being replaced by a pronoun, and the like); it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. In addition it establishes a relationship among the texts.<sup>74</sup>



The author's *name* here displaces the author. The emphasis here being on the *discourse* that frames the name and that gives it a function:

The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse: the fact that the discourse has an author's name, that one can say 'this was written by so-and-so' or 'so-and-so is its author', shows that the discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status.<sup>75</sup>

The phrase 'in a given culture' is highly significant here. 'What is an Author?' goes on to refer to the 'author-function', relating its appearance to the nature of discourses as 'objects of appropriation' and the organization and policing of discourse in a certain historical period towards the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries.<sup>76</sup> The 'author-function' is also associated with the emergence of literary discourse, described by Foucault as a recent and historically contingent discourse. In conclusion, Foucault links the 'author-function' with 'the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses' and claims that it does not affect all discourses 'in the same way at all times and in all types of civilisation'.<sup>77</sup> Clearly this has implications for conceptions of Literature that are evidently central to English in the National Curriculum at KS4, to English at A Level - where the 'juridical' system at work in English teaching is evident - and to English in Higher Education, where ideas like author and period are deployed to give mythical unity and depth to the subject. Foucault's development of this anti-liberal elaboration of the 'author-function' continues with further statements likely to contradict the favoured assumptions of most practices of English in schools. According to Foucault, the author-function 'is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer; but rather by a series of specific and complex operations'. This section states that 'it does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects - positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals'.

'What is an Author?' defines the author in terms that emphasize the specific cultural significance of authorship and that negate the role of individual being and consciousness in the 'author-function'. It denies the conventional logic of relations

between the 'author' and the 'works' - terms referring to ideas that are the very stuff of the practice of literature in English in schooling. In 'What is an Author?' it is made clear that such apparently fundamental ideas are provisional:

the author does not precede the works, he [sic] is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction ... The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.<sup>78</sup>

To describe Shakespeare as a 'functional principle' would no doubt cause consternation for many within the domain of English teaching, as would the apparently bizarre but thoroughly convincing idea that the author does *not* precede the works. For Foucault, the author is a function for determining the potentially disparate signifying tendencies of 'polysemic texts' - a position which serves to emphasize the historically contingent nature of discourses of literature, again a position likely to be inimical to exponents of both traditional and liberal models of English teaching.<sup>79</sup> 'What is an Author?' deals with one of the central tenets of conventional English teaching, the whole notion of authorship being central to the subject's concerns and practices in language and literature. In this key piece, Foucault not only announces - like Derrida - the polysemic character of texts, but puts characteristic and necessary emphasis on the whole historically specific 'juridical', 'institutional' character of the discourses of authorship and literature. In relation to English teaching, the position Foucault elaborates tends to reveal the particular discursive formation of ideas like authorship and literature, denaturalizing concepts that have the status, within the field, of given truth. Much of Foucault's concerns throughout his work were in identifying such 'regimes of truth.'

The interrogative position Foucault adopts in 'What Is An Author?' is elaborated in relation to discourses and language practices in general in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1977). The process of questioning defamiliarizes common sense versions of meaning and problematizes textual relations, but is also concerned to develop a sense of the extra-discursive forces at work and the more 'epochal' organizing principles/ideas that hold discourses in place and give them shape. As indicated above, Foucault's thesis is especially relevant to the process of

rethinking English in terms of locating its practices and ideas and the specificities of its discursive practices within a particular historical and institutional formation. In general, Foucault seems to argue that the unity of discursive categories must be provisional and related to their place within a field and an 'episteme'. For the teacher of English, inducted through characteristic professional channels, the articulation of the constructedness and historical relativity of the fundamental categories of English teaching was crucial. The realization of the constructedness and historical relativity of fundamental subject categories reinforced my critique of the unities of English and impelled the invention of alternative ideas and practices based on the speculative kind of questioning practised in 'What is an Author' and in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*. These two related processes - echoing Derrida's articulation of 'différance' - provided significant motivation for the works I published on English teaching.

Foucault's procedure of questioning exemplified in relation to the 'author-function' might be applied more generally to the various unities of English teaching. 'As soon as one questions that unity it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse.'<sup>80</sup> There are a number of significant elements in the general thesis of the *Archaeology of Knowledge* for an analysis of the discursive practices of English. Developing a post-Saussurian position, Foucault writes of the problematic relations between words, discourses and things, which turn out to be nothing like as direct and clear as common-sense habits of thinking would have it. In a characteristic inversion, he writes of 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak':

I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These words define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. 'Words and things' is the entirely serious title of a problem; it is the ironic title of a work that modifies its own form, displaces its own data, and reveals, at the end of the day, a quite different task. A task that consists of not - of no longer - treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of

signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe.<sup>81</sup>

As Foucault elaborates, discourses operate as 'regimes of truth', not only producing and ordering the objects of which they speak, but also determining and defining the differently organized positions of subjects within discursive regimes. Discourses have *productive* power and bring things into being. Discourses also claim institutionalized established authority to operate as regimes of power. The emphasis on the significance of discourses is perhaps paradoxical as Foucault above refers to the 'more' which exists above and beyond the relation of words to things and is a key component of his enquiry. English operates as just such a regime of truth, with its discursive practices well established, quite clearly and obviously within specific types of institution, such as schools. English determines what counts as literature and what doesn't; English determines what counts as a legitimate form of response to literature constituted within controlled limits. Indeed, English *demand*s response for certain kinds of subjects of its discursive power: school students doing GCSE exams, for instance. Similarly, English defines and patrols language practices, determining what are legitimate forms of written and spoken expression within its boundaries, what are appropriate ways of talking about, writing about and 'responding to' texts, what is good 'English' (grade A) and what is not (grade F). With the coming of the National Curriculum, assessment procedures in English have become increasingly foregrounded, and subject to public definition and statistical analysis. An important product of this emphasis on assessment has been to produce norms of measurement for 'appropriate' response, language usage, forms of writing and subject positions.

Foucault's later development of the concept of a disciplinary technology of power may point towards the idea of construction of English, its historical contingency and its strictly institutional being.<sup>82</sup> Proposing a shift in the very nature of government through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, discipline, it is argued, emerges as a technique of power operating through procedures for training or coercing bodies, both collective and individual. The instruments this disciplinary power operate through are 'hierarchical observation', 'normalizing judgement' and 'the examination'. Transposed to the specific context of the English classroom these instruments may be seen to function in the normative drive of central features of the

English curriculum and its practices. Personal response - in this view not so personal - becomes an apparatus designed for observation, for observing the formation of the person. The student's response (to a text, say, or in relation to a discussion of issues or personal experiences) is subject within the pastoral-disciplinary framework of the English classroom to the corrective management of the teacher. Personal writing is similarly 'managed'. Class discussion, textual activities and journal writing, for example, might all be considered in such terms - as an alternative to the position that sees them as the expressions of individual being. Favoured, naturalized practices of the most liberal of liberal English may be reinterpreted as techniques for the observation of students - to render them visible and, therefore, 'knowable' and 'correctable'. A failure to produce the reading required according to the 'normalizing judgement' of the teacher, however, is not, usually, to risk *overt* punishment in the modern English classroom: since students are entitled, it is held, to their personal responses.

It is the examination, Foucault suggests, which combines the techniques of 'hierarchical observation' and 'normalizing judgement' and allows the subject to be classified and judged. The examination manifests: 'the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected.'<sup>83</sup> In the context of English teaching 'examination' may be extended to include all those apparently liberal practices that scrutinize and modify aspects of the student's self - from forms of linguistic expression to responses to textual material. In liberal English the formal examination had largely been displaced, especially in the GCSE examination system in the mid 1980s, with more subtle forms of surveillance and judgement through coursework where the process of examination, modification and review - all according to Foucault mechanisms of subjection - become more or less constant but concealed features of the English classroom. While the position Foucault expresses recognizes that power - including power of the surveillance type - cannot be exercised without resistance, 'a strategy of struggle' in the context of the English classroom is likely to produce few positive benefits for students in terms of official recognition. What Foucault terms a 'free play of antagonistic reactions' applied to the context of the English lesson is always constrained by the relations of power structured by the discursive framework of the subject.<sup>84</sup>

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault develops the thesis that in the transition from sovereign power to capillary power or surveillance, the newly forming disciplinary machinery of the state invades hitherto unregulated areas and produces normative discourses through various institutions. Within this framework of ideas, the development of the state education system can be seen as a means of organizing hitherto wayward populations under the normative pastoral-disciplinary regimes of schooling.<sup>85</sup> Schools as we know them become sites of regulation in many forms, including the physical regulation of space and training of the body, expressed in its architecture and routinized disciplinary practices. The playground is especially the space where the unconstrained but supervised behaviour of the children may be subjected to pastoral correction by the teacher.<sup>86</sup> The 'schoolroom' includes training in the areas of reading and writing, producing identities structured around norms of reading and response.<sup>87</sup> According to Ian Hunter's Foucauldian position, the English lesson exemplifies the normative training of schooling. The literature lesson, where the literary text with its endless 'depth' or potential for 'free-play' is the site for the student to expose 'his' responses to the pastoral correction of the teacher figure - an 'ethical technology', in Hunter's terms.<sup>88</sup> This version of English describes the subject less in terms of developing certain kinds of knowledge or ideas, less in terms of an ideological project, and more in terms of a *pedagogy* concerned above all with the production of a certain type of person - inwardly reflective and, ultimately, *self-regulating*.

The personalist emphases of liberal English, where writing is construed as a direct expression of the self, are also challenged in the linguistically-oriented psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. In Lacan there appeared a theory of the subject that challenged prevailing notions of identity. Lacan's account of identity enabled links to be made between the subject, language, discourses and the social. The critical linguistic components of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory develop and draw from Sapir, Saussure and Jakobson among others, indicating a strong orientation to theories of language that give language a primacy in the field of representation.<sup>89</sup> In Lacan language is interwoven with Freud's description of the divided subject. Lacan develops the Freudian idea of the divided subject along with the idea of different orders of being: the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. Inhabiting the three orders at the same time but in different and not entirely stable ways, subjectivity is caught in the

interplay between the symbolic, the imaginary and the real.<sup>90</sup> In this theory, the subject is very much the subject *of* language, where language is not simply an external force, exterior to the subject nor a tool used by the subject for its own autonomous ends: language is the very principle that structures the subject and *determines* identity and being.<sup>91</sup> While Lacan's theory of the subject is largely abstract, it has powerful implications for language practices in education and in relation to English teaching. Lacanian theory develops the poststructuralist themes of language and discourse with particular reference to the function and effects of language in the subject. A fundamental principle for Lacan is expressed in the assertion that: 'no meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to another meaning',<sup>92</sup> echoing (or echoed by) the Derridean principles of supplementarity and deferral. The Saussurian distinction between the signifier and the signified, the stable description of the structure of the sign is deconstructed in Lacan's collapsing of the difference between the two - when the signified is, to echo Derrida again, put under erasure: the signifier intrudes into the signified, namely in a form which, not being immaterial, raises the very question of its place in reality.<sup>93</sup> This formulation deconstructs the strict distinction between signifier and signified. The effect of this is to produce a particular phenomenology, one that describes a dynamic structure for the relations between subjects, language and the world. This phenomenology, like Derrida's deconstruction of the Saussurian description of the sign, has a powerful bearing on matters of representation, but has equally deconstructive implications for the description of the subject of representation.

For Lacan, what applies to language applies equally to the subject. As with Derrida, though, signification is mobile. The subject, therefore, is unfixed and multiple, but required to submit to the social / cultural force of the symbolic order. The mobility of the subject is structured - by way of supplementarity - by a lack, a finitude that maintains the ceaseless play of signification. Identity is a function of this mobility and lack and is stabilized by the operations of the symbolic order to which the subject must submit the mobility of desire. For some feminists Lacan has been of special interest precisely for this intensely culturalist version of subject identity.<sup>94</sup> It seems particularly relevant to a political movement seeking to undermine certain biologically essentialist accounts of gender. An illustration of the role of signification

in the construction of Lacan's notion of identity is given in the vignette of gender difference:

A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop. Look, says the brother, we're at Ladies! Idiot replies his sister, can't you see we're at gentlemen.<sup>95</sup>

This illustrates in elliptical form something of a key phenomenological issue in the workings of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*. The position of the subject, in relation to the object and its relations with the idea of the object indicate at once the variability of meaning - here two alternative meanings are produced - and the socially symbolic ordering of meaning in language systems that determine subject positions in turn. The above quotation illustrates the significance of the symbolic order in relation to the positionality of the subject, including gender as a form of positionality within a symbolic ordering that vacillates between imaginary identifications and symbolic representations.

Lacan's account of the structure of the sign has parallels with Derrida's idea of 'play': 'An incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier...'<sup>96</sup> This factor of play, however, cannot be simply reduced to 'free play'. The following passage recalls Derrida's sense of signification's symbolic order or 'knotted system' :

in the second property of the signifier, that of combining according to the laws of a closed order, is affirmed the necessity of the topological substratum of which the term I ordinarily use, namely, the signifying chain, gives an approximate idea: rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings.<sup>97</sup>

In the same piece the theory of metonymy and metaphor, as twin principles of signification, is elaborated: displacement and substitution being the very principles on which language can function, echoing Derrida's insistence on the mobility of the trace and the supplement. As always with Lacan observations on signification apply directly to the constitution of the subject or subjectivity:



it is the connection between signifier and signified which alone permits the elision in which the signifier inserts the lack of being into the object relation, using the reverberating character of meaning to invest it with the desire aimed at the very lack it supports.<sup>98</sup>

Consciousness is structured in language and is not separable from unconsciousness, being itself is fragmented across its different orders that structure it simultaneously. We live in the imaginary order, the symbolic order and the order of the real at the same time, though we can never directly access the real as it is always laid over by the symbolic which is the means by which the world is organized in language. The subject is divided through signification in language and is caught in the chain of signification which has no resting or anchoring point and which is not stabilized by any transcendental signifier nor by any direct relation between the signifier and the signified. Language dwells within the subject but is not under the command of the subject; on the contrary, the subject is very much, in Lacan's terms, the subject *of* language. Being used by language more than using it, the subject is alienated from itself and from the articulation of its desire. There is no escape from the net of the symbolic order, nor is there any respite from the effects of the movement of signification. Only in the public symbolic world of discourse can the subject find meanings that are held in temporary/provisional stability.

As is the case with Foucault and with Derrida, Lacan's anti-essentialist theory of the mobility of meaning and of the subject at the same time gives emphasis to the social determinations of meaning and identity. Lacan's description of the subject, of the orders of being and of language and signification provides powerful means for interpreting ideology and its role in relation to the subject. In fact, Althusser deploys a Lacanian notion of ideology as less a masking of reality than a multitude of different way of configuring reality, of representing the world, some of which are endorsed more powerfully by the social symbolic order, and which claim the imaginary recognition of the subject in their formulations of the subject's relations to itself and to the world.<sup>99</sup> Lacan constructs a theory of subjectivity that relates the post-Saussurian linguistic theory with a Freudian model of the subject with its powerful emphasis on the unconscious. Language is always unknowable and always subject to unconscious movement of 'play' - a parallel with Derrida, again - and is beyond the conscious intention and direct control of the subject. Meaning belongs to the symbolic

order rather than to individual consciousness / intention. Lacan theorizes explicitly the structure of the subject's relations with language and what gets defined as the symbolic order. This seems to propose a reworking of conventional phenomenology of subject/object relations and demands that recognition be given to the socio-symbolic function of language and its relation to the different positioning of subjects. English teaching, with traditionalist emphasis on literature, has no account of the different forms of positioning to texts that the Lacan model proposes and in its liberal guise emphasizes direct correspondence between self, experience and language, without adequately realizing the crucial significance of the symbolic order and of the social that validates different forms of language differently.

On the view that I have proposed Lacanian theory is not an alternative to sociolinguistics but works in parallel and complementary ways. The social specificity of sociolinguistic concerns can be seen to complement the abstract Lacanian description of the function of language in the formation of identity. The poststructuralist position in general may similarly make connections with other socially and philosophically oriented theoretical positions. Derrida's emphasis on the indeterminacy of meaning when viewed statically according to the structures of signification usefully parallel Wittgenstein's later (post-*Tractatus*) philosophy of language. Wittgenstein's emphasis on language and '*forms of life*' parallel Foucault's insistence on discourses as organizing positions *beyond* language, over and above language.<sup>100</sup> This seemed consistent with both Derrida's sense of 'play' and systems of thought and with Lacan's sense of the subject of language and the symbolic order. It also seemed to me that just as sociolinguistics complemented the sociology of Bourdieu by providing a vocabulary for articulating the *specific* ways that the language 'habitus' of the school worked to validate and invalidate different forms of language by a symbolically violent, systematic, institutionalized imposition, so sociolinguistics might indicate specific ways in which the potential free-play of meanings and the fluidity of subjectivities might be organized and given more static identities within the social context of a powerful institution - the school - and within the specific practices of a significant element in its discursive operations - English teaching.<sup>101</sup>

For me, the poststructuralists Derrida, Foucault and Lacan impelled a rethinking of the phenomenology of reading practices in English teaching. This

involved a return to fundamentals - represented in a fresh description of phenomenological relations of subject and object in both 'Never Mind English ...' and in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*.<sup>102</sup> The category of the object had become problematized, no longer possible to be seen as there 'in itself'. It was an object that we could only recognize and name if we already knew what it was within a symbolic, linguistic ordering of things and relations. The object, moreover, could be seen from a number of different perspectives and each of them would reveal different aspects of the object. The totality of the object could never be grasped either as we could only view aspects at any given time and from any given perspective. Signification operated on the principle of deferral where signs pointed constantly to other signs and took up their meaning only within a network of inter-relations. There was no correspondence between the sign and the 'object itself' other than the conventional. Moreover, subjects are situated differently in relation to objects, but never with a perfect or infinite free choice. The position of the subject is symbolically determined, too. The conscious subject - essential for the idea of personal response - was fundamentally divided, on the one hand, and ordered linguistically, on the other. 'The subject' was also both divided and ordered by gender. The reading subject was varied and differently positioned in relation to the textual object, in ways that would actually determine the very identity of the object being read. *Othello*, for example, was not the same 'thing' for all subjects any more than World War II, Manchester United or English. The concept of the symbolic order, and Foucault's implicit emphasis on the socially contingent nature of discourse, with their historically shifting production of objects, and their equally shifting production and positioning of subjects, worked to render some of the fundamental categories of English questionable - at least in the sense that they couldn't claim with any philosophical rigour to be as absolute as the subject tends to represent them as being.

Displacing the teaching of texts, personal response, character and themes, poststructuralism provided a basis for teaching GCSE students about language, textual relations, reading positions and perspectives. The poststructuralist perspective had the effect of destabilizing and problematizing textual identities. Texts were not complete wholes available for direct access; texts were ordered symbolically within a system that had its own taxonomy. That system of differences determined where texts stood in relation to one another and what kinds of reading might be appropriate to them.

Various means were deployed, it seemed, to anchor textual meanings, like the category of the author, for instance, but as Foucault had shown, this stability was a mechanism produced not by texts themselves but by the socially embedded discursive reading practices that gave them identity and in effect made them what they were.

From my point of view as a practising English teacher rethinking English, it seemed there was a reciprocity between the effects of poststructuralist theory and sociolinguistics and sociology. The fundamental assumptions of English were questionable on socio-cultural as well as on philosophical grounds. Poststructuralism, some specific educational sociology and critical sociolinguistics offered routes through which the assumptions of the subject could be challenged - and also through which alternative practices could be sketched out. Lacanian descriptions of subjectivity had drawn on positions in linguistics and in productive ways seem to correspond to critical sociolinguistics. It seemed that poststructuralist theories of language and textuality and their relations with subjects highlighted and gave particular significance to institutionalized forms of linguistic and cultural power. The fusion of poststructuralism and sociology was a way of avoiding the kind of descent into the nihilism that Daw and Norris charged poststructuralism and postmodernism with, and seemed to invert those critiques that found the poststructuralist / postmodernist nexus as essentially vacuous.<sup>103</sup> The political implications of poststructuralist theory, of the rethinking of reading and general textual relations it implied was perhaps most evident and clear in the work of poststructuralist feminism. Chris Weedon's *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1987), for example, provided a neat exemplification of the uses of poststructuralist theory in the textual and subject politics of gender. In writing of this kind it could be seen how poststructuralist theory might impinge on the everyday politics of institutionalized practices in the whole general arena of culture - including educational practices and the highly institutionalized practices of English in schools. Within the specific context of English teaching, with its cultural and political biases and its institutional structures and practices, it seemed to me that poststructuralism offered the opposite of political nihilism. Poststructuralism was a means for exploring in detail specific aspects of the cultural politics of education practice that had been broadly defined by sociology and sociolinguistics.

In the field of cultural politics poststructuralism became related to the emergence of postmodern theory - or theories of the postmodern - initially via Jean Francois Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition* (translated in 1984) - and subtitled 'A Report into the Condition of Knowledge' was concerned to define significant shifts in discourses of knowledge, but was expanded considerably into a general theory/description of contemporary global cultural condition as in the case of David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1991). With some postmodernist accounts of culture there is a runaway tendency to break through barriers of specific and institutionalized practices, in order to describe manifestations of the 'global' postmodern condition.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, it seemed to me in the context of English teaching that the modernism / postmodernism divide could provide a useful break for understanding fundamental differences in pedagogic discourses of quite different types: liberal/traditional discourses being modernist in character, and poststructuralist discourses with their emphasis on the provisional identity of things being postmodernist in character. A fundamental difference between the two is a loss of faith in the idea of a natural progress towards enlightenment. From a postmodern perspective, progress can no longer be seen as the inevitable accumulation of knowledge and the forward movement of science. A postmodern position may tend to see the field of education as fractured by different pressures and discourses, historically contingent and unevenly developing.<sup>105</sup> For English teachers, the National Curriculum indicated a rupture of significant scale in the forward progress of the subject, as represented by its some of its more messianic advocates.<sup>106</sup> In effect, the National Curriculum and the history of its development and its installation can be taken as an exemplary case of certain trends sometimes identified as postmodern. It might be possible to read the National Curriculum, for example, in Nietzschean terms as the triumph of a certain regime of truth or as the supercession of one would-be grand narrative by another. Another postmodernist view might emphasize, after Lyotard via Wittgenstein, the interlocking of different language-games, narratives competing within various social spheres for supremacy within a general public discourse where performativity - in the form of SATS, action zones, performance related pay and league tables - is the order of the day.<sup>107</sup>

In terms of questions that might be asked of the claims of English to cultural authority and authenticity, a sense of the postmodern may be useful in acknowledging

the extent to which official and influential versions of the subject fail to engage effectively with the cultural plurality of its constituency. David Harvey's description of post-Fordist shift in economic, cultural conditions provides a detailed and way of accounting for complex operations of culture and identity. In Harvey's account power relations of class, gender and ethnicity are subject to mobility, pastiche and bricolage while also being structured by stabilities of discourses and institutions.<sup>108</sup>

Postmodernism tends to be associated negatively with a kind of cultural libertarianism, heralding the end of history, the death of grand narratives and an end to social responsibility in the field of politics and the public domain. This finds extreme expression in the case of Jean Baudrillard where postmodern tendencies are taken to represent the precedence of simulation over any grasp of the social real.<sup>109</sup>

Baudrillard's position, however, differs radically from the positions of Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, since he claims to have identified a point in history when the very order of things changed fundamentally to dis sever representation from the real. Lyotard's postmodernism is about the condition of knowledge in the social sphere and gives emphasis on the discrete language games of knowledge. For Lyotard performativity as a key criterion of value goes along with an agonistic sense of competing discourses that seems to me to be more politically productive than Baudrillard's apocalyptic negation of the social. In the context of education, postmodernism has been effectively deployed both to describe contemporary conditions and to revisit some of the major issues in the field of cultural politics of education.<sup>110</sup>

### **Critical Sociolinguistics**

One significant route for theory to engage critically with the fundamentals of English teaching was via sociolinguistics. Since the late 1960s, language had for some time been perceived as involved in the detailed institutionalization of cultural bias and the reproduction of class differences in schooling. In the early 1970s sociolinguistics had become critically involved in general debates about education and class. The (government commissioned) sociological work of Basil Bernstein and his (famous/notorious) promotion of the 'elaborated' and 'restricted' code distinction - corresponding to middle-class and working-class speech patterns - engendered controversy among educators, raising the heat on questions about education, culture

and class in the 1970s.<sup>111</sup> Reviewing and revising debates about language in education seemed particularly relevant to my own attempts to rethink English via theory.

Bernstein's theoretical sociology introduces language into accounts of social difference relating language differences to different levels of achievement in education of different class groups. In Bernstein's work language is an essential component for a description of the way that social structure - and social stratification - works through education.<sup>112</sup> In Bernstein - as classically in the work of Sapir and Whorf and de Saussure - experience is organized through language but language differences are related explicitly to social systems. Different linguistic systems, or dialects, reflect different types of social experience, expressing the different forms of life and dispositions of different social environments. Children coming to school come from different linguistic environments, are differently positioned within socially differentiated language forms. Schooling is conducted in forms of language that do not match equally the different linguistic environments and habitats of socially differentiated groups. The acquisition of language and processes of socialization are one and the same process and intricate with the transmission of culture, producing differentiated cultural orientations expressed through language differences that are bound up with a continuous cultural / social identity. In effect, language differences represent different 'symbolic orders' for different groups.

In schooling, dominant forms of language may relate negatively or positively to the linguistic, symbolic legacies of sections of school populations. Bernstein writes: 'The different focusing of experience ... creates a major problem of educability only where the school produces discontinuity between its symbolic orders and those of the child.'<sup>113</sup> Bourdieu characterizes this imposition of a symbolic order as 'symbolic violence', the main vehicle for the imposition of an institutional order, but also of values and habits of thinking.<sup>114</sup> M.A.K. Halliday (1979) defines the effect on 'the child' of Bernstein's account of the differences in verbal practices that inhere in different class speech environments: 'The child who is not predisposed to this type of verbal exploration in this type of experiential and interpersonal context "is not at home in the educational world" as Bernstein puts it.'<sup>115</sup> In other words, children may experience alienation in school through language. Certain ways of organizing experience in socially differentiated language forms and habitual practices - those that approximate most nearly to 'standard' English - are more in tune with the linguistic

environment of schooling. Dialects and registers vary and diverge according to a number of factors including, crucially, social class. In describing Bernstein's account of the character of the socially differentiated nature of languages, Halliday refers to the idea of 'subculture': 'what determines the actual cultural linguistic configuration is, essentially the social structure, the system of social relations, in the family and other key social groups, which is characteristic of the particular subculture.'<sup>116</sup> Bernstein defines the relations between language differences and social relations in terms of differences of codes as different linguistic forms or 'fashions of speaking'. Allied to these socially structured differences in speech are (and this becomes the source of the controversy in Bernstein's work on education) different forms of behaviour.

A number of fashions of speaking, frames of consistency, are possible in any given language and ... these fashions of speaking, linguistic forms or codes, are themselves a function of the form social relations take. According to this view, the forms of the social relation or, more generally, the social structure generates distinct linguistic forms or codes and these codes essentially transmit the culture and so constrain behaviour.<sup>117</sup>

The danger in the position expressed by Bernstein in relation to class, language and education was the attribution of essentialist qualities to the differences between working-class language and middle-class language. One significant problem with Bernstein's work was perceived to be the potential correlation of working-class culture with less expressive linguistic forms. The infamous use of the distinction between working-class speech as 'restricted code' and middle-class speech as 'elaborated code' implied, albeit inadvertently, a hierarchy of expressive power. This position was tackled positively in the work of William Labov and in the development of sociolinguistics in the field of education by M.A.K. Halliday who refined Bernstein's thought with a more acute sense of the arbitrary nature of symbolic linguistic power.<sup>118</sup> Both Labov and Halliday were keen to shift the argument away from the taint of deficit models of working-class language implied in Bernstein. While Halliday reminds us of the *social* dimension of educational failure, he also reminds us of the *linguistic* aspect of educational failure: 'Educational failure is really a social problem, not a linguistic one; but it has a linguistic aspect ...'<sup>119</sup> With the appearance



and development of more 'culturalist' accounts of language and education, the emphasis seems to fall increasingly on the linguistic power structures of schooling as being involved in the exertion of an arbitrary cultural authority invested with significant symbolic power.

Labov's work had offered a challenging theory to put into question the 'juridical' issue of the cultural linguistic authority of the school.

In this area, the deficit theory appears as the notion of 'verbal deprivation': black children from the ghetto area are said to receive little verbal stimulation, to hear very little well-formed language, and as a result are impoverished in their means of verbal expression. It is said that they cannot speak complete sentences, do not know the names of common objects, cannot form concepts or convey logical thoughts.<sup>120</sup>

The argument in any case rendered liberal assumptions about the simply positive function of education - including the egalitarian pretensions of the new comprehensive school system - untenable and indicated clearly a lack of awareness in matters of class and culture. Labov's work was significant as a radical departure in debates about language and education, insisting as it did consistently that 'the logic of non-standard English', the grammar and the expressive power of non-standard forms was in all ways comparable with the standard, dominant and educationally privileged forms.<sup>121</sup> The effect was to deflate the myth of linguistic deprivation, while also insisting that the domination of standard English was essential to inequalities of access. Both Bernstein's work and Labov's work generated a climate of interest in language matters among educationists. Ideas drawn from linguistics in education had become increasingly important in some discourses about the subject English during the 1970s. James Britton had developed a Vygotskian model of English pedagogy that made the use of language in the classroom central to the exploratory learning processes. This was an essentially liberal model that entertained the notion of free play without seriously problematizing the already given linguistic biases of the school. Douglas Barnes's related work 'discovered' and helped to popularize interest in talk in the classroom. Harold Rosen showed concern for language and class and propounded a liberalizing of linguistic practices in English allowing for the recognition of diversity of forms and styles of speech.<sup>122</sup>

Sociolinguistic debates enjoyed but a brief intervention into English teaching in England and Wales. Mainstream language concerns were deflected into 'language across the curriculum' initiatives. In Australia, however, M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional grammar engendered 'genre theory' in English teaching. Developments of Halliday's 'social semiotics' addressed issues around language, class and culture in education. In Australia, the influence of sociolinguistics has been considerable in academic discourses on education generally, in English teaching particularly, and has been closely related to questions of equity influencing government language policy. Hallidayan elements have been introduced into the English school curriculum in some Australian states. In the United States, some very interesting and controversial developments have occurred linking linguistic theory with education. William Labov identifying the accentuation of linguistic differences, understood as expressions of different cultural orientations writes: 'the differences we found in Harlem are not growing less. On the contrary, the home languages of black and whites are growing more different from one another.'<sup>123</sup> Labov has been influential in promoting the 'ebonics' movement, and indicates possible lines of development for the more radically relativist language positions developed through sociolinguistics. Labov has been cited as an expert witness in public debates and has been a significant figure in the development of the 'ebonics' departure.

... the African American community of Oakland has finally decided, as a whole, that it is time to stop blaming children for the failure of the schools and time to improve out methods of teaching reading by using our knowledge of the language that children actually speak.<sup>124</sup>

In a similarly politically charged context, a powerful and unambiguously critical position has been developed in the work of Hilary Janks in South Africa. South Africa provides a powerful example of a linguistically diverse and fiercely contested arena.<sup>125</sup> Hilary Janks's critical language awareness is developed from an application of discourse analysis (especially the work of Fairclough), Hallidayan sociolinguistics, Bourdieu's work on language as symbolic power and a reading of Foucault's position of discourses. 'Why We Still Need Critical Language Awareness in South Africa' advocates application of discourse analysis - after Fairclough - in the name of a 'transformative pedagogy' based on a critical linguistic approach to 'the discourses

which speak us'.<sup>126</sup> Teaching materials for secondary schools putting discourse analysis into practice constitute the *Critical Language Awareness Series*.<sup>127</sup> This teaching scheme is referred to as being structured by 'the struggle over the sign'.<sup>128</sup> The position and practice developed in it draws explicitly on Foucault's sense of discourse as being policed.<sup>129</sup> Emphasis is given to the way language variety is suppressed and unity emphasized in education so that speakers of non-standard language forms are induced to 'collaborate in the destruction of their instruments of expression'.<sup>130</sup> Attention is also given to the way that discourse represents versions of the world as legitimate and the power of discourse to construct subjectivity. This work has also been linked to the South African government's *Curriculum 2005* project to reconstruct post-apartheid education, to expand its scope and to address the problem of equity in the context of the legacy of apartheid.<sup>131</sup> In South Africa, language policy is an intensely debated issue in terms of access and empowerment. Hilary Janks advocates, among many other powerful recommendations: 'teaching language policy in such a way as to undermine the symbolic power of English while recognizing its material power'; 'extensive work on critical language awareness which enables students to understand the relationship between language and power'; and advocates transferring resources to the teaching of African languages.<sup>132</sup>

In English teaching in England and Wales, the LINC debate provided an interested 'local' instance of attitudes towards socio-linguistic questions (addressed polemically in 'LINC: Reading The World Of English').<sup>133</sup> The LINC materials (1992) had offered a framework for language studies, a new component within English, that had hitherto tended to conceive of language work as performative and productive rather than concerned with knowledge and analysis. 'Knowledge about Language' work, produced through the LINC project under the guidance of Ronald Carter formulated frameworks and materials for use in schools that included some sociolinguistic forms of understanding addressing the relations between language, culture and power.<sup>134</sup> The problem with the LINC materials, in terms of the 'constitution' of English teaching, was that they were never implemented as policy, and in the end it was left to the discretion of local education authorities whether or not they should be distributed to schools. In those cases where the materials were released, there was no government backing for the training of English teachers in their

implementation. As a consequence, the LINC materials also came and went and left little impact on the practices of English teaching at large.<sup>135</sup>

The training, induction and culture of English teachers in England and Wales has little truck with theories of language that recognize social differences as being systematically implicated in assessment in English. It is not as though English teaching has moved beyond the debates that stirred in the 1970s and that were partially rescucitated through the LINC project. As The Bullock Report clearly demonstrates, and The Cox Report more recently echoes, there is a passing recognition of the case presented by Labov on standard varieties of English. The recognition is displaced by the liberal discourse of access and the liberal accession in the face of the assumed value of standard English that enjoys an unproblematic, 'common sense' centrality.<sup>136</sup> One of the aims of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was to develop language practices that would directly address sociolinguistic issues. It was also an aim of the book to problematize the role of the standard / non-standard division in judgements about the quality of students' language and, crucially, in the arena of public assessment.<sup>137</sup>

### Theories of Culture and Communications

The emergence of Cultural Studies and Media Studies also provided alternative frameworks for making sense of the business of communication, readings, and meanings. As an English teacher redefining the cultural orientation of the subject, theoretical developments in these areas represented important departures. Cultural and Media Studies worked against the exclusive tendencies of traditionalist versions of cultural value both in the space they gave to popular culture and in the manner of their approach to popular culture. John Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989), for example, not only indicated a broadening of the scope of the idea of what might constitute significant culture; it offered ways of interpreting popular cultural consumption as active, intelligent, sense-making and often as challenging to 'dominant' meanings. Ien Ang's work in *Watching Dallas* (1985), *Desperately Seeking The Audience* (1991) and *Living Room Wars* (1996) represented a developing theory of the uses, pleasures and meanings of texts and forms within the field of popular culture.<sup>138</sup> From within Media Studies it was possible to take into account considerable changes in the nature of popular culture, and to see links and relations

with new technologies, with large scale electronic communications systems and global cultural conditions.<sup>139</sup>

Anti-formalist shift in accounts of processes of interpretation were significant to the thesis of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*. In key accounts in Cultural Studies and Media Studies, audiences are seen as actively engaging with their lived social environments, making their own kinds of sense and taking their own specific pleasures from cultural activities and events. Television watching on this model is seen less as the subjection to technologically, economically powerful determinations than as the interactive, often collective / critical reading and meaning making practices expressing social and cultural differences. John Fiske's account belongs to a general movement that emphasizes 'pleasure, empowerment, resistance and popular discrimination'.<sup>140</sup> In his distinction between the *financial economy* of production and consumption and the *cultural economy*, Fiske asserts that 'the power of audiences-as producers in the cultural economy is considerable.'<sup>141</sup> A number of studies can be marshalled to support this argument, including Eric Michaels's account of the way Australian Aboriginal viewers appropriated the figure of *Rambo* as symbolic of their own political aspirations to resistance and struggle, and the example of Russian Jews in Israel watching *Dallas* as a critique of US capitalism.<sup>142</sup> Fiske's position provides a theory of power relations that explains how popular culture may resist the power of the powerful within the domain of the semiotic. According to this position, popular culture is a kind of semiotic battlefield in which conflict is fought out between imposed meanings and pleasures and identities and positions produced in acts of semiotic resistance.<sup>143</sup> Although conceived of by some accounts of English teaching as related, even symbiotic, subjects in the context of schooling, Media Studies actually deployed significantly different perspectives, a completely different vocabulary and conceptual apparatus for dealing with textual material and signifying processes.<sup>144</sup> As a teacher of Media Studies as well as English, it seemed to me that Media Studies was much more theoretically explicit and coherent when dealing with questions of meaning, audiences, textual value than English, where residual elements of Leavisism and liberal notions of creativity allowed the continuation of the centrality of the philosophically naive idea of literature as a distinct textual field with its own properties and effects and the linked idea of personal response as a privileged mode of textual engagement.

The perspectives of Cultural and Media Studies on audiences and texts is significant in relation to English teaching in a number of ways. In the first place, it challenges the tendency in much English teaching to represent popular culture as manipulative and external (a legacy of Leavis and Thompson). It implies that the reading of popular culture may well be active and productive - or creative, to use the favoured term of English teaching. It also gives credence to the notion that popular cultural forms are worthy of attention having the potential for producing positive effects in relation to those who 'consume', or 'use' them. It raises the question of cultural value and cultural authority. After the emergence of Cultural and Media Studies, the question of the textual field was potentially a serious theoretical and political problem confronting English. What could be the cultural authority for the maintenance of literature as a category, as literature increasingly came to be seen as a kind of caste practice, and when the vitality of popular culture was being increasingly recognized? Much of the thrust of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was to propose a complete rethinking of the textual field in English teaching in the light of Cultural Studies and Media Studies perspectives.

Within Media and Cultural Studies there was also the consciousness of the global field, significant shifts in communications systems and cultural relations, influencing matters of social identities and culture. John Tomlinson's study *Cultural Imperialism* (1991) dealt with questions of cultural domination by powerful forces at work in the global proliferation of media consumption. *Cultural Imperialism* highlighted key studies by Ang, Michaels and others that both challenged monolithic domination theory, but that also recognized the imperialist tendencies of powerful media interests in the 'condition of late-modern globalization', asking questions about the relations between "imperialist" and "subordinate" cultures'.<sup>145</sup> Globalization theory provided a perspective on the relations between the global, the national and the local, taking into account changing cultural conditions and elaborating the relations between the assumed forces of media imperialism, indications of populist, nationalist and sub-cultural resistances and reclamations of media forms and products.<sup>146</sup> Literature on global media relations indicates a complex of appropriations and movements within relations of dominance and subordination. Key studies on the effect of television in rural Indian communities, on the development of television networks in the subcontinent, offer interesting considerations for conceptions of

media consumption theory.<sup>147</sup> An awareness of new technologies also came from Media Studies, indicating significant shifts communication systems and relations: VCRs, HDTV, satellite systems, fibre-optic cabling and digitalization providing the occasion for considerations of media access and media empowerment.<sup>148</sup> My venture into Media Studies indicated the limitations of the conception of Media Studies embraced by English teaching. It also offered an account of signifying relations, communications technologies and systems that seemed to extend beyond the scope of English teaching, with its limited conceptions of readers and texts.<sup>149</sup> A sense of the global development of media systems and uses - with its emphasis on the significance of local cultural conditions - certainly seemed to put the concept of literature into a perspective that undermined its claims to universal validity.

Literary studies had also been critically re-examined through post-colonial perspectives. Edward Said (1978), Gayatri Spivak (1990) and Aijaz Ahmad (1992) represented literature as streaked with the post-colonial legacy, once again suggesting that the universality of the category could not be sustained without a significant repression of history and of the cultural role of literature in hegemonic colonial discourses.<sup>150</sup> This had implications for the stability and status of canon literature, but also seemed to suggest that literature itself might be a questionable category: even multicultural literature, celebrated in some liberal versions of English teaching, and increasingly significant in Higher Education, might represent an imposed cultural form. Gauri Viswanathan in *Masks of Conquest* (1989) described the historical role of English studies in the colonial enterprise as a form of cultural colonialism. On this view, the popularity of, for example, Toni Morrison on Higher Education English courses might be seen as ambiguous in terms of its cultural politics. There is a (difficult and complex) question about the role of literature in and from subaltern and culturally marginalized contexts. Literature may represent an alien or imposed form through which the subaltern and marginalized is actually prevented from speaking in an idiom of its own cultural habitus.

Approaching the business of culture, identity and cultural preferences from another perspective, the sociological work of Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1986) offered a powerful theoretical framework for rethinking culture and education and offered innumerable specific examples of cultural preferences as class distinctions. Media Studies based analyses of audience uses of media products indicated a deconstructive

approach to the still powerful opposition between culture and popular culture. Where education had represented its dealings with culture as neutral, clearly the cultural field in general could be seen as always already inflected with class positions. Attachments to and engagements with cultural objects were never free from class positioning. Cultural objects and practices were always already intricately with identity, with class inflected social relations and affiliations. Cultural choices and cultural department were intricately with identity in subtle and intimate ways that had far reaching implications for institutions and practices in education.

My thinking about English teaching and its relations with popular culture was significantly influenced by Media Studies, Cultural Studies, post-colonial perspectives and by the analysis of the field of cultural consumption in relation to class elaborated in Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1986). In relation to these positions and perspectives the narrow textual realm of English seemed parochial and anachronistic, as well as exclusive. Media and Cultural Studies had the effect of validating the popular as a legitimate and significant focus for analysis, providing an alternative set of concepts to examine and make sense of textual material, also to heighten awareness of institutional processes in production, distribution, and consumption. Media Studies and Cultural Studies had demonstrated that the idea of 'general writing' - an inclusive conceptualising of the textual / linguistic field - might be approached through a number of perspectives and procedures. In this context, the Hemingway short story, the first world war poem, or the Shakespeare play seemed increasingly odd foci for the development of reading skills, techniques and sensibilities. Their relations with lived textual experiences seemed rather tenuous, at least.

### **New Bearings: Theory in English**

During the period in question here, a number of key publications appeared in academic discourses of English to challenge the status of literary studies, and to question the cultural supremacy of English in cultural and intellectual life and in education. These came in the form of 'internal' critiques that increasingly seemed to legitimate my developing suspicions about the validity of the cultural and linguistic assumptions strongly embedded in English teaching. An early and personally influential example, Francis Mulhern's *The Moment of Scrutiny* (1979) concerns the influence of F.R. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* movement in the cultural and intellectual



tradition of English.<sup>151</sup> Mulhern offers a political re-reading of Leavis and *Scrutiny*, attributing considerable significance to the movement in relation to the idea of literature and its force in education, his aim being to identify *Scrutiny's* 'overall cultural programme'.<sup>152</sup> According to Mulhern's analysis *Scrutiny's* influence in the realms of literature and literary study have been to *depoliticize* the whole field. He argues for a recognition of '*Scrutiny's* cultural power' deriving from 'the apparently specialist procedures of "literary criticism"'. In his analysis the great achievement of *Scrutiny* is to have fashioned literary studies into a form of 'corrective social criticism'. The dominant function of literary criticism, according to Mulhern, is 'the repression of politics' and this leads to his round condemnation of 'England's cultivated, politically philistine (and so, conformist) intelligentsia'.<sup>153</sup> This 'cultural function' (the repression of politics) is, he argues, 'reproduced daily, with countless particular inflections, by the entire national education system' and constitutes 'part of an ensemble of cultural *domination*.'<sup>154</sup>

Mulhern's book is an early expression of a 'movement' seeking to reread the history of English studies, to unearth a political history of the subject in order to trace its links with contemporary practices of 'traditional' literary studies that are politically and culturally loaded. In *The Moment of Scrutiny* this rereading calls for a realignment of ideas and practices to occupy English. Mulhern's call for an ideological struggle to reoccupy the terrain of literary studies and to shift the current of intellectual discourses, ironically identifies *Scrutiny* as the key instance on which such a project might be modelled.

What is required, then, is a vigorous contestation not only of 'ideas' but of the institutions and practices that sustain them, in journalism, in education and elsewhere - a concerted struggle for which the only modern precedent in England is *Scrutiny*.<sup>155</sup>

Mulhern's implicit call to arms is answered by Chris Baldick's *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848 - 1932* (1983). The political project of literature and English in education is identified in the line that moves through I.A. Richards to Leavis as followers of Arnold. In 'literary discourse' as expressed in Leavis and Richards, Baldick finds these key figures 'creating a substitute moral philosophy and a substitute social analysis as much as a substitute religion.'<sup>156</sup> The mission of Baldick's history is to reveal the ideological project of the post-Arnoldians: the cultivation of an

'organic' community, a harmonious, rounded, and self-complete development of civilization under the guardianship of literary criticism.<sup>157</sup> Baldick also rediscovers the close alliance between literary criticism as a significant practice in education and a form of social mission: 'Such, at its most ambitious, was the stated or unstated tendency of the constant analogies between social and literary orders in this period of English criticism.'<sup>158</sup> The real significance and the emergence of literary values in English and of Leavis was to provide a sense of unity and mission where there had been difference and conflict: '...from the very beginning, English Literature as a 'subject' has been founded upon a series of uncertainties and conflicts.'<sup>159</sup> And the political project of 'a growing 'opposition' movement' - of which Baldick may be counted as one - has become 'to question the long-standing assumptions of traditional literary criticism embedded in the very title 'English Literature': both the status of Great (and hence capitalized) Literature and the Englishness of the subject's concerns and methods.'<sup>160</sup>

Baldick's sense of an opposition movement may have been embodied in *Rereading English* with its congenial critique of both literature and of dominant forms of critical practice.<sup>161</sup> In the opening essay, 'The Crisis in English Studies', Peter Widdowson throws down the political gauntlet to 'the largely unshaken dominance of conventional criticism, precisely within its principal arena of activity - secondary and tertiary education'.<sup>162</sup> This 'conventional criticism' is represented by Widdowson as being sustained within 'the untransformed education system of a still powerfully entrenched bourgeois culture' with the clear implication that the 'crisis' is the occasion for the transformation of the 'education system', and that this must involve some form of challenge to the 'entrenched bourgeois culture' of the education system.<sup>163</sup> Widdowson affirms the existence of a 'crisis in English studies' as a form of awakening, a newly discovered self-consciousness about the identity and orientation of the subject:

the crisis in English studies ... is a question, *posed from within*, as to what English *is*, where it has got to, whether it has a future, whether it should have a future as a discrete discipline, and if it does, in what ways it might be reconstituted.<sup>164</sup> (first emphasis added)

His proposal in response to the 'crisis' is to challenge the given structure and practices 'to redirect it in response to pressing social and political needs.' What Widdowson

shares with Leavis and indeed with Arnold, then, is the notion of a 'social mission', in Baldick's terms, that will address urgent political/cultural needs. Widdowson identifies an Arnoldian line of development for English as a 'humanist surrogate for religion'. In Widdowson's speculation about what should be the future of English, he proposes its migration from its quasi-religious function to the political function, arguing that the subject be so 'reconstituted'.<sup>165</sup> For Widdowson, the political function implies rereading relations of power through textually focused analysis. In the same volume, 'The Hidden History Of English Studies' by Brian Doyle also refers to crisis ('the urban school in crisis'<sup>166</sup>) as well as to the (hidden) ideological/political project of English:

selective uses of English as a language and a literature have also been of great importance in mediating power relations between classes and other groups in British society.<sup>167</sup>

Accounts of the rise of English studies from 'the first quarter of the present century' 'towards a state of professional respectability and systematization' cannot be adequately explained as the straightforward development of 'intellectual and practical styles'.<sup>168</sup> Once again the emergence of English as a professional discipline must be seen in terms of the 'political and cultural significance of the shift (which was real)'.<sup>169</sup> In tracing the history of the subject, Doyle claims to disclose the social forces at work in and around 'the English Language and Literature.'<sup>170</sup> In other words, the process of the establishing and development of English is rethought by Doyle as an essentially ideological project. For Doyle English becomes an institutionalized means of maintaining class relations of power and of sustaining a certain view of the world which has been amenable to the maintenance of class relations of power.

The moment of *Rereading English* announces a cluster of themes that my published work on English teaching attempted to broach around the unmasking and restructuring of English: with critical emphasis on the idea of exposing or restoring to the subject its social cultural political history and recovering for it a meaningful-future in terms of its reorientation in relation to these key terms. 'Poststructuralism, Reading and the Crisis in English',<sup>171</sup> proposes the alliance of a redefined, deconstructed, regenerated English with Cultural Studies - with a poststructuralist framework for its projected textual ventures. In the same volume, Catherine Belsey's 'Re-Reading the Great Tradition'<sup>172</sup> effects a re-reading of Leavis's text - on similarly alternative

grounds. Belsey identifies the established business of literature with 'a liberal education': promoting the intransitive qualities of 'mature sensibility' and 'sureness of perception'. Belsey proposes an occupation rather than a rejection or displacement of English: 'to treat English as a site of struggle, to generate a new critical discourse, to reread the great tradition, not in order to valorise it, but in order to release its plurality'. Her aim is to establish reading strategies from within English to redraw the subject in Higher Education. One offered example is a feminist reading of Daniel Deronda that shifts meaning from Leavis's proposed 'discrimination between subjectivities' (thus affirming hierarchy itself) to a feminist reading that is 'consciously and explicitly *produced*'.<sup>173</sup> Belsey's is prepared to salvage literature as something phenomenologically 'there' in the given arena, but that must be subject to redefinition via alternative practices.

Terry Eagleton in 'The Rise of English' (1983) presents the idea of the relatively recent emergence of literature in order to emphasize the constructedness of the category. Literature, according to Eagleton, becomes established critically as a special category, a means for bearing 'social values' and 'a vital instrument for their deeper entrenchment and wider dissemination'. 'The Rise of English' associates the 'emergence of literature' with the emergence of the new middle-class in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.<sup>174</sup> Eagleton claims that the emphasis on 'creative imagination' embodied in literature is a post-romantic idea. Literature becomes significant in industrial England as an 'enclave' for 'creative values' existing as a living criticism of 'those rationalist or empiricist ideologies enslaved to "fact"': hence the specifically spiritual and decidedly ideological value placed on the literary work, hence also the necessary distinction of 'literature' from other types of writing and reading. It's not simply that literature is ideological: 'Literature is an ideology.'<sup>175</sup> To clinch the sense of literature's distinct identity as bearer of the spiritual and the creative and to reaffirm the historical sense of its socio-cultural mission, Eagleton refers to the famous statement of George Gordon: 'England is sick, and ... English Literature must save it.'<sup>176</sup> For Eagleton, the 'disarmingly frank' Arnold is a key figure who speaks for the association of the significance of literature - as a means to the revival of the spirit of the nation - and the furtherance of class identity and interests. Literature signifies for Eagleton's Arnold a means of revivifying the spiritual dullness of the middle-classes: echoing the idea of Eagleton's distinct and creative realm. Eagleton sees the rise of

English, at least partly, as describing a different trajectory. The roots of English are essentially democratic, coming through the Mechanics Institutes and the extension college lecture circuits, drawing on Lionel Grossman's and D.J. Palmer's versions of the rise of English whilst also echoing John Dixon's. This is consonant with Eagleton's conclusions that proposes freeing literature from its institutionalized constraints. The liberation of 'Shakespeare and Proust' may entail the 'death of literature', writes Eagleton, but, curiously echoing Arnold, he suggests that this may be precisely their '*redemption*'. This position essentializes Shakespeare and Proust *and* frees them from the very category - literature - that gives them meaning and identity. The argument that Eagleton promotes questions the category of literature by insisting on its historical contingency. At the same time it accepts that Proust and Shakespeare have an existence independent of the institution of literature. Eagleton's concluding allegory of the 'lion' and the 'lion tamer' unambiguously develops the idea of the liberation of literature.<sup>177</sup> There is a contradiction in Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction* that consists of both questioning the foundations of literature, and wanting to liberate literature from its ideological shackles.

Refunctioning literature or occupying the space in the curriculum taken by literature is a common theme in the movement associated with *literary* theory in academic discourses of English. Shakespeare provides a significant symbolic focus for such tendencies. There is a sense of recovering the cultural materialism of Shakespeare by taking Shakespeare studies back to the age of Shakespeare - expressed in Derek Longhurst's contribution to *Rereading English*, 'Not for all time, but for an Age'. Claiming that 'any materialist approach to Shakespeare must therefore give priority both to the historical and theoretical conditions in which the plays were first produced', Longhurst traces the status of Shakespeare in the curriculum to Newbolt's acclaim of 'our greatest English writer'.<sup>178</sup> Longhurst argues for releasing Shakespeare from the 'timeless' and 'eternal' and recovering its material being through locating it in its historical cultural context. The 'material being' of Shakespeare, though, is not directly accessible to a historical materialist approach. Shakespeare is multiple, being produced and reproduced differently in different historical periods. Much of the new critical theoretical perspectives on Shakespeare produced in the 1980s sought to construct a sense of the provisional, historically specific existence of Shakespeare as a symbolic category in the historically relatively recently 'forged' realm of English

Literature and its institutional locations. This is evident in a number of self-consciously theoretical and politically conscious studies that acknowledge the contemporary *reproduction* of Shakespeare and that Shakespeare as we know it is historically recent.<sup>179</sup>

Eagleton's sense of recovering literature from its shackles retains some notion of an intrinsic identity for authors and texts and offers a partial separation of Literature from its institutional moorings. Belsey's *Critical Practice* follows something of this notion in its critique of the 'common sense' but really 'ideologically and discursively constructed' reading practices of expressive realism.<sup>180</sup> Belsey expresses the commonly-held poststructuralist view that 'meaning is socially constructed' and carries this through to a generalization about the relations between meaning and 'the social formation': 'the social construction of the signifying system is intimately related to the social formation itself.' It follows then that reading any form of textual material will reveal ideology at work, if 'Ideology is inscribed in signifying practices ...'<sup>181</sup> Belsey is keen to apply poststructuralist thinking to the business of criticism, drawing on Barthes, Derrida and Lacan but also on the more Althusserian and historically self-conscious work of Macherey, applied to a series of literary texts.<sup>182</sup> In the end, *Critical Practice* advocates a new mission for criticism: '...meanings circulate between text, ideology and reader, and the work of criticism is to release possible meanings.'<sup>183</sup> *Critical Practice* also hints darkly that: 'a more radical problem arises of whether we should continue to speak of *literature* at all', arguing that the case for 'the primacy of the signifier' proposes, in the end, the necessity of putting the term 'literature' under erasure.<sup>184</sup> *Critical Practice* concludes with the advocacy of a certain type of liberationist criticism, freeing the plurality of textual meanings from their constraints in ideological reading practices. It problematizes the very identity of literature but tends to work wholly within the category, as a necessary corollary to its linked concepts 'criticism' and 'critic'. The figure of the 'critic' remains closely associated with the social practices of literature and with the institutionalized order of 'criticism'. One of the problems for much of the writing about 'theory' - particularly *literary* theory - as in the cases of Eagleton and Belsey, outlined above, is that it is produced in relation to the business of literature in Higher Education and specifically within the context of English. Once the category of literature is problematized, the identity of the practice of literature and the 'critic' figure become equally problematic.

The dissolution of literature opens a boundless field, that deconstructs itself in its shapelessness. This was an issue faced in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* and was resolved only by recourse to working with literature in a thoroughly sceptical way, drawing parallels with popular textual forms, on the one hand, and by proposing an extension of the textual field and a wholly different practice of language and textual studies.

The problem of the identity of literature and of its association with questions of value is addressed at length in Antony Easthope's *Literary into Cultural Studies* (1991) which defines 'the institution of literary studies' 'as a form of what Althusser names as an ideological state apparatus'.<sup>185</sup> Easthope claims that the modernist reading of literary studies cannot guarantee literary value, and characterizes the literary text by its polysemic tendencies draining the literary text of its aura, or its claim to special status. In addition, *Literary into Cultural Studies* makes a distinction between the author in different contexts ascribing a special political function to the novelist in non-western sections of the world.<sup>186</sup> The book finds no reason for the separation between high culture and popular culture and proposes 'a new paradigm for the study of high and popular forms together'.<sup>187</sup> To this end, Easthope places 'literary studies' against what is conceived of as its other 'cultural studies', aiming to produce a field of study that encompasses questions of 'gender', 'the canon', 'The national culture and its others', 'class identity' and other issues associated with the aim of 'drawing its subject into a theoretical and academic critique of the everyday'.<sup>188</sup>

Another approach to questions of textual politics is available in the swathe of feminist literary theory, where questions of the identity of literature and its institutional being are subsumed to a specific political project. Seeking to define 'feminist criticism' in terms of an approach to literature, Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) seeks to explore aspects of poststructuralist theory, among other forms of theory, in order to clarify the possibilities and the proper objectives of feminist literary practice.<sup>189</sup> In *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Chris Weedon argues the necessity of poststructuralist theory as a means of constructing an 'adequate feminist politics', arguing that 'women's experience' alone cannot provide anything beyond a liberal humanist account of the politics of gender.<sup>190</sup> For Weedon - as for others - this has implications for the practice and theory of criticism, but also necessarily extends well beyond criticism, always reading into the politics of gender:

The task for feminist criticism is to demonstrate how texts constitute gender for the reader in class- and race- specific ways and how these modes of femininity and masculinity related to the broader network of discourses on gender both in the past and in the present.<sup>191</sup>

Weedon refers to 'the discursive battle for the meaning of texts'<sup>192</sup> and also refers to the role of literary discourse in the education system:

At the heart of the mechanism of power/knowledge lies the education system, within which selected individual are initiated into literary discourse, taught to read in particular ways and to specific ends.<sup>193</sup>

Weedon sees the poststructuralist feminist venture as a means of addressing matters of power and inequality, including addressing the role of literary studies within the education system and its role in organizing forms of subjectivity, modes of representation and reception. In doing so, Weedon argues for an approach to 'fictional forms' that goes well beyond the literary,<sup>194</sup> and represents Rosalind Coward's *Female Desire* (1984) as an exemplary case of poststructuralist feminism, analysing 'a range of cultural phenomena' providing a model for the rethinking and the reorientation of literary studies.<sup>195</sup> Weedon draws a contrast between the development of poststructuralism in relation to work on the media and popular culture and in relation to literary studies. She finds that the establishment status of literary studies, its deep-rooted attachment to liberal - humanism, meant that it *had* to be 'profoundly hostile' to poststructuralist theory and its challenge to dominant modes of reading.<sup>196</sup>

Theory's incursion into English is perhaps most dramatically represented in new approaches to Shakespeare. A number of publications sought to apply theory in various ways to Shakespeare - a symbolic cornerstone for English and literary studies that remains a statutory component of National Curriculum English and of English at A Level. *Political Shakespeare* (1985) represents itself as offering 'materialist criticism'<sup>197</sup> advocating, after Raymond Williams, an end to the special status and privileges of 'literature and art' and proclaiming the end of the dominance of idealist criticism with 'the advent of theory'.<sup>198</sup> The book offers a number of different approaches to the 'materialist criticism' of Shakespeare, including a feminist approach to *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*, which proposes a textually focused rereading



of Shakespeare, but also proposes a rereading of the institutions that sustain Shakespeare and patriarchal modes of engaging with Shakespeare. The political, in this case, is conceived of as going beyond the level of the textual, reaching out into the contextual while also addressing 'the misogyny of *King Lear*'.<sup>199</sup> Other textually-based readings in the book are set alongside general critical consideration of the role of Shakespeare in education,<sup>200</sup> the cultural significance of the Royal Shakespeare Company,<sup>201</sup> and the limited range of meanings generated in film and television productions of Shakespeare plays.<sup>202</sup> The sense of working beyond a literary model of textual engagements that comes through frequently in *Political Shakespeare*, is palpable also in Terence Hawkes's *That Shakespeherian Rag* (1986) which offers a series of readings of Shakespeare texts that moves beyond attention to the texts to the historically shifting conditions of their various readings and reproductions, examining the meaning of Shakespeare as a cultural phenomenon in the larger sense. *Hamlet*, for example, is 'read' alongside an account of the climate of political intrigue that enfolds Dover Wilson's reading of the play in the context of Europe after the Russian Revolution and towards the end of the First World War. The examination of *Hamlet* encompasses the Newbolt Report (1921) and its statements on the significance of literature and national identity. In making apparently curious links, and an unlikely but plausible connection with the cultural politics of jazz music, the cultural references of *That Shakespeherian Rag* affirm extra-textual elements and forces that render texts meaningful, reminding us at the same time of the historical specificity of any given reading. The piece draws attention to the role of literature within education after the Newbolt Report which might to be taken to mark the moment from which Shakespeare becomes a central component in mass national education. Its conclusion celebrates literary theory as a new force at work within the establishment of academic literary criticism.<sup>203</sup> The book argues that:

There can be no criticism which is innocent of theory. There can be no criticism 'itself'. As a result, no innocent, common-sense encounter with any text can be available to us. If we accept it, that argument requires that we examine and make plain the position from which we offer critical judgements.<sup>204</sup>

*That Shakespeherian Rag* argues for a 'project' that would focus on 'the construction of cultural meaning' in an agonistic sense by engaging in different version of cultural meaning through the reading of 'literary texts'. It is obvious, on the one hand, that the argument of the book is moving towards a Cultural Studies sense of textual, discursive, institutional and intertextual relations, but remains tied, on the other hand, because it speaks from within the domain of English, to the very idea of the 'literary text' that it works to unhinge. The conclusion encompasses a new mission for English:

'English' would consist, not of a supposedly innocent encounter with literary texts, but of an analysis of the ways in which the meanings of those texts have been produced and used: the study of how readings of them arise, operate, conflict and clash, of the social and political positions which they embody and on behalf of which they function.<sup>205</sup>

This version of textual study, while recognizing that it is tied to the given formation of 'English' studies seeks to operate in a thoroughly self-conscious way within its discursive situation. The end product of this position seems to be expressed in *Meaning by Shakespeare* (1992), a series of further essays offering similarly tangential readings of Shakespeare texts as exemplified in *That Shakespeherian Rag*, moving through a range of texts and textual fields to highlight the cultural and political reverberations of literature. In each case, Shakespeare's texts are not read 'in themselves', as that would contradict the whole point of the reading tactic Hawkes has developed. Essays ostensibly about *Coriolanus* or *King Lear*, for example, turn out to be explorations of political and cultural issues in terms of how these plays have been read or represented, or in terms of how they connect with significant discourse on public politics or on gender politics.

A major problem with this position is that once the category of literature has been drained of its aura, it can only usefully serve as a pretext for a discussion about other things. Literature loses its centrality and leaves a vacuum where its *raison d'être* once was. There is no particular reason, then, why literature especially should be the starting point for a discussion of anything at all, since a whole range of texts might serve a similar, 'pretextual' function. It was the impetus of this idea of going beyond literature that motivated key elements in my publications on English teaching leading

to *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*. The argument of 'Never Mind English ...' and of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was directed towards the dissolution of the category of literature and at the same time towards a tactical recognition of the structure of English. *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* proposed, however, that a subject was imaginable that would teach reading practices without being tied to literature, that would be interested in *textuality* and the textual field.<sup>206</sup> In *Meaning by Shakespeare* the concluding chapter on 'Bardbiz' refers to 'Shakespeare's centrality as an instrument of cultural meaning', a position that is clearly related to the constitution of the subject English that has institutionalized the significance of Shakespeare as central.<sup>207</sup>

*Meaning by Shakespeare* represents itself as the application of 'Cultural Materialism'.<sup>208</sup> Within this general approach Shakespeare (and by implication, literature) becomes an object of study as a cultural phenomenon, rather than as the repository of a set of meanings or a range of possible meanings. The approach is echoed in Graham Holderness's *The Shakespeare Myth* (1988) where Shakespeare is the occasion for discussions about homosexuality in contemporary social life, where there is an examination of Shakespeare in popular culture, Shakespeare as a hegemonic instrument in the field of culture, and a whole section on the production of Shakespeare in the theatre. The pattern of approach in these alternative Shakespeares is a combination of alternative textual readings and intertextual veerings into social, cultural, political commentary. Shakespeare is regarded as being a significant cultural phenomenon, not for the intrinsic merit of the 'work', but for the cultural political exegesis that the Shakespeare phenomenon, textual or otherwise, might engender. In 'Poststructuralist Shakespeare: text and ideology', Christopher Norris begins with Derrida's 'cryptic statement' 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte' to launch on a description of Derrida's case that emphasises the properly institutional focus of deconstructive practices that opposes 'text' to 'writing'.<sup>209</sup> The essay takes a critical look at traditions of Shakespearean exegesis based 'in the name of autonomous subjectivity and universal human experience'.<sup>210</sup> In the end the procedure followed illuminates, not the truth nor even the multiplicity of Shakespeare's text, but the history of the readings that reveal the 'complicated stories of their own devising'.<sup>211</sup> Once again, the approach can only trace 'the strange divagations of sense' that follow the attempt to

uncover 'the permanence of truth of Shakespeare', and the text or texts become *occasions* for that exploration.

The form of deconstructive criticism outlined above in relation to Shakespeare provides a kind of model for the logic of practice of literary theory where the object of focus or the occasion of criticism is the literary text or literature. It seems, in the context of English in schooling, that this approach can be minimally productive for students whose school experience of English consists of being inducted - or not - into the liberal humanist English that the deconstructive practices outlined above seek to undermine. The question in the end seems to reside in relation to the issue of literature and the literary. While the textual field may not be able to disentangle itself from the literary - which has been central after all to English teaching since the Newbolt Report - there is a critical difference between making literature the central concern or object of the educational practice in question. Clearly, the kind of textual and extra-textual interplay at work in Shakespeare studies based on a cultural materialist approach renders the whole concept of literature questionable, even the more generously conceived version of the concept embodied in liberal English with its inclusion of 'multi-cultural' literary texts. From the point of view of the kind of textual work elaborated in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* as alternative to liberal practices in English, literature was present as the institutionalized contents of the subject, to be worked beyond in a practice that aimed to be thoroughly intertextual.<sup>212</sup> The form of 'cultural materialist' Shakespeare criticism provided a kind of supportive, parallel model from which some of that work could be envisioned and developed.

A more radical and more Cultural Studies oriented approach to constitutional questions of subject identity came in *Rewriting English* (1985). In this book, the text 'is only a means in cultural study' and is 'no longer studied for its own sake ... but rather for the subjective or cultural forms which it realises and makes available.'<sup>213</sup> Constitutional questions at the centre of English and its relations with textuality and language could be further rethought through Cultural Studies approaches. Cultural Studies concerned itself with social power relations as they are distributed, organized, negotiated and deployed within various fields of cultural activity. Popular culture became of particular interest as being significant in terms of the relations between cultural forms and subjectivities. Ethnographic studies of subcultures, for example, provided new frameworks for understanding cultural experiences in their lived

contexts - as against the implicit idea in English of culture being embodied in specific objects. There is a different emphasis in this Cultural Studies approach from the approach of Media Studies. It is not to the study of the mass media as the object of concern that Cultural Studies has oriented itself, so much as engaging an interest in the media - among other things - as a 'site on which to engage the general question of social theory'.<sup>214</sup> In the field of Cultural Studies, the idea of culture has been extended into the practices and discourses of 'everyday life', including the powerful discourses that play a part in shaping the social formation, such as the discourses of education. This seemed to argue for the extension of the cultural field within the teaching of 'English' to incorporate a range of texts that would reach beyond the textual to engage with cultural experiences along lines suggested by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.<sup>215</sup> Something of this expansion of the idea of culture, and its effects on existing practices within English in education, is expressed in *Rewriting English* (1985). The book launches into a sustained critique on the status quo of English in education: 'the texts, the canon, the great tradition safely installed in the literature syllabus and regularly reconsecrated in the annual round of published criticism' and advocates moving 'beyond curricular literature and the discourses of English studies to consider practices of reading and writing that are largely excluded by the institutions of literary education and criticism.'<sup>216</sup> Counter examples are given of 'new forms of reading and writing associated with the women's liberation movement' to emphasize, in effect, the redundancy of literary studies.<sup>217</sup> The book's position is organized around a correlation of culture, redefined and expanded, and politics: 'A broader definition of culture, understood as a whole "way of life" or "way of struggle", with a consequent shift and expansion of the meaning of politics, has been a notable feature of 'New Left' thinking since the sixties.'<sup>218</sup> At one level, at least, this position was influential on the idea of redefining English that informed the route towards *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*.

The elements of theory that contributed to my published works on English teaching included sociology, poststructuralism, sociolinguistics and critical language awareness theory, postmodernism, Media Studies and Cultural Studies. In different ways, they contributed to a critique of the dominant tendencies of English teaching and enabled a rethinking of the subject. During the period of my published works, 'theory' had

become an issue in English studies, though had only appeared on the fringes of English teaching in schools in England and Wales. It seemed to me that the elements of theory outlined above called for a fundamental rethinking of English teaching. It seemed that theory offered 'technologies' for rethinking the dominant ideas, practices and the general terrain of English teaching. I would argue that theory in the context of secondary English teaching had to confront fundamental questions about the relations between subject authority and cultural and linguistic difference that were less urgent and less palpable in Higher Education. Theory in the context of English teaching had to be more fundamental, more radical and more challenging. Theory, however, wasn't readily embraced by English teaching during the period of my publications being generally regarded as alien to the concerns of English teaching professionals. In order to understand the context of English in education, to comprehend its deep-seated resistance to theory, it seemed necessary to investigate the formation of the current constitution of the subject. One way of interrogating its present state was to re-examine the history of English teaching.

## HISTORIES OF ENGLISH TEACHING

...English has represented an amalgam of traditional and liberal, progressive values - with the general function of maintaining itself as the focus for a humane and enlightening experience of language and literature, being at once free and open and, at the same time, chaotic and ordering ...

This general idea of the special place and function of English is highly contestable.

Nick Peim, *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, p. 205.

In this chapter, I will outline some of the key strands that seemed to have given rise to the constitution of English teaching as I found it during the period in question (1983 - 1995) and will examine their contribution to dominant ideas in English teaching. I will go on to consider three different ways of interpreting the history of English teaching: the natural progress version, the ideological version and the governmental version.. From there I will trace the recent history of the subject relating to the National Curriculum. First of all, I will outline a claim that the history of the subject offers another form of theory from which its identity may be probed, deconstructed and reinvented. The account offered here of the history of English teaching and various key interpretations of it is conceived in a belief in 'the need to grasp the present as history', as Fredric Jameson has put it,<sup>1</sup> although the history offered here is not singular. By way of a conclusion to this chapter I will consider the present condition of English in the light of the National Curriculum.

### History as Critical Theory

*Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was predicated on my developing knowledge of the history of English in state education and made a self-conscious intervention into that history. The realization that the history of English teaching was neither singular nor in itself coherent was for me another significant element in the process of calling the dominant version of the subject into question. Influential histories of English teaching - such as David Shayer's *The Teaching Of English In Schools 1900 - 1972* (1972) and John Dixon's *A Schooling in English* (1991) - had represented the subject as inevitably and naturally progressive, and in the light of alternatives - such as Brian Doyle's *English and Englishness* (1989) and Terry Eagleton's 'The Rise of English' (1983) - seemed unconscious of the subject's political dimension.

A key point in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was that English took a wilfully blinkered view of its own theoretical grounding. The constitution of English could be reinterpreted via a sense of the contingent forces and components that had given rise to its specific structure, dominant ideas, characteristic debates and differences. An important gap in its self-descriptions was a sense of its own formation as being entangled with the history and development of state education. Histories of English existed, but as I hope to demonstrate with cases of David Shayer's *The Teaching Of English In Schools 1900 - 1972* and John Dixon's *A Schooling in English* especially, they tended to represent English in celebratory mode in their efforts to represent it as a largely liberating force separate from the machinery of state education.<sup>2</sup> The dominant form of English that I have designated as 'liberal' in my work tended to represent itself as the product of a necessary, enlightened and progressive evolution. An alternative view of subject history, on the other hand, in the form of a sustained review and critique of the subject's 'anthropological' foundations, represented the post-Bullock state of English teaching as the *naturalized* order of things. Rethinking the history of English and English teaching represented another possibility for critical intervention in subject identity. Emphasis on the *question* or *issue* of history challenged the given order of English. The realization that there was not one, universal and all-embracing singular history emphasized tensions in subject identity and suggested a remodelling of the subject as a contested site.

The realization of conflicting subject histories made any position that developed from a single version of the emergence and development of English problematic. During the period of my publications on English teaching a number of historical investigations emerged to challenged hitherto ruling versions of subject identity. These offered the opportunity for English in state schooling to rethink its own historical development and its dominant self-descriptions.<sup>3</sup> In the genesis of my own published works, certain histories of English were crucial in informing a critical sense of established subject identity. The 'discovery' of subject history was a factor in demystifying the dominant mode of the subject, in demythologizing key concepts in subject identity - literature and creativity, for example - and in providing a framework for understanding how these ideas had become essential to the subject. Creativity, it became clear, had not always enjoyed a key position in ideas about English, nor had literature always assumed an automatic centrality. A re-examination of the history of



the subject had the effect of draining English of its 'aura', reminding us of its contingency and offering the possibility of arguing for a different set of practices. In this sense, subject history is complementary to textual, linguistic and social forms of theory.

The coming of theory into discourses of English initiated a new and intense interest in the origins of the subject.<sup>4</sup> This emphasis on a historical dimension to subject identity is evident in the work of Mulhern, Eagleton, Widdowson as well as the explicitly historical accounts of English - Doyle, Batsleer and others.<sup>5</sup> All of these are clearly seeking to question hegemonic versions of subject identity and to bring to consciousness its political dimension. Along with the interest in the origins and development of English, a historical sense of the development of notions of 'Englishness' also comes into the area of cultural, literary studies.<sup>6</sup> There appeared to be a correlation between the development of English as a university subject, English in schooling and discourses about national identity, the state of the nation, cultural hygiene and the functions of education.<sup>7</sup> These histories addressing the cultural politics of the emergence of English conflict with accounts that represent the history of English as a more or less necessary narrative of progress, as in the case of John Dixon's *Growth through English* (1967) and David Shayer's *The Teaching of English in Schools* (1972). A third position is represented by Ian Hunter in *Culture and Government* (1988) and elsewhere that sees both the ideological and the progressive accounts as allied to a similarly misguided missionary sense that education is a vehicle for culture through which 'full development' can be achieved, denying the contingent historical conditions that shape the mundane bureaucratic / managerial functions of schooling and also denying the historical function of liberal pedagogies in the moral management of populations.

### A Common Outline

The following outline offers a provisional and necessarily partial account of some key threads in the history of English teaching. Accepting that it cannot address the specific practices of the subject in schooling during the period in question, that it cannot approach the history of English teaching from an ethnographic perspective, it can only begin to suggest that genealogies of English teaching might differ in significant ways, according to the position from which they are speaking. My purpose here is to trace

major strands contributing to the state of English at the time of the Bullock 'settlement',<sup>8</sup> and to explore the different ways that the history of the subject has been interpreted by interested and representative commentators.

### **Newbolt and Leavis: The Cultural Mission of English**

The Newbolt Report, *The Teaching of English in England*, is generally addressed as the first document of major, defining significance in the history of English teaching in schools.<sup>9</sup> The Newbolt Report defines the significance of English as relating to vital matters of language and culture - associated with the spiritual state of the masses and with the political health of the nation. Before the outbreak of World War I, The English Association had expressed symptomatic concerns about the state of the language and the cultural health of the working-classes,<sup>10</sup> but the overriding framework of ideas for Newbolt can be traced back to Matthew Arnold's concerns for the cohesion of the nation through culture.<sup>11</sup> Arnold is often represented as the authoritative voice behind the Newbolt Report, in his concern for literature as culture and for the spiritual health of the nation, involving the displacement of religion by literary values.<sup>12</sup> George Sampson, author of *English for the English* (1952) and cited as an influential member of the Newbolt committee, amplifying Arnold, defines the subject as a key force for national, class and social cohesion. Drawing on Arnold's vision of literature in *Culture and Anarchy* (1932) as a means for cultivating fineness of thought and feeling in the rising middle-classes, Sampson represents English literature as itself a spiritual force to cohere the nation socially *at all levels*: a common national heritage.

The Newbolt Report officially defines the culturally and politically significant form of English teaching. In Newbolt, the teaching of English becomes seen as force in a drive towards the realization of national identity and social cohesion through culture in the form of literature and language. The vision of English crystallized in Newbolt has been celebrated by some commentators and critiqued by others,<sup>13</sup> but according to both positions, Newbolt established for English the moral / cultural authority to become the central component in the school curriculum. Debates about the cultural function of education could subsequently be conducted around English.<sup>14</sup> After Newbolt, English continues to be frequently represented in a host of different contexts as being central because of its cultural / linguistic 'aura'. English teaching

has been: 'the focus for a continuing debate about language and its uses, about elite and popular culture and about the expectations society has of young people - a debate in miniature about what education can and should do.'<sup>15</sup> It is frequently claimed as an essential property of the subject that it lends itself to cultural contest by its very nature. English teaching 'has been particularly sensitive to wider social and political pressures because of the peculiar position the subject holds at the boundaries of school and out of school life.'<sup>16</sup> The Newbolt Report had represented state education of the masses as properly concerned with the spiritual health of the nation in the face of the threat of social unrest, revolution and anarchy.<sup>17</sup> It claims for English an essential, governmental cultural mission and as state education it moves through the huge shifts of the 1944 Education Act, Circular 10/65 and the 1988 Education Reform Act English remains at the centre this cultural political function.<sup>18</sup> From 1921 onwards English continued to be represented as the central subject on the curriculum.<sup>19</sup>

After Newbolt the crucial influence on English teaching is F.R. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* movement.<sup>20</sup> Leavis is imputed with the mapping of literature and developing ideas about the relations between literature and culture. He established the role of literature as a force at work against the dehumanizing tendencies of industrial capitalism or - as Leavis was later to describe its prevailing value system - 'technologico-benthamism'.<sup>21</sup> His work speaks for 'spiritual'/'human' values in the face of industrial capitalism and its disastrous break with forms of sensibility that belong to what is often referred to as the 'organic community'. Leavis's stance carried with it an almost messianic self-consciousness about the value of literary criticism: a form of training in sensibility held to be of supreme importance in the struggle against the crude materialism of the age manifestly expressed in a degraded popular culture.<sup>22</sup> Leavis increasingly represents English as the necessary 'discipline of thought' to combat contemporary cultural tendencies, asserting its superiority, for instance, over philosophy.<sup>23</sup>

Though liberal English had diverged from a strictly Leavisian conception of literature, the traces of Leavis were powerfully evident in the structure of English Literature at A Level and still visible in much thinking about literature in English generally.<sup>24</sup> After Leavis it was easier to claim with some moral seriousness that English stood for something and was equally something to stand for. In spite of Leavis's exclusivity and elitism - his insistence on the supreme importance of literary

criticism being accompanied by the assertion that it must inevitably remain very much a minority affair - there were those who used his commitment to the significance of literature in the context of the state secondary school across the so-called ability range. Notable among these was David Holbrook whose *English for the Rejected* (1964) was an often powerful account of his experiences as an English teacher working with 'less able' children in a Cambridgeshire secondary school with 'real' literature. (*English for the Rejected* provided in my own case the beginnings of a model from which to positively read and interpret the writings of children designated as less able, and for uses of 'real' literature with such rejected children.) Via envoy figures such as Denys Thompson and Raymond O'Malley - both contributors to *Scrutiny* and strongly influenced by Leavis, and both significant contributors to *The Use of English* - the *Scrutiny* position was carried (albeit modified) into the realms of English teaching.<sup>25</sup>

The Leavis inspired tradition of English teaching reaches back to the Arnoldian mission of cultural hygiene, being critical of modern industrial society, often benevolently rueful of the cultural / spiritual condition of working-class lives and aiming to fill the cultural void created by urbanization and industrialization. This line of thought migrates into some of the concerns with education, language and politics in the 1960s, especially in the wake of the Newsom Report.<sup>26</sup> The idea of cultural deprivation, and its link with the condition of the nation, has fairly deep and varied genealogy: it is possible to trace a line through the pioneer schooling of David Stow, the bureaucratic concerns of James Kay-Shuttleworth, the cultural mission of Arnold and Leavis and the idea of working-class linguistic deprivation that came with Bernstein and deficit model sociology.<sup>27</sup> This idea of education as compensatory cultural training and enrichment moves also through elements of progressive pedagogy that gain an increasing, if unlikely, purchase in state education after World War II especially.<sup>28</sup>

The sense of a significant linkage of education, English class and culture - evident in Newbolt and in Leavisism - is subject to crucial challenges in the development of critical sociology that offers the potential to question the loaded linguistic and literary assumptions of the subject.<sup>29</sup> It became my contention that liberal English teaching of the post-Bullock era had inherited strong, if not always explicitly revealed vestiges of Leavisism. In practice and in theory, English teaching had not fully rethought its relations with literature. The polarity that divided popular

culture off from literature remained, in spite of its more generous, and unLeavis-like expansion of the category of literature.<sup>30</sup> *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* sought to reverse the deficit model of English teaching more radically than previous models. By drawing on theory and research from Media and Cultural Studies a significant element of the project was to restore status and validity to popular culture, to recognize the vitality of the cultural lives of comprehensive school populations while also providing 'knowledge' in the form of textual, 'reading' techniques for engaging with popular culture. Similarly, by drawing on sociolinguistic theory I aimed to provide more positive modes of working productively with language in English classrooms, in specific practices aimed to recognize language diversity positively. This reaction to my own Leavisite background and to the Leavisite inheritance of English teaching was a significant factor in rethinking the cultural / linguistic bases of English teaching.

### **Progressive Pedagogies: English, Creativity and Enlightenment**

Issues of culture and language issues and could not be separated in English. The language practices that were promoted in the late 1960s and early 1970s by James Britton and others, had been theorized by a reading of Vygotsky, and were to become - in my view, at least - the epitome of liberal English's eschewal of the political. These language practices were genealogically related to strands in progressive education that emphasized the active participation of learners.<sup>31</sup> Progressive language practices were related to ideas about the school as an instrument for cultural and linguistic enrichment, related in turn to often concealed notions of cultural and linguistic deprivation. The Newbolt Report included references to 'starved existences' and bemoaned the 'clatter of the factory', anticipating Leavis's apocalyptic view of the cultural plight of industrial civilization.<sup>32</sup> For Leavis education and English particularly were forces to set against the disastrous prevailing cultural environment. George Sampson in *English for The English* (1952) had argued for the nation's children to be educated *against* their environment. This sense of cultural deprivation, in relation to the industrial revolution and urbanization linked to a cultural mission for English teaching and English teachings follows the process that Raymond Williams defines in *Culture and Society, 1780 - 1950*: when 'Culture came to be defined as a separate entity and a critical idea.'<sup>33</sup> A similar missionary sense of the value of

*creativity* is evident in the work of Caldwell Cook, in some ways a founding figure of creative English teaching, and at least a pioneer of progressive pedagogy in English. *The Play Way* (1917) offers a prototype synthesis of the value of literature and the releasing of the creative energies of children through creative play as a form of education of the self.<sup>34</sup> Progressive pedagogies in English remained influential and were developed to reflect quite differing conceptions of the subject's cultural mission from the Arnold, Newbolt, Sampson, Leavis line.<sup>35</sup> The idea of the essential creativity of the child, and its influence on exploratory forms of active learning, was very much evident as a powerful strand in the form of English teaching I had been inducted into as a training and then as a probationary teacher. In this context, the promotion of creative language practices was continuous with the idea of cultural enrichment through literature.

Before The Newbolt Report, Caldwell Cook had celebrated the spontaneity of the child's responses - a key notion in creative and cultural enrichment tendencies in English teaching. The 1920s in England and Wales saw the growth of a number of experimental schools that bore testimony to discourses of child-centred creativity in education.<sup>36</sup> Later, the Spens Report of 1939, for example, in true 'reform pedagogy' style, advocates "activity and experience" rather than knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored.<sup>37</sup> Education, felt to be more than the cultivation of skills and knowledge, became associated with the cultural missionary aim of full personal development - 'personal growth' as a key English teaching document of the 1960s would have it.<sup>38</sup> This strand of development is related genealogically to the aims of education expressed in the ideas and practices of James Kay-Shuttleworth and David Stow to 'enculturate' the culturally unorganized urban masses of post industrial revolution Britain.<sup>39</sup> The strands that led to the idea of creative, personal growth English (with its strong sense of the value of literature in self and in 'world' exploration), can be traced back with forms of teaching that centred on the child's *whole* development and creative capacities, that emphasized process over content, experience over knowledge.<sup>40</sup> Progressive pedagogies - many of which had their roots in post-romantic continental education theories and practices of the nineteenth century - increasingly migrated into state education finding a congenial home in English teaching.<sup>41</sup> English had adopted progressive pedagogic techniques especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s both as a means of realizing fuller level of participation in

the comprehensive school, and under the influence of language theories of Vygotsky championed especially by James Britton. Creativity had been a key notion for Leavis too, who had a Lawrentian sense of the deadening effects of industrialization on the urban proletariat.<sup>42</sup> English teachers influenced by Leavis teaching the more able, say, in the grammar schools in the 1950s after the 1944 settlement of education in the tripartite system would be emphasizing Literature, while those teaching the so-called less able in the secondary modern schools might promote creativity through expressive language practices. Either literature or creativity - or both - could act as compensation or counter forces against the cultural inadequacies of industrial society.<sup>43</sup>

The element of English as a school subject that perhaps most epitomized progressive pedagogy was drama - conceived as a form of exploratory play, and increasingly associated with creative elements in English teaching becoming a recognized and in some critical cases central element of the subject as in the case of Tony Adams's *Every English Teacher* (1974). Drama - closely associated with the newly developed concept of oracy - remains a component of liberal English.<sup>44</sup> Peter Slade's *Child Drama* (1958) shows the influence of Jung and Wordsworth in its sense of the value of the child's consciousness of things and - the often unconscious - self-exploration that later versions of creative writing enabled. 'Othello: A New Approach to A-level English' deployed drama techniques familiar to English teachers at this stage - role play, hot-seating, collective tableaux, improvisations - but had realigned them as an inclusive means of enabling poststructuralist reading techniques and positions to come into play. The significance of the approach is that it promotes an awareness of different reading positions and may provide a kind of training in moving among them. Liberal English, on the other hand, represented drama as *self-expression*. Similarly in liberal English, children's own writings - reconceptualized through growth pedagogy as self-expression and as exploration - displaced the compositional or grammar based models of language working English. Creative writing had been given a special place in the curriculum by advocates of creativity, such as the progressive educator Raymond O'Malley.<sup>45</sup>

In the comprehensive school English became the location *par excellence* of progressivist pedagogies and became the home for a combination of discourses in relation to culture, the environment, politics and creativity.<sup>46</sup> Frank Whitehead's *The*

*Disappearing Dais* (1966) had endorsed creative writing while also advocating literature, but put a good deal of emphasis on a shift in pedagogic relations towards more free interchange between teacher and pupils. Tony Adams (1970) advocated team-teaching as a 'learning team in which pupils and teachers are engaged *co-operatively* in a series of teaching and learning situations.'<sup>47</sup> The role of the English teacher in *negotiating* the development of literary responses finds classic expression in The Bullock Report:

The teacher has a deeper knowledge of literature in general than his pupils can possess. He brings to the situation a wider experience of life and a maturer view of it. To contain these in the process of sharing is a measure of his skill at its highest level ... The teacher's skill lies in developing the subtlety and complexity of this [the child's] response without catechism or a one-way traffic in apodictic judgements.<sup>48</sup>

Teaching English here encompasses so much more than a knowledge of literature: there is also the 'process of sharing' with its all its implications of 'reform pedagogy', exploratory learning and the inference of the significance in the process of 'wider experience of life' and maturity. The terminology here is reminiscent of Ian Hunter's sense of a technology of the person as much as the teaching of a subject, a 'total schooling' of the 'whole person'.<sup>49</sup>

During the Bullock epoch, it seems that a significant amalgam emerges around a cluster of ideas in English teaching that becomes a kind of orthodoxy: of creative writing (symbolic of creative engagement through education), a shift in pedagogic relations, of literature as the surface for self and world explorations, of drama as self-realization and exploration of otherness, of children's small group talk as a means for learning and language development.<sup>50</sup> (Later, with the imposition of the National Curriculum, The Bullock Report was to be referred to with wistful acknowledgement of its sanity and balance - almost as representing a golden age of English teaching.<sup>51</sup>) According to a perspective expressed by Ian Hunter, all the elements of this 'package' that takes shape during and after the 1960s have a deep continuity with the conception of popular education being developed in the first half of the nineteenth century by Sir Kay-Shuttleworth via David Stow's model Glasgow school.<sup>52</sup> Pastoral discipline was the form of human technology that developed through the shifts in ideology and practice of English teaching. A more sophisticated development, perhaps, than in



David Stow's 'normal school', but nonetheless a series of techniques whose deployment was less concerned with the transmission of knowledge than with the formation of particular type of subject / citizen. The personalist tendencies of much progressive English teaching have clearly emphasized the socio-cultural functions of education. Patrick Creber's *Lost for Words* (1972), influenced by James Britton's Vygotskian approach to learning through language use, represented a characteristic position that renounced normative correctness in favour of positive celebration of differences. For Creber, though, the issue was to remain at the level of the personal psychology of the learner, rather than to take on the thorny issue of the social dimension of language in education. Creativity remained a central tenet.

### **10/65: the Comprehensive School and English Teaching - Bernstein, Sociolinguistics and After**

During the 1960s the comprehensive school was conceived by more avant-garde sections of the education establishment as a new venture in the social function of education. Circular 10/65 had been issued in the wake of a popular concern for equality of opportunity in state education, and held out the promise of a new dawn in conceptions of the school and its social functions.<sup>53</sup> New approaches to teaching and learning had become necessary to effectively engage with a new constituency. New curricula began to evolve. Schools were restructured with a new agenda relating to their newly defined constituency and new teaching methods came to the fore. The social relations between teachers and pupils in schools had to become less authoritarian. There was a wave of optimism in the coming of the comprehensive school, a fairly extensive school building programme and a number of interesting experiments in liberal comprehensive education, most notably Countesthorpe college in Leicestershire, the first local education authority to implement a form of comprehensive schooling on any significant scale.<sup>54</sup> There was also a current of pedagogical political awareness that was tending to deconstruct old models of authority in schooling: Lawrence Stenhouse's influential Humanities Project advocated that education must 'renounce the position of teacher as 'expert''; the teacher should take the role of disinterested 'chairman' [sic] - 'Teaching must be based on discussion and inquiry'.<sup>55</sup> The enthusiastic devolvement of authority in content and values reflects some of the changes in the culture of teaching during the

period after the Newsom Report (1963) and after Circular 10/65 related to comprehensive schooling, sociolinguistics, progressive pedagogy theory, challenges to the functionalist views of schooling, effecting changing views of the English teacher.

While the cultural 'missionary' work of language and literature practices in English teaching were being adjusted in the process of comprehensivization, questions of the social surfaced only partially in the development of subject identity. Debates about language, culture and class raged hotly in education in the wake of Bernstein's work. English teaching made its own accommodation, effectively resolving the issue by nullifying the contradiction that promised inclusivity and promoted acceptance of language diversity and left forms of assessment tied to a thoroughly normative model of language development and performance. That, at least, was the position as I saw it when I came to address the issue of language and English in 'Reading the World of LINC' and in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*.<sup>56</sup>

English teaching developed along a number of lines to meet the spirit of the new comprehensive order. These strands include psychologically-influenced approaches to language,<sup>57</sup> the teaching of drama as a pedagogic method, the idea of language as self-expression and self-realization, the sense of the value of literature as both a vehicle of cultural training and for personal growth. They formed the basis for a renewed sense of the cultural mission of education, a major shift involving a new emphasis on the role of talk in the classroom. Talk was to be the vehicle for more co-operative and inclusive forms of learning. Much of the drive for this derived from a sense of social justice relating to the relativism of modern sociolinguistics. The Newbolt Report had been clear on matters of dialect and standard English: 'It is emphatically the business of the Elementary school to teach all its pupils who either speak a definite dialect or whose speech is disfigured by vulgarisms, to speak standard English, and to speak it clearly and with expression.'<sup>58</sup> In the dawn of comprehensive education, other voices pressed for recognition of class factors in state education. The Newsom Report of 1963 had put the question of working-class under-achievement on the official agenda, while the Labour Party were promoting the idea of comprehensive schooling, both in the name of social justice.<sup>59</sup> Basil Bernstein's government funded major study (1971) on language, schooling and class came as a consequence of Newsom.<sup>60</sup> Bernstein's findings were controversial - given the deficit implications of the terminology of the 'restricted' code. Dennis Lawton's *Social Class, Language and*

*Education* (1968) shows the influence of Bernstein: 'restriction in the control over a language involves a restricted view of the universe, a restricted mode of thinking, a restricted ability to benefit from educational processes.'<sup>61</sup> According to Lawton, Bernstein's view of context, role, culture and language implies 'code learning or extending pupils' range of control over language', and implies recognition that this learning 'must be achieved through changes in the social structure of the school.'<sup>62</sup>

*Critical Theory and the English Teacher* advocated a rediscovery of these sociolinguistic issues in English teaching and attempted to integrate sociolinguistic awareness into its scheme of work.<sup>63</sup> An awareness of the brief history of sociolinguistics in education was important to that element of its project. But Bernstein's work constituted a significant landmark, giving rise to a debate and a movement within education, concerned specifically with language issues that retained a focus on the social dimensions of language. The key terms in Bernstein's work on language and schooling - 'elaborated' and 'restricted' - may have carried unfortunate connotations of deprivation against fullness of expression. But from Bernstein's study some significant developments arose, including some important counter-studies. M.A.K. Halliday, Director of the Nuffield programme in Linguistics and English teaching from 1964 - 1970, became an influential, powerful advocate of professional attention to language and schooling - and offered a different emphasis to Bernstein's work on social language and education.<sup>64</sup> From a sociolinguistic perspective, Halliday expresses impatience at the 'English Literature specialist' in schooling - an 'amateur' in language matters.<sup>65</sup> Against the idea of corrective language teaching, implied in Newbolt's advocacy of standard English, and against the idea of code learning implied in Bernstein's work, Halliday recommends 'descriptive' and 'productive' language teaching:<sup>66</sup> where descriptive language teaching shows how language works (exemplified more recently in the LINC materials dedicated to promoting knowledge *about* language); and where 'productive' language teaching enables the extension of pupils' existing language resources, without implying a hierarchy of codes. A significant contribution to the language education debate came from William Labov in the USA, challenging some of the tendencies in Bernstein's paradigm in 'The Logic of Non-Standard English' (1973) with the specific intention of demonstrating that from the point of view of a scientific linguistic perspective the language of non-standard forms was at least as expressive, as powerful and cogent as the language of standard

forms. Labov thereby demonstrated that the structurally sustained superiority of standard English in institutions of education was utterly arbitrary.<sup>67</sup>

Halliday's insistence on a relativist sociolinguistics, led to a child-centred account of 'oracy' - the term used to define the significance of classroom talk. Influential publications during the period following Bernstein's work tended more to a more accommodating, pluralistic Hallidayan model. These included James Britton's *Language and Learning* (1970), Harold Rosen's *Language, the Learner and the School* (1970), Andrew Wilkinson's *The Foundations of Language* (1971) and Douglas Barnes's *From Communication to Curriculum* (1976) - much of which was promoting new emphases in English teaching on oracy and active, participatory language use.

### The Bullock Settlement

Some advocates of sociolinguistics were (and remain) doubtful about the value of creativity in language work in English. P. Doughty, for example, in *Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching* (1968): 'from the point of view of the pupils' needs as a whole ... the limitations of this assumption should be apparent.'<sup>68</sup> In The Bullock Report there is some attempt to relate the sociolinguistic question with an emphasis on a creative expressive approach to language matters in English. Bullock's resolution of contradictory strands in English teaching is cool and considered but indicates conflicting tendencies that in a less functionalist treatment would provide good materials for the explosion of the subject's coherence. Bullock casually admits the incoherence of the subject: 'It is a characteristic of English that it does not hold together as a body of knowledge',<sup>69</sup> but represents this openness - or incoherence - as a positive merit and its great claim to value. The Bullock Report continues, by way of advocating the intrinsic merit of the subject: 'Literary studies lead constantly outside themselves, as Leavis put it; so, for that matter, does every other aspect of English.'<sup>70</sup> The reference to 'literary studies' as defining the characteristics of the subject is telling, especially when set against the potential conflicts at work in English arising from different models of language.

The presence on the committee of James Britton was a crucial factor in shaping elements of The Bullock Report - especially those concerned with language. Britton was then Professor of Education at London University, author of *Language*

*and Learning*, a Vygotskian who effectively developed much of the linguistic basis for liberal language practices in English.<sup>71</sup> 'English is rooted in the processing of experience through language' quotes Britton enthusiastically from an earlier section of the document in his 'Note of Extension'.<sup>72</sup> The statement encapsulates a model of language and learning that was and continued to be influential and to shape the consciousness of the liberal English teacher. 'The processing of experience' defines a particular view of language and its relations with the world, a view that structuralist and poststructuralist theories were to challenge and that was at odds with much sociolinguistic thought. But this idea was crucial to the advocacy of creative, personal writing and oral work in English. The idea of language as a 'processing of experience' was closely associated with the assertion that English was about much more than itself, that language was a means for mastering experience and that the English classroom was the location for significant types of growth and development of the whole person.<sup>73</sup> At the same time Bullock was influenced by its 'real world' representatives. Its attitude towards language teaching may have been influenced by Britton's Vygotskian position, but it also had this to say about standard English:

The argument has been advanced, notably by Labov in the U.S.A. but also by some people in this country, that to imply a superiority on the part of elaborated language is to think in terms of middle class values. Commenting on some of the American studies to which we have referred, Labov suggests that 'lower class' language need be no less effective, that it has its own equal validity, and that one should not look upon the child in terms of a deficiency to be remedied. This is a sincerely held view to which we may do less than justice in presenting it so baldly. It is a necessary corrective to the opinions of those teachers and educationists who believe the disadvantaged child brings nothing of his own to school. But it must not blind one to the reality of the situation as it exists. There is an indisputable gap between the language experiences that some families provide and the linguistic demands of school education.<sup>74</sup>

There is a kind of unconscious 'double voicing' here whereby the validity of Labov's 'sincerely held view' is recognized in the same instant that it is swept aside by an appeal to the 'reality' of the situation that goes on to define class-based language differences as differences in range and expressive power, precisely missing the point of 'The Logic of Non-Standard English' that it refers to. The position here expressed

echoes the credence given earlier in the Bullock Report to the Plowden Committee's references to the School Handicap Score:

in research carried out for the Plowden Committee, the most powerful variable [in reading and in general attainment in school] was found to be the School Handicap Score (S.H.S.), a weighted sum of Father's Occupation, Father's Education, Mother's Education, Number of Books in the Home, and (minus) the number of siblings.<sup>75</sup>

The Bullock settlement represented a compromise that was felt to be worthy of the complexity of the subject, and that received the blessing of some of its more avant-garde practitioners. It had the advantage of representing a broad church while also allowing for the congregation to emphasize elements that might suit their own predilections. No survey exists of the scope of the differences at work in English in specific practices in particular institutions at this, or at any other, period. It is possible, though, to see a regularity in examinations in English, and to find a large degree of agreement - inscribed and institutionalized - about the form and delivery of the subject in practices since Bullock. Later, Bullock was to be referred to as epitomizing the essential spirit of the subject when the government introduced a National Curriculum in English that was represented among some advocates of the subject as against its true spirit.<sup>76</sup>

### **Interpretations of the History of English Teaching**

When I started English teaching in 1976, the traces of these various lines of development were very much evident in the specific ideology and practices of the department I worked in, and were also clearly present in differences that were aired in relation to English teaching - in publications, in public debates, in different departmental practices and beliefs and in GCE and CSE coursework practices in different institutions. The conception of the subject organized around language and literature that Newbolt epitomized still determined the order of things, and there remained for many a powerful sense of cultural mission about both language and literature. For some, in the 1970s, the nature of the mission was shifting - to challenge the forms of language and literature that had been dominant, while for others developments were following a naturally liberalizing course. Progressive educational

ideas and pedagogies had influenced the liberal model of professional identity and had found a congenial environment in certain aspects and examples of the comprehensive school, where often there was an accompanying inclusive sense of community.

Language questions had arisen powerfully out of the sociological researches of Bernstein. A tradition of sociological research had been concerned with the question of class inequalities in post-war schooling where the tripartite system had clearly and blatantly failed to offer large sections of the population access to social mobility through education.<sup>77</sup> In the 1960s expansion of the universities in the wake of The Robbins Report and the coming of the comprehensive school seemed destined to provide a new egalitarian form of society where education might provide the foundations for at least a meritocratic if not an egalitarian social formation.<sup>78</sup> Theories of schools and schooling as culturally loaded environments made the project of comprehensive schooling more problematic, though. Class inequalities, it appeared, were sustained by the cultural / linguistic habitat of the school and were at work in all its operations, including the details of the curriculum. Various aspects of sociology, social theory and cultural theory made this problematization clearer, on the one hand, and made the history of English teaching more problematic, on the other.

For the English teacher a sense of the history of the subject - albeit unconscious or vaguely formulated - might be a factor in the determination of subject identity, professional development and political self consciousness. The general tendency of The Bullock Report is to represent the history of English teaching as a story of progressive development. A similar sense is conveyed in Margaret Mathieson's key study, *The Preachers of Culture* (1976), where an awareness of tensions and differences in the subject's development is displaced by a sense of English teaching as a unified and progressive force.<sup>79</sup> As the history of the subject got rewritten in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the very idea of a unified history or historical development became problematized.<sup>80</sup> By the time of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (1993), three main versions of the history of English teaching seemed to be identifiable. In the first place, the dominant liberal progressive tradition epitomized in The Bullock Report; secondly, the cultural materialist critique that tended to see English as an ideological project that had distorted the subject's originary political mission; and thirdly, Ian Hunter's analysis of the relations between English and governmentality that challenged both of these positions on the grounds of

their attachment to the ideal of complete development. From a Foucauldian and Weberian position Hunter sought to trace a deep genealogical relation between English teaching and nineteenth-century pastoral discipline, conceived of by the pioneers of state education, and that led Hunter to privilege pedagogy over the details of subject content or ideology.

### **David Shayer and John Dixon: The History of English as a Liberal, Progressive Force**

In *The Teaching Of English In Schools 1900 - 1972* (1972), David Shayer produces a detailed historical account of changes in classroom practice - drawing on evidence such as teaching resources, method books, and exam questions as well as the meta-discourses of published materials. Shayer's book is imbued with a sense of rational progress in teaching of English,<sup>81</sup> a view that is echoed in other histories of English - explicitly in John Dixon's *A Schooling in English* (1991) and implicitly in Michael Raleigh's and Michael Simons's 'Where We've Been: A Brief History of English Teaching 1920 - 1970' (1980) with its sense of a collective *mission*. These examples offer a form of history of English teaching at odds with the 'break' in subject identity represented in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*. They both come from significant sources: Dixon being a representative figure in progressive English teaching; Raleigh and Simons writing from 'The English Centre' - an important source and disseminator of avant-garde ideas in the field of English teaching.<sup>82</sup>

Shayer represents the development of English teaching in terms of more or less steady progress towards increasingly enlightened methods, practices, models and expresses a general faith that this is founded in the more or less inevitable forward movement of educational progressivism. Drawing on progressive advances in the theory of child development, Shayer believes that English achieved an identity as a *unitary subject* with a creative, child-centred theory and methodology at its core. Anything else - concerns with grammar, standard English, strict literary heritage practices for instance - are represented as residual lesions from older, exhausted and dying practices and ideas. Since around 1900, English has been represented as a uniquely humanizing subject in which literature fulfils the capacity and the need to enrich lives and compensate for deficiencies of contemporary culture.



According to Shayer, progress towards ever more enlightened practices and ideas in English can be, and indeed has been, hindered by conservative forces: intransigently anti-growth teaching practices, the exam system, the vestigial 'classical fallacy' (English drawing on classics as a higher status subject), and the 'imitative fallacy' wherein children's writing must imitate, copy, reproduce literary or other adult models. For Shayer, these are relics of nineteenth-century beliefs and practices and he establishes a characteristic opposition between the imposed repressive artificiality of imitative writing and 'the living child'.<sup>83</sup> Within the logic of this opposition, the development through the twentieth century of more child-centred approaches to English is represented as humane, progressive and inevitable. Shayer also finds the 'moral fallacy' and the 'grammar fallacy' persistent in anti-growth English teaching. In both cases the emphasis is, for Shayer, self-evidently misguided, both being in different ways based on externally imparted knowledge and authoritarian control as opposed to self-expression, self-discovery and guided freedom. His view develops a characteristic liberal general view of the possibilities, social functions and value of education.

Shayer's history defines 1910 - 1920 as a crucial phase for advances in the teaching of English, occurring at a critical juncture when English was becoming increasingly significant in the school curriculum and just before it is about to find official expression in the Newbolt Report. He detects tendencies in documents from the period of a significant move away from formal essay writing towards personal, self-expression. In the years 1914 - 1916 children writing poetry became a more accepted part of school English. Examples of children's writing began to appear in books about English teaching during this pre-Newbolt period. Shayer charts evidence of the pupil being more central and more active - in accordance with contemporary psychological influences and progressive theories of education - emphasizing the growing significance of individual learning, individual expression. With the creative credentials of the subject established, Shayer hails Newbolt and George Sampson as heralding clear progress from a narrowly disciplined view of the subject. At the same time he also welcomes Newbolt's endorsement of Arnold's concerns with education for a stable / cohesive society, accepting it as is right and proper that English should provide a humane education to civilize the masses. Once again there is the expression of the idea that language and literature teaching should be deployed in the legitimate

name of social cohesion and national unity. It is a matter for a kind of professional pride for Shayer that English should provide the educational emollient for class differences. It is clear that his position on English teaching is thoroughly functionalist.

While Shayer connects English teaching and social cohesion, *The Teaching of English in Schools 1900 - 1972* cannot investigate relations between English teaching (as exemplifying liberatedness) and social structures. Within this view, there is no sense of ideology, nor of a cultural politics that might challenge the narrative of positive development and progress. Shayer regards I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis as representing important advances, Richards emphasizing the *training* of reading but reading for the development of *sensibility* rather than correctness, to represent competence in reading as including emotional and personal responses, as a means of cultivating competence in living. Richards is significant for Shayer in recognizing and defining how richness and subtlety of language amounts to a richness and subtlety of emotional experience, an important thread in accounts of personal growth English, as with a cultural hygiene models of the subject. With Leavis providing the moral component, and critical practices deriving from Richards, Shayer finds an appealing combination of social mission, individual growth and practical teaching method. Through the detailed study of poetry, for example, individuals' abilities 'to feel' can be extended, developed, refined and so pupils can be humanized in the classroom activity of practical criticism. For Shayer, this is an unqualified good.<sup>84</sup> In fact, the whole of Shayer's historical perspective is predicated on a discursively specific version of the idea of history as the progress of truth. Revealing the truth of this history has the positive, and practical value of eradicating bad teaching practices.<sup>85</sup> 'it is impossible to remain on the fence when discussing such items as the positive values of creativity, the influences of the examination system, or the benefits (or not) of teaching formal grammar.'<sup>86</sup> Shayer believes unreservedly in 'creativity' and therefore progressive educational goals are not subject to critical analysis.

Shayer's book is significant in a number of ways. It represents an expression of the liberal, progressive tradition, rooted in personal growth and in social cohesion. It defines a progressive history of English with a distinct teleology. It appears at a historically significant moment, three years before the Bullock Report (1975) and five years after Dixon's *Growth Through English* (1967). It indicates something of how progressive, personalist, growth models of English can trace their lineage to periods

and practices much earlier than *Growth Through English*. This last point is particularly significant when considering the type of description of English studies that Ian Hunter's genealogy of subject practices offers - where personal growth and other models are subsumed under long standing, deep rooted pastoral / governmental 'technologies'.<sup>87</sup> Shayer's description of the poetry lesson and its significance, for example, is in Hunter's terms a classic statement of pastoral discipline, deployed as moral management and modelled on a particular view of subjectivity within the school.<sup>88</sup>

With a more self-conscious political emphasis, John Dixon's book on the historical development of English teaching, *A Schooling in English*, expresses the positive cultural mission of English teaching and attributes great social significance to the subject. Dixon represents the relations between the teacher and the state as an historic struggle against unsympathetic, even repressive power. English is depicted as essentially resistant to ideological / political control, itself a developing and free-floating critical discourse. Dixon's earlier *Growth Through English* is the first major statement of the liberal synthesis of the 1960s, a book that significantly influenced the Bullock Report.<sup>89</sup> Coinciding with the 'new dawn' for education in the inception of comprehensive schooling, the book made important, powerful claims for the importance of creativity and for the newly formulating role for literature in the school English curriculum. Literature, for Dixon, is more about *personal* response, *self* and world exploration than about canonicity; and writing, particularly creative writing, is a means towards personal development and involves the cultivation of the whole self.<sup>90</sup>

The idea of an inclusive historical progression for this quintessentially liberal subject is developed in *A Schooling in English* (1991) that describes the relations between the teacher and the state as an historic struggle. Taking an opposite line to Chris Baldick (1983), Dixon wants to represent English as politically resistant to ideological / political control, and as a significant site of ideological free-play. *A Schooling in English* identifies three critical 'periods': university extension work from 1867; teaching of English at Cambridge 1919 to 1929; the wider movement in English and Cultural Studies from 1965 to 1979. Dixon is concerned to demonstrate how for teachers and students English epitomizes oppositional possibilities for subverting dominant power.<sup>91</sup> Echoing Terry Eagleton in 'The Rise of English', Dixon represents the origins of English as a significant strand in the growing involvement of the

working-class and of women in education via the extension movement, the peripatetic universities organized by women, courses of lectures for working men - all instances of class generated cultural practices.<sup>92</sup> Dixon is revealing the concealed history of working-class and women's involvement in early English as a means towards various kinds of liberatory educational practices - important as a means of establishing the credentials of English as a politically resistant and significant discourse. Before the state apparatuses could get their hands on it, before examining bodies were established, English enabled workers to enjoy the social pleasures of poetry and drama. The emergent subject welcomed questions, encouraged conversational teaching and in its early phases Dixon even detects incipient signs of concern for world literature. Dixon never pauses to consider questions about the cultural status and authority of literature, nor the forms of its institutional deployment - for him, engagement in literature can be seen in itself as the experience of culture. In Dixon's carefully qualified descriptions literature and culture are virtually synonymous. Literature is a means for the expression of culture by the people and Dixon's description has no sense of culture as double edged or as linked with power relating to social differences.

In Dixon's account, key orientations for democratic literary study had already been 'piloted' as early as 1870. Post-war English at Cambridge, dominated by I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis, is represented as part of a necessary, significant challenge to entrenched dogmas of a largely classical and stagnant form of literary education. Literature and literary criticism gain a kind of natural popularity as avant-garde, morally authentic forms of knowledge and study: literary criticism becomes associated with a new breed of lecturers putting the emphasis on collaborative explorations, offering new freedom, drawing on advances in psychology and philosophy, as exemplified by I.A. Richards in *The Principles Of Literary Criticism* (1924). Dixon expresses unconditional enthusiasm for E.M.W. Tillyard's *The Muse Unchained: An Intimate Account Of the Revolution in English Studies at Cambridge* (1958) and regards both Richards and Tillyard as in their different ways sharing a positively bracing concern for theory - bringing to literary studies and English a new clarity in ideas about reading and criticism. Richards's *Practical Criticism* constitutes a 'democratic' revolution in literary and cultural studies, with its emphasis on student responses and its implications for training in sensibility.

Dixon's third period - the 1960s and the 1970s - finds a renewal of democratic confidence in the project of education. In growth models of English with the emphasis firmly on creativity students are conceived of in new and exciting ways. In the new English, students become *producers* of art, not just passive viewers, or readers, or receivers. A new form of democratic literary and Cultural Studies emerges which is empowering via forms of interaction (with texts, with one another, with teachers and with teaching modes) that are clearly and significantly redefined by the *seminar* as the paradigm for the education process. The enabling of personal response opens up the personal as a legitimate realm - and this is a necessary democratic move for the equal and free exchange of meaningful experiences as knowledge. Literature and the media are interrogated for their tacit assumptions and everyday knowledge suddenly becomes highly significant, especially enabling otherwise educationally disenfranchised women into the arena. The authoritative canonical monuments of Literature shed their cultural authority and become *literature* - simply other voices in dialogue in a realm where there is a plural potential for desired and critical readings.

Dixon's selection of key periods encompassing key movements in English teaching - enables him to construe a history of progress towards a full integration and synthesis he favours. His history is necessarily selective, denying the significance and the persistence of positions, approaches, strands and traditions that might work against the view of English teaching as a progressive unity. Dixon implicitly proffers the idea of an essential or true spirit of English - to be recovered in its democratic origins, rather like Shayer. In the long view, the extension movement and Cambridge English are presented as preparation for the blend of radical and progressive English that Dixon characterizes as the true condition of the developments of the 1960s and 1970s.

Dixon's history tends to represent English as though it were separate from the history of the emergence of the state education system, independent of the social structure and resistant to the functions of education within governance and policy. Complex questions about culture - the politics of culture, institutions, professional identities - and language in education - 'learning me your language' - and the thoroughly normative forms of assessment in the English examination are discretely avoided. Dixon negates a number of key features to sustain his myth of true, purposeful development. The language practices of English in examinations, for example, with the arbitrary imposition of a notional standard English Language, are

either not addressed or seen as bureaucratic aberrations against the true spirit and destiny of the subject. Similarly the cultural exclusivity of literature is an unfortunate residual feature at odds with the 'proper' democratic function of personal response and the free exchange of ideas and identities.

**Chris Baldick, Brian Doyle, Stephen Ball: Cultural Materialist Critique, English and Ideology**

In *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848 - 1932* (1983) Chris Baldick describes the establishing of English as an academic discipline at universities in terms of its promised solutions to problems in society. Via the figure of Arnold, Baldick finds that literature and criticism acquire responsibilities in relation to the general well-being of society. Criticism, according to Arnold, rises above partisan advocacy of particular views of society or political dogmas - a common cry in discourses about English teaching. According to Baldick, though, the critical detachment involving a rejection of radical social action prized by English amounts to a political position itself involving support for the status quo and existing social inequalities. Criticism's aim to be 'disinterested', according to Baldick, denies and masks the 'real' conflicts of interest in society. Arnold's common values for Baldick, then, are *ruling* values 'imposed' on the 'masses' via state education in the English curriculum. On this view poetry, criticism and education contribute to the state's control of the masses as an element of the state ideological apparatuses. Baldick sees the rise of English Literature as an agent of social harmony, directed at school children, adult workers, women and also found at the same kind of ideological work in the empire. English Literature gets constructed as the storehouse of British cultural wisdom (Arnold's 'the best ...'<sup>93</sup>) and is tied to restricted, monocultural notions of national identity. According to Baldick's account, after World War I the idea of national identity is a powerful factor in promoting and developing English as an academic discipline. He identifies two main trends at work in the Newbolt Report's advocacy of the role of English in 'national education': the first is national pride, national consciousness in and of the native language and literature; and the second is a belief in education as a means to produce certain socially cohesive effects. Baldick refers to George Sampson's representative anxiety over the condition of the populace - as signifying the fear of materialist, revolutionary potential: 'Deny to working-class children any common share in the

immaterial and presently they will grow into the men who demand with menaces a communism of the material.'<sup>94</sup>

Baldick coins the phrase 'immaterial communism' to characterize the way that increased access to education and to culture becomes an official means of averting revolutionary political action - a danger evident in the Russian Revolution, in the near revolution in post-war Germany and in the General Strike. Baldick is critical of Richards's idea of 'cultural mission' in its divorce of the cultural from social analysis and critique and is also critical of F.R. Leavis's and Q.D. Leavis's notion of tradition, representing it simply as a nostalgia for the mythical 'organic community'. The Leavises and the *Scrutiny* project are castigated as anti-democratic, reactionary and anti-Marxist.<sup>95</sup> Baldick condemns the advocacy of a social mission for English criticism because its strategy amounts to scandalous 'substitution' - literary criticism displaces other forms of criticism or critical thinking about society. Through discourses of English and literature, consensus is sought on the basis of unconscious assumptions and shared responses - rather than rational intellectual debate, amounting to a strategy to soften and mask the pursuit of class interests.<sup>96</sup> Baldick attempts to drag back into light views about literature and society of those who founded and shaped English in order to expose this truth. This critique of English concludes: 'Criticism in its most important and its most vital sense had been gutted and turned into its very opposite: an ideology.'<sup>97</sup> Baldick's Marxist critique claims privileged access to truth concealed by ideology. He represents English as a unitary force with a large scale social function - mission, in fact - though clearly from a virtually opposite critical point of view from Shayer and Mathieson.

In a similar vein, Brian Doyle in *English and Englishness* (1989) presents English teaching as a significant form of cultural intervention into lives of the masses. English, early on in its history, is called on to sustain a 'national ideal' and develops into a system of institutionalized practices which evaluate fictions, differentiating particularly between those with cultural value and those without that constitute the popular. English is thus implicated in wider cultural processes - fictions have symbolic value in relation to social hierarchies. English is a central source of sustenance to the general value system and stands in opposition to the perceived threat to cultural leadership from the masses and in tendencies towards democracy. English teaching is another significant institutionalized cultural apparatus, designed to sustain

myths of national identity, national linguistic order and social cohesion across potentially splintered class factions. To support this view Doyle draws an interesting comparison with the National Trust as an element in the organization and management of social identities around ideas of national culture.<sup>98</sup>

To elaborate this thesis of ideological development, Doyle considers gender in the genesis of English. In the nineteenth century, according to Doyle, English emerges as a low status subject for study by and for women, just as it was mainly women who staffed the emergent national schooling system. By the 1930s, though, English had displaced classics, had achieved more mainstream currency and had achieved higher status, becoming associated with male career structures. Doyle indicates the diverse functions of English, noting also that English works differently and is organized differently at different levels. While there are different Englishes at work in Oxbridge English, provincial colleges English and English in the (still relatively) new system of national schooling, all of these can be identified as generally contributing towards a mythical sense of common national culture. English could also support the processes of selection and hierarchization in different social contexts - acting as a testing device for entry into various state and professional organizations. Although Doyle sees a nexus of related ideological functions and effects of English, *English and Englishness* doesn't assume a unitary identity for English. It draws on a range of sources for a sense of subject identity and sees Newbolt as significant along with other documents; it also sees university English as being significantly distinct from state policy, schooling, adult education and popular literary culture. *English and Englishness*, though, retains the general notion of an ideological coherence for English, finding a consistent general function in different contexts.

A direct counter case to Shayer and Dixon, and modifying the critique of the subject offered by Doyle, is offered by Stephen Ball who emphasizes the complicated, uneven development of curriculum change in English - seeing it as variously influenced by pressure groups, educational ideologies and wider social / political conditions.<sup>99</sup> In contrast to a progressive development, Ball indicates persistent tension and conflict at work in subject identities and practices. While many histories may privilege *literary* English, Ball identifies an ongoing conflict in the period 1920 - 1960 between literary and 'grammatical' positions.<sup>100</sup> These, apparently persistent, tensions are evident in the present form of the National Curriculum in English and



arose in the debates and schisms that led to it.<sup>101</sup> The fractured image of English that Ball projects - as a practice and discourse without consistent rationale and structure - may be both confirmed and denied by the recognition that English departments all over England and Wales have been getting on with the business of implementing the uniform National Curriculum in English. Clearly there was no consistently held position from which this uniform curriculum might have been challenged. At the same time it seems to have drawn assent, or at least to have avoided any visible dissent among those who were suddenly being required to teach a centralized version of the subject. At Key Stage Four, National Curriculum English includes compulsory Shakespeare for English and compulsory pre-twentieth century textual study for English literature and imposes a fairly narrow definition of literature and literary study on the subject. Key stage four English has banished knowledge about language and denied sociolinguistics in favour of a 'real world' / functionalist espousal of standard English. At the same time the key stage four English allows for both *Sumitra's Story* and creative writing - suggesting that the subject is a collection of disparate elements. According to Ball, the fragmented identity of English can be traced back to the Newbolt Report's compromise between positions. According to Ball, Newbolt never did establish the ascendancy of literary (nor liberal) English, though its mission was explicitly couched in those terms. The literary version of English had been steadily advocated by the English Association, but in fact had had little impact on the public schools and boys' grammar schools, making most headway in relatively low status schools educating girls, the working-class elementary schools and in new state secondary schools.<sup>102</sup> Ball reminds us of the fractured nature of education in this account seeing differences at work at different levels across the various institutions of subject practices.

### **Ian Hunter: English as a Governmental Technology of the Self**

A quite different position on the development - or genealogy - of English teaching is offered by Ian Hunter. Hunter's alternative account of the history of English teaching declines both the teleological view of Dixon and Shayer and the ideological view of Baldick and Eagleton with equal scorn. In *Culture and Government* (1988), Ian Hunter traces a line from Arnold to Raymond Williams - representing the history of English as emancipatory project (in the name of 'complete development') attempting

to reconcile a division between culture and society. Hunter in turn analyses Baldick, Leavis and Marxist (Raymond Williams) versions of English as idealized histories that ignore the dominant historical process - which, in relation to education, Hunter defines as the development of the social as an area for the supervision of populations. In the Arnold / Leavis tradition - whether left or right wing versions - history is conceived of as the movement from or towards utopian reconciliation of culture and society. According to Hunter, though, the origins of English to be found in the more 'mundane' (one of Hunter's favourite words) nineteenth century concern for the management of mass populations. What appears to have started out as a minority ethical practice for shaping the cultured and privileged individual comes to fill a governmental need in the spread of a specific type of popular education. This human technology has a genealogy that links the Normal School of David Stow in Glasgow, via the work of the bureaucrat, Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, to the governmental functions of elementary schooling and later to the reading practices of the English classroom.<sup>103</sup> English is a site of techniques for moral training in which the life of the child is brought into the norm-saturated environment of the classroom.<sup>104</sup> In the literature lesson individuals are corrected as they express themselves, invited to problematize their responses and themselves, to cultivate the inward looking self-regulating subject, a specific type of person.<sup>105</sup> Even in the liberal English classroom the individual's personal response is judged, corrected and modified, in a thoroughly pastoral spirit, via the exemplary figure of the teacher. From this perspective, personal response is not the expression of freely adopted reading positions and techniques, but the problematization of the self, though couched in a language of personal response that has to be learned, a whole register that will coincide with the individuals' language profiles in quite different ways. Something of this argument is evident in my 'NATE and the Politics of English' where personal response is thrown into question, and throughout *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* where reading practices are proposed as directly counter to personal response. Hunter, though, abstracts the form of pedagogic practice from curricular details which are largely disregarded as irrelevant in the general description. It is through the specific form of a pedagogy that a subtle regulation is deployed as social norms get experienced in the form of personal response. In 'the literature lesson' the text offers the surface on which students' 'lives' - thoughts and feelings - are rendered visible to correction. The student's personal

response is validated but is always open to correction through the English teacher's sympathetic inspection.<sup>106</sup> The apparently open relationship between student and teacher is the means by which social values and norms are transmitted. For Hunter, this is an inescapable logic: attempts to liberalize - attempts to validate the personal - are conscious or unconscious moves to render governmentality more subtle but more complete.

It is in the literary practices of English teaching in schools where the issues and the tensions in personal growth, liberal models of English are perhaps most clearly evident. Ian Hunter's work on English has been the most persistent in illuminating the tendencies of growth model, and literary models of English, in their deployment of techniques of pastoral surveillance. Growth model English advocated personal experience as activating the child's 'directness of perception' and 'free and direct emotional response'.<sup>107</sup> The possibility of a democratic, individualizing venture which would create an inclusive environment in which the responses of *all* students could be valued was envisaged.<sup>108</sup> Belsey writes ironically of this privileging of response: 'The indeterminacy of the text is a small price to pay for the right to be the source of meaning not only of our own utterances, but of others as well.'<sup>109</sup> In the English classroom, though, some 'personal' responses clearly count as better than others within a discourse that requires a specific type of personal response. Certain personal responses are not legitimate: boredom, hostility or indifference, for instance. Hunter comments on the business of personal response by referring to the idea of a 'reconciliatory reading', a particular form of structured 'textual' negotiation:

the 'reconciliatory' reading, employed as a pedagogical norm or 'task of behaviour', also functions as a means for revealing the state of the psycho-ethical unconscious to the *corrective observation* of the teacher-critic.<sup>110</sup> (Emphasis added).

That is, the response provides the occasion on which the student's 'self' is displayed for monitoring, examination and adjustment. The good response to a literary text, argued by *both* growth and heritage English to be genuine and 'felt',<sup>111</sup> and to come from a reader's unique inner self, though, is always readable as culturally, historically and socially located. Reading constructed as a private and personal matter, however, encourages students to *regard* their responses as personal and individual - yet

paradoxically universal - and ideologically neutral. Alan Sinfield, writing about the role of Shakespeare in English teaching comments: 'questions which appear to invite a personal response are often all the more tyrannical; candidates are invited to interrogate their experience to discover a response which has in actuality been learnt.'<sup>112</sup> Michel Foucault defines the examination as epitomizing the joint processes of objectification and subjection, outlined in the well-known formulation: 'the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected.'<sup>113</sup>

Foucault's concept of a disciplinary technology of power provides an alternative account for the characteristic literary English lesson. The text in the reading lesson in English is the surface or occasion for the intransitively critical, if kindly, observation of students. Students' language performances are subjected to the same critical treatment - where suggestions for development may go alongside corrections. The processes of 'reading' and writing render students 'visible' and, therefore, 'knowable' and 'correctable'. In the modern English classroom students are constrained to produce personal responses and to produce personal forms of writing. Failure to produce appropriate readings or writing - according to the 'normalizing judgement' of English teaching necessitates pastoral intervention, modification, correction. The ideal end product of this technique of ethical surveillance is the self-regulating individual - this pastoral form of discipline epitomizing the modern form of governmentality.

Although growth model English is represented by its advocates as a challenge to heritage practices,<sup>114</sup> by continuing to construct texts and students' reading of them in terms which assume the *intransitivity* of meaning, can be seen as parallel to heritage practices.<sup>115</sup> The apparent shift of the location of meaning from the privileged text or author to the reader - and therefore the apparent opening up of the possibility of resistance and challenge to dominant readings through the widening of the range of possible readings - is supported by the frequent appeals in GCSE examining procedures and in A Level examiners' reports for the reader's personal response to the text. The 'inner self' assumed as the emanating centre of response, however, rather than representing 'the innate, individual state of the individual reader' and the guarantee of freedom to produce uniquely personal meanings is redefined by Hunter in terms of 'a specific strategy whereby the student-reader is expected to perform a

certain *representation* of the 'self'. The process of producing a response in English is thus described by Hunter as 'an aesthetico-ethical' transaction available for scrutiny and correction within 'the normalizing practices of personal response pedagogy in secondary English classrooms.'<sup>116</sup> The reading self in the English classroom is obliged to construct a life of his or her own choosing, which involves continuous self-scrutiny in relation to 'the text' in terms of how she or he feels or thinks or should behave. The project becomes the reader's own identity and Nikolas Rose writes of this 'obsession with personal identity, this tyranny of intimacy in which narcissism is mobilized in social relations and the self is defined in terms of how it feels.'<sup>117</sup>

Hunter offers a unique way of interpreting histories of English teaching of divergent kinds in the name of 'governmentality'. For Hunter schools are historically and fundamentally institutions of governance. Rhetorics of liberation are likely to suppress key elements of school practices. Hunter relates the idea of governmentality to the historical shift that sees state education become a principal mechanism in person formation. This position clearly derives from a Foucauldian sense of a radical shift from sovereign power to governmentality. Government and education in this new state formation are one and the same. For Hunter, 'the literature lesson' serves as a paradigm for the subtle technique of a special form of governmentality, the ideal end product being self-government within a normative regime. The exertion of power in the form of pastoral discipline is routinized in 'everyday' practices of reading, writing speaking and listening. The favoured practices of liberal English such as creative writing can be seen as offering a surface on which the self can be problematized. Hunter's description of the normative operations of the literature lesson doesn't include any possible reference to the case of language according to a sociolinguistic perspective; Hunter seeks in fact to deny the relevance of sociolinguistics as a form of critique of English teaching as this cuts across his desire to represent social / cultural critiques as falling into the essentially humanist trap of complete development. It is possible, however, to see some continuity between the Foucauldian description in Hunter of a managed environment in which the self is problematized in the literature lesson, and the corrective language practices of English teaching, where the self and language are seen as a unified whole to be monitored, fostered, corrected in a pastoral context.

Hunter represents English as being more consistent than Ball and is dedicated to a totalizing interpretation in the name of governmentality. Some questions arise, though, about Hunter's consistent insistence on privileging pedagogy above content as offering the truth about English. If it is pedagogical relations that supervene, why focus exclusively on English? Hunter's history of the subject focuses strongly on the pre-history of English in schools. The essential, governmental nature of English is expressed in terms especially of the formulations of James Kay-Shuttleworth and his pioneering ideas for the ideal form of the school and the ideal figure of the teacher. The history of the subject is subsumed under this prehistorical emphasis, collapsing differences and specific practices of the school subject, and overriding any sense of the shifting functions of state education. Hunter doesn't address socially exclusive language practices in public examinations in English. The dominance of standard English cannot be subsumed under his explanatory framework, nor can different levels of attainment that are directly related to language differences be shrugged off as 'legitimate inequality'.<sup>118</sup> Hunter also doesn't address the school as defining specific and limited conceptions of literacy and operating a coercive delimitation of culture. The practice of moral management must be conducted around identifiable clusters of ideas and attitudes. These phenomena, as well as more obviously coercively corrective aspects of English teaching, cannot all be accounted for in terms of pastoral discipline. By focusing on pedagogical relations, and by redefining English as a 'human technology', Hunter usefully highlights historical features of the subject's constitution, but cannot negate questions about the subject's particular versions of culture and particular models of language.

### **After Bullock: Towards The National Curriculum and the Contemporary Scene**

In *The Preachers of Culture*, Margaret Mathieson's defines 'the four main activities within English' as 'literature, creativity, discrimination, and classroom talk'. While acknowledging that there are 'conflicting views' of priorities in relation to these activities, they are represented as generally consensual features of subject identity.<sup>119</sup>

The Bullock Report represented the powerfully established 'liberal' view, on the whole, that promoted the idea that English was essentially about the 'dissemination of liberal culture throughout society.'<sup>120</sup> Mathieson goes on to describe how the shift

from the grammar schools as the centre of concern for values in education to the then relatively new comprehensive schools, gave rise to anxiety over the curriculum in relation to the bands of students classified as 'the average and below average child.'<sup>121</sup> The question of how to construct an English curriculum that would now meet the needs of a new constituency within the comprehensive school gave rise to varied answers. Some schools adopted streaming as a way of sustaining the differentiations of the tripartite system. Many schools saw the comprehensive school as an opportunity to break down those old barriers in the name of 'mixed-ability' teaching. An effect of this shift in consciousness was to give rise to new questions about what was the proper role of subject English in relation to those four main activities: 'literature, creativity, discrimination, and classroom talk'.<sup>122</sup>

Some developments occurred in English teaching to challenge prevailing hegemony in approaches to the main elements of English. In some cases the centrality of the very categories that Margaret Mathieson defines was challenged. This uncoordinated and disparate movement was in part a response to issues raised by the large scale changes occurring during the period of comprehensivization and after. In the work of Chris Searle - and in the Teaching London Kids movement, for instance - English was rethought in terms of extending the liberal ideal to all independently of class and linguistic variation.<sup>123</sup> The challenges that occurred were political in character and began to raise explicit questions about the cultural politics of the subject. The comprehensive school had initiated a period of commitment to ideals of equality. Mixed-ability teaching had challenged existing assumptions and consciousness about class as a factor in educational success and failure had been part of a movement towards an attempt to realize the goal of equality. Ken Worpole, also a teacher at Hackney Downs school, had written about the potential for the ideas about literacy to be reorganized on more inclusive basis.<sup>124</sup> In the 'Literature Teaching Politics' movement - a series of conferences organized through the early 1980s, there appeared a few scattered pieces concerning the development of a theory informed basis for rethinking the politics of English teaching. Much of this work was concerned to demonstrate new applications of theory to a broader definition of the literary text, to pursue questions concerning canonicity as well as develop a sense of the impact of Cultural Studies on English teaching.<sup>125</sup> In both *English in Education* and more significantly in *The English Magazine*, later to become *The English and Media*

*Magazine*, theory appeared from time to time as offering prospects for new directions, new bearings in subject practice and identity. Richard Exon's populist account of post-structuralism and its impact on English appeared in *The English Magazine*. 'The Post-Structuralist Always Reads Twice' suggested new practices in relation to group readings of poetry.<sup>126</sup> More challenging to the given structure of the subject was Terry Eagleton's 'The Subject of Literature' that also appeared in *The English Magazine* and that sought to question the liberal basis of the reading practices of English. It was this piece that prompted my own contribution, on A Level teaching, 'Redefining A Level', that attempted to demonstrate how ideas from theory and Cultural Studies had worked to transform the habitual practices of English at A Level in one specific context. These examples were sporadic intrusions and were never absorbed into the mainstream practices of the subject. Under pressure from the editor a section outlining problems with exam board moderators - guardians of subject identity - elements of my attempt to redefine A Level English had to be suppressed as open debate about subject controls in the face of attempts to redefine practices was felt to be both naive and professionally dangerous.

There were some attempts to redefine English syllabuses, though only rarely in the name of including significant components of theory or of restructuring the configuration of the subject in relation to theory. English examination syllabuses had a history of liberalization - especially in the cases of 100% coursework CSE syllabuses, the UCLES 9000 A Level syllabus that invited school to submit their own paper 10 - a third part of the final assessment - for coursework assessment based on their own practices and in the case of the AEB 660 A Level syllabus that allowed for 50% of the final assessment to be in the form of coursework - the contents of it to be significantly determined by participating institutions. These syllabuses had enjoyed a burgeoning during the late 1970s and 1980s and represented, it seemed to me, the realization of the liberal model of the subject. They were largely self-regulated safely within the accepted confines of the liberal idea of English that championed creativity and personal response, but that also retained a clear commitment to the centrality of literature. One serious example of an attempt by English teachers to establish, via official channels, a drastically new course was the 'Avon' Cultural Studies syllabus that never actually came to fruition, running into the government imposed restrictions on A Level coursework that came along with the National Curriculum restrictions on



coursework at GCSE, and that also had the effect of ensuring the integrity of the literature core of the subject at A Level.<sup>127</sup> The 'Avon' syllabus had been proposed by a consortium of teachers and was developed during a commission that I attended at the 1989 NATE conference held in Swansea.<sup>128</sup> The syllabus was to be organized around textual practices that eradicated the divide between the literary and the popular and that also attempted to undo the division in English between literary practices and practices that came under the heading of 'language'. Some of the material proposed as content of the syllabus - like the iconography of everyday objects - was deliberately construed to make this break with English explicit. A major issue, however, for those working on the syllabus and for the examining authorities we were consulting with was the question of the title of the scheme. 'Properly' speaking, it seemed appropriate to signal its difference from English by naming it simply as an A Level in Cultural Studies. I argued against this, as I imagined that it would have the effect of making the syllabus a minority affair that would have little impact on the general state of English. I argued for a title that would include English - English and Cultural Studies, for example - in order to attract the significant numbers drawn to A Level English and to retain the connection with English in order to shift the grounds of the subject.

### **The National Curriculum in English**

While avant-garde syllabus development was halted by governmental intervention, the National Curriculum heralded the end of 100% coursework schemes at GCSE in English. In liberal organs the National Curriculum was represented as the dark triumph of right-wing bureaucratic ideological interference by government in the face of liberal expertise developed through the progressive history of the subject. For English teaching, the National Curriculum, I argued, broke the spell of the progressive myth.<sup>129</sup> General deflation and loss of faith among English teachers were accompanied by a sense of deskilling.<sup>130</sup> Professional autonomy had been significantly reduced and the centralized control of the specific details of the curriculum were experienced by English teachers particularly as a general loss of significance. There developed a strong sense of a powerful opposition between the English teacher's commitment to the essentially liberal construction of the subject on the one hand and the restricting hand of government intervention. The view I took was that the National Curriculum remained organized by similar principles - and practices - that had

characterized English in comprehensive schools. GCSE schemes that had enjoyed 100% coursework had still been constrained by invisible but nonetheless powerful forces.<sup>131</sup> The uniformity of coursework contents seemed to represent a consensus that was operating a quite restrictive rather than an expansive and inclusive version of subject identity. *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was critical of this structure of liberal English - and from the point of view proposed by the book, the liberal / conservative hegemony in English was not much distinguishable in fact from the form of English that the National Curriculum embodied. This seemed to me to be borne out in the fact that, though the occasion of some disgruntlement about a reduction in professional autonomy and some discontentment over forms of assessment, the contents of the National Curriculum were accepted. English teachers were teaching it.<sup>132</sup>

Interestingly enough, the most sustained account of contemporary English and debates on contemporary English teaching in schools in England and Wales has been managed by Brian Cox, the former Black Paper author who chose to champion the cause of English against the government imposed restrictions of English of the National Curriculum. As a Black Paper author, Cox had been sceptical of what were perceived to be liberal tendencies of comprehensive education: 'There is an urgent need for new conservative initiatives in education', he had once written.<sup>133</sup> When consulted during the production of the Bullock Report, Cox had advised against 'the dangers of popular culture.'<sup>134</sup> As author of The Cox Report, though, Cox came into conflict with government. It is a symptomatic irony of the liberal-conservative alliance in English that Cox became a spokesperson for the subject in its argument with government. Cox claims that from 1991 to 1995 a 'small groups of Conservatives interfered with the National Curriculum in order to impose an extreme right wing version of the knowledge and skills necessary for the education of our children.'<sup>135</sup> Cox also laments 'The decision by Kenneth Clarke in 1991 to allow a small right-wing group to take over NCC and SEAC ...' thus establishing his own position in contrast to this right-wing effrontery.<sup>136</sup>

Cox proposes five models of English that account for the diverse interests of the subject. These include: 'personal growth', 'cross-curricular', 'adult needs', 'cultural heritage', and 'cultural analysis'. Cox represents these five versions or models as 'a broad approach to the subject which can unite the profession' echoing

something of the position of NATE, the influential body claiming to represent the interests of English teachers that Cox increasingly saw himself in allegiance with.<sup>137</sup> For Cox there is no contradiction between his proposal of 'cultural heritage' and his simultaneous support for 'cultural analysis'. Cox sees no complications in putting any of the other, actually often conflicting views of English, side by side with one another in his total description of the subject.<sup>138</sup> To assure us of the completeness of his liberal reincarnation and in his consequent attempt to be as inclusive as possible, Cox is at pains to acknowledge that there is a 'great debate' about the status of literary theory in relation to English. He issues a necessary warning though, dismissing 'such changing critical fashions as structuralism, deconstruction, marxist criticism ...' as though everything else, but especially the literary model of English subject identity he proposes, was everlasting and beyond the vagaries of 'fashion'.<sup>139</sup> In a move which is either astonishing for its naiveté or utterly disingenuous, Cox acknowledges in relation to questions of literature and canonicity that 'Classrooms cannot be isolated from such debates.' He goes on to argue against the restriction of the canon, but never against the canon itself.<sup>140</sup> Cox cites Soyinka to the effect that we must open our minds to other cultures and refers self-applaudingly to Chapter 2 of The Cox Report where cultural analysis is represented as a significant (but not defining) mode of English. In a characteristic and familiar move, avoiding the entire phenomenological question about the identity of literature and the entire social question of the status of literature, effectively negating 'cultural analysis' of the subject, Cox asserts that 'study of literature' must involve 'honest discussion' about quality, and must be founded on 'analysis and discrimination'. The assumption is that 'analysis and discrimination' could take place in some realm beyond theory, beyond 'cultural analysis' and that, anyway, we all already know what they are. As if to confirm the circularity and essential vacuity of his argument and his whole position, Cox resorts to the familiar liberal English statement concerning the state of contemporary culture, finding in the end his own version of a thoroughly Leavisite position: 'Culture seems to be drifting progressively downmarket ..', 'as TV schedules make plain'.<sup>141</sup> (Ironically, it's Cox, though, who finds 'ignorance and prejudice' in the actions of John Major in the reduction of coursework in English GCSE assessments.)<sup>142</sup> Cox acknowledges, however, that there are such things as good films, good film being defined by what Cox himself has decided is good. Cox's cultural bearings have shifted little since his

Black Paper days, and it is worth reflecting on what is indicated about the state of English teaching that Cox became its spokesperson in 'the battle for the English curriculum.'<sup>143</sup> If Cox was to be the advocate of the subject, this indicated very significant facts about the condition of English in schools, its attitudes towards linguistic and literary / cultural matters.

Cox's ultimate appeal is to the idea of 'art' quoting from Bradbury:

The real reason for taking criticism seriously is the desire to take art seriously, as an exploration, an investigation, a fundamental probe into our moral, our spiritual and our imaginative life. That depends on a desire for standards, for judgment, for the endless sifting of the better from the worse.<sup>144</sup>

Cox utterly endorses this view: this is the notion of English he claims 'many teachers of English' wish to see at the centre of English studies. In the end, this is the basis for Cox's position. What is best done within English is hardly a matter for argument, much less for the fads and fashions of theory, it is much more properly a matter for custom and practice. Cox asserts: 'The study of literature has never ceased to be at the centre in school programmes of English, and there is no reason why this should not prevail in the future.'<sup>145</sup> Cox's view on English teaching encapsulated here clearly has no historical sense of the genealogy of the subject.

Cox outlined his ten features which should be 'at the centre of the post-1995' English curriculum.<sup>146</sup> In it he includes the teaching of the LINC materials that were produced during the early 1990s under the government sponsored supervision of Ronald Carter.<sup>147</sup> The LINC materials sought to propose knowledge about language based to some extent on linguistics and sociolinguistic, to develop the (more Vygotskian) input into English of Barnes and Britton on language at least partially on more Hallidayan lines, giving some emphasis to language and the social and to theories about language.<sup>148</sup> Carter traces a *natural* progression from the Britton of the Bullock Report to the work of LINC and while on the one hand elaborating 'variation theory' that utterly problematizes the normative language practices of English teaching, still envisages a developmental model. The big question for Carter is 'To what extent can the above theories help teachers in their task of fostering language development?'<sup>149</sup> Carter is uncritical of the Cox Report with its five versions of English, and sees no problem with introducing a critical linguistic perspective into the

liberal framework of the subject. Carter is sanguine, in fact, that the National Curriculum will work in the tradition of Britton. The volume *Knowledge about Language* includes a section by John Richmond that is indicative of what I took to be the thoroughly untheorized political position being taken on language by the advocates of the LINC project.<sup>150</sup> For John Richmond grammar teaching in English is not a problematic question of linguistic / cultural politics but is presented entirely as a question of pedagogic method. In an interesting version of language in practice he refers to 'a temporary derailment off the trains of grammatical connection between brain and pen' - as though without such temporary derailments the movement of grammar in writing might be smoothly running along parallel lines.<sup>151</sup> For a contemporary luminary of English teaching to represent grammar in this way indicates, perhaps, something of the condition of theory in English teaching in England and Wales. It is as though the whole question of grammar teaching could be reduced to a matter of pupil performativity with no sociolinguistic complications. This seems surprising in a book explicitly purporting to deal with language issues in English teaching in the name of *knowledge about language*. In an attempt to address the English teacher, and to sustain the idea that English teachers have a natural sense of good language practices, the book as whole tends to eschew language theory, almost entirely neglecting sociological issues.<sup>152</sup> This seems to confirm the argument of the piece I wrote on the LINC project which proffered a range of interesting examples of work on language but that chose to ignore the constitutional language practices and ideas of English in its institutionalized forms.<sup>153</sup>

Language debates have always been close to debates about subject identity in English teaching and about education. Early concerns for the well-being of the masses at the turn of the century had identified the decline in the English language as a matter of urgent concern,<sup>154</sup> a position echoed in Newbolt and more recently in the 'Better English' Campaign. 'Better English' neatly represents the equivocal position of English teaching in relation to language - or one influential set of its advocates at least. NATE had supported the 'Better English' campaign, headed by Trevor McDonald and had even featured a picture of the distinguished newsreader on a front cover of *NATE News* (Summer, 1996).<sup>155</sup> The confusion between ideas about language and empowerment and the acceptance of the dominant status of standard English indicates an amnesia of debates that were conducted in the 1970s in education

and in English. Writing about the recent politics of English teaching in relation to the National Curriculum, Ken Jones advocates 'that teachers of English sought a re-encounter with the concerns of that period', finding that the 1970s interest in language, culture and class had been unproductively deflected by other concerns.<sup>156</sup>

Jones is critical of the fact that English teaching allowed its ground to be occupied by debates that represented pressures outside itself. He finds that progressive English teaching lacked the very theoretical consciousness to resist the imposition of the model of English represented in the Cox Report:

... the willingness of 'progressive' English teachers to recognize themselves in the report as it does on the substantial shift in position of the report's chief organizer. One of the reasons 'Cox' could accomplish the manoeuvre was a lack of self-awareness within progressive English teaching.<sup>157</sup>

Jones also finds a gap in the theoretical make-up of progressive English teachers in relation to 'social criticism'; 'although a penumbra of social criticism surrounded the intentions of many English teachers, for most of them 'progressive education' was articulated as a matter of method.'<sup>158</sup> What's indicated here seems to me to be in accord with the position expressed in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* and in the piece written about the National Curriculum, 'Key Stage 4: Back to the Future?', where lack of political consciousness in relation to questions of subject identity had enabled the subject to be organized via the National Curriculum on grounds that emphasized traditional features of the traditional / liberal continuum. The political condition of English teaching in England and Wales also seemed to enable the transition to occur without great protest from English teachers. The element of 'social criticism' as expressed above by Jones had been a significant gap, although it had also been the case that social criticism had tended to take the form, when it did appear, of a post Leavisite rejection of commercial values and media forms often in the name of a 'traditionalist' adherence to an alternative set of values embodied in literature, even where literature had been generously expanded beyond the canonical. In the end, Jones attributes the reductionist version of the National Curriculum in English to the failure of comprehensive education to rewrite the contents and structure of whole school curriculum: 'The comprehensive school lacked a comprehensive, remodelled curriculum.'<sup>159</sup> By the time the National Curriculum was in place and established in

schools, it had become, according to Jones, an accepted feature of the educational landscape, represented in the national press as a necessary *fait accompli*: ‘a consensual feature of British life’<sup>160</sup> or ‘part of the common sense of educational policy’.<sup>161</sup> It is tempting to regard the National Curriculum, as the end of English, certainly as the end of the progressive myth of English.<sup>162</sup> It continues to speak of a fractured subject, but one that retains governmental functions in relation to special cultural objects and probably more critically language. With its tiers and levels the National Curriculum in English is closely reminiscent of the 1864 requirements for a basic school curriculum. Meanwhile debates - both in the public sphere and within the institutions of the subject - about the identity of English hardly exist. NATE has embraced the ‘Better English’ programme and there appear to be no signs of significant change on the horizon nor of significant resistance from English teachers.<sup>163</sup> As I wrote in ‘Key Stage 4: Back to the Future?’, English teachers are teaching the National Curriculum, are marking it and there is no apparent dissent.<sup>164</sup> This acceptance surely indicates an acceptance of the modified Cox version of English, in all its enduring conservative attachment to standard English and literature and its linguistic and cultural naiveté.

The recent history of English teaching in England and Wales has been dominated by the National Curriculum, promoting a model of subject identity that is an amalgam of traditionalist and liberal elements. The National Curriculum imposes both testing and tiering both of which seem alien to the liberal incarnation of the subject. These changes and others impelled by the 1988 Education Reform Act and its 1992 sister act centralize control and deskill teachers in relation to curriculum management.<sup>165</sup> With a weakening of local authorities under LMS, schools become individual entities that may compete with other local schools for student numbers and for a position in a league table, problematizing the idea of the community comprehensive school. Schools and their curricula have become subject to OFSTED surveillance, another factor in the erosion of teacher and school autonomy. In English particularly the idea of the self-regulating naturally evolving subject of Dixon’s account is difficult to sustain in the face of the central control by government. The history of the development of the National Curriculum in English indicates that English teachers were not consulted to any significant degree and that the final product was established by committee and modified by government appointee. The national professional organization of English teachers, NATE, failed to organize any

large scale protest to the National Curriculum or to offer any viable arguments for anything that would be seriously alternative to it and during the period in question suffered from falling roles making local interest groups less viable.<sup>166</sup>

In the meantime some signs of practices outside the traditionalist / liberal alliance appear in fragmented form at various levels of the subject. Aspects of feminist criticism have been absorbed unevenly into English teaching at various levels and there is evidence of concern with gender - now mostly addressing a perceived lowering of boys' achievements in the subject. There is a general acceptance of the value of multicultural literature in the English classroom. There is some incorporation of genre theory into practices that are organized around 'writing frameworks'.<sup>167</sup> The National Literacy strategy with its 'literacy hour' has some potentially productive practices in teaching the semiotics of reading non-fiction texts in detailed ways.<sup>168</sup>

My own professional sense of the state of the subject is one of disempowerment and stasis - with a restriction in the nature of professional identity. It is possible at the same time to see new possibilities, though, in the critical habits of new generations of English teachers often with a background in critical theory, Media Studies or Cultural Studies. It's difficult to say how much this will impact on the given order of things - given that English teaching is constitutionally organized to resist such incursions. What's certain is that the horizons in English teaching in England and Wales remain dominated by the National Curriculum. From the point of view of the position expressed in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, at the level of practice the question is how to open language and textual work to alternative practices alongside the strictures of the National Curriculum. There is an attempt to illustrate how this kind of practice - working within and against English - might work in 'Key Stage 4: Back to the Future?'.<sup>169</sup>

### **Other Contexts of English: Alternative Models and Debates**

Alternative models of subject identity are alive and well, however, though they tend to thrive in contexts other than England and Wales. An interesting proposition would be to examine the various histories and lines of development of subject identity in the different national contexts of English.<sup>169</sup> The Australian context seems particularly energetic in exploring, sustaining and developing a range of perspectives and positions that represent a break with literary models and growth model versions of



subject identity.<sup>170</sup> The 'critical literacy' movement, characterized by a broad approach to texts extending beyond literature and 'critical' techniques for reading has been influential in Australia. 'Critical literacy' aims to recognize and emphasize the role of the social in signifying practices, paying attention to matters such as the representation of gender and ethnicity. 'Genre theory', based in the sociolinguistics of Halliday, has also attained general currency and purports to offer a mode of English teaching that takes into account the relations between socially discursively determined 'registers' and the dominance of standard forms of language. The most challenging position in English teaching in Australia comes from the application of the idea of education as a form of governmentality derived from ideas of Foucault via Ian Hunter. 'Governmentality' applied to a rethinking of the contents of the English curriculum is propounded in the work of Annette Patterson and Bronwyn Mellor, and gives rise to some highly original, practical and productive work on reading practices.<sup>171</sup> One of the main advantages of this position is that it refuses to idealize the subject of English by giving priority to any one of the disparate aims of the subject in practice over all others. It has a rootedness, in other words, in the mundane functions of English in its institutional contexts. Where critical literacy will tend to promote the idea of the liberation of the subject from ideological restriction via the application of certain critical reading techniques, critical literacy practices are likely then to come into conflict with the assessment system that figures so powerfully in schooling to determine differences of access. Critical literacy, in other words, is likely to be deeply embarrassed by the governmental functions of schooling.

While it is the case that ideas like critical literacy and an associated range of concepts and practices have become part of what English is in Australia, and while in South Africa language policies in education are being informed by a sociolinguistic sense of the politics of language differences, English in England and Wales remains dominated by the National Curriculum.<sup>172</sup> At the level of the influential professional body, NATE, discussion and debates remain structured around meaningful responses to poetry, and the frequently expressed dissatisfaction in the present regime of English harks back to the post-Bullock liberal golden age. When recent discussion on literacy held in the NATE journal, *English in Education*, threatened to introduce a political dimension into the arena of English teaching, this was deftly avoided by keeping the discussion of theories of literacy away from any debate about the current constitution

of English, and by ensuring that the main participants, Colin McCabe and Brian Street, media and literacy theorists, were speaking to the subject at a distance themselves from its habitual concerns.<sup>173</sup> McCabe, in fact, calls for a 'comprehensive new settlement in the teaching of literacy' without any reference the state of things in terms of literacy in education nor within English teaching.

### **The Contemporary State of English**

The history of education since World War Two has been characterized by major shifts in the very nature of state education, its functions, forms and discourses. The vast expansion of education for the population as a whole - expressed in The 1944 Butler Education Act, in the Robbins Report and in Circular 10/65 - was accompanied, unevenly, by liberalizing tendencies that found expression in the curriculum most persistently in English teaching. This liberal position never gained a complete ascendancy but remained the dominant discourse in the public arena in English until the National Curriculum, coming through the 1988 Education Reform Act, displaced its laissez-faire premises by a rather more traditionalist, prescriptive curriculum. For avant-garde liberals, this abrupt halt to their myth of progress came as a shock coinciding with the Education Reform Act's undermining of the project of community comprehensive education.

I have argued that the National Curriculum, part constructed, part lamented by the former Black paper author, Brian Cox, as restricted, illiberal and unenlightened, has been possible due to the ideological structure of the subject, and the nature of subject identity, the history of the subject. The long-established political vacuum of the subject enabled the occupation of English teaching. The practices promoted by the National Curriculum were not so distant from the liberal form of the subject. The unresolved question of the place of literature, the unresolved issue of normative language practices, and the role of both these areas in assessment, clearly indicated that the subject lacked a politically conscious critical theory in relation to language and culture. In terms of the three main perspectives on subject history I have outlined, the National Curriculum can be interpreted in quite different ways. From the liberal progressive perspective, it will be seen as the more or less catastrophic intervention of government into the proper development of the subject. From the point of view of an ideological interpretation, it will be seen as the reaffirmation of hegemonic versions of

culture and language, imposed through the details of the curriculum on the consciousness of the population. From the perspective of governmentality, the National Curriculum can be viewed as business as usual, since the details of the curriculum are subordinate to the pedagogic relations that enact the problematization of the self in the name of the cultivation of self-governance. From the point of view developed through my published works on English teaching and finding its fullest expression in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, the present condition of English teaching is continuous with its historically dominant liberal form. The political issues involved in English teaching remain cultural and social questions about literature and language, as the ideological versions of the history of the subject might insist. The powerful and overarching idea of governmentality, however, negates the possibility of a liberationist philosophy or practice that is simply alternative and politically transparent. In the concluding section I hope to explore briefly how ideological and governmental critiques of English teaching might afford plausible alternatives within the contemporary scene of English teaching.

## CONCLUSION

English cannot plausibly remain simply what it has been.  
 Nick Peim, *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, p. 215.

In the preceding chapters I've tried to define the distinctive nature of my published works on English teaching and its contribution to debates about subject identity. I have demonstrated some of 'the working out' behind the published work and located the work within a sense of the history of English teaching, taking into account different perspectives on the history of English teaching. I've tried to describe the context of my attempt to rethink English teaching in terms of my own career as an English teacher and in terms of the state of English teaching. In the account of theory I have given, I've attempted to define a fusion of elements that informed my thinking on English teaching, especially in relation to a rethinking of the centrality of literature in the subject and in relation to language and social difference.

This work of challenging and redefining English teaching has continued and developed in my involvement in teacher training, in teaching degree programme education modules and involvement in European education networks. The distinctiveness of my contribution to rethinking English teaching has been recognized in invitations from major international conferences on English teaching and education in the UK, the USA, Australia and South Africa. I have continued to publish and to present conference papers on English teaching dealing with issues including the postmodern politics of English, English and national curricula in the UK and Australia, the future of English, rethinking the teaching of grammar (an attempt to revive debates about language in English teaching) and the professional identity of English teachers.<sup>1</sup> It has been partly through a sense of the international dimension that I have been able to develop the business of rethinking subject identity and the role of English teaching - or something deriving from it - in education, modifying the position expressed in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (1993).

In this conclusion I want to consider a critique of the kind of alternative position I developed rooted in Ian Hunter's reading of Foucault. This is a critique that has been developed in Australia - in a context where critical theory is a much more familiar discourse in English teaching - evident, for example, in the fact that systemic

functional linguistics has become familiar among English teachers' everyday discourses on English. It has a more studied, developed and serious character than the more familiar and dismissive critiques of critical theory as 'barbarism' or as 'clever, shallow, influential literary theory'<sup>2</sup> and the equally dismissive claims from within English studies that 'post-Marxisms, Foucauldianisms, cultural materialism, new historicism, queer studies ...'<sup>3</sup> are all already part of English, anyway.

In this conclusion, I hope to explain how the position taken in my published works on English teaching may answer what I have characterized as the 'governmental' critique: firstly, by acknowledging the value of the emphasis it gives to English pedagogy as a form of human technology; but secondly, by clarifying the role of critique in relation to questions about the cultural politics of English teaching. In doing so I hope to clarify how my published works on English teaching may be seen to offer a contribution to questions about discourses of English, literacy and language in a range of educational contexts and how they may be seen to offer a contribution to questions about the cultural politics of education in a larger, less subject-bound sense.

### **The Significance of English Teaching in State Education**

Accounts of English teaching provided by English teachers, have a perhaps understandable tendency to inflate the significance of the subject and the profession. It may be that the historically dominant form of English teaching has required this special sense of a grand mission. This can be related back to the early struggle for recognition of the subject and to both its traditionalist and its liberalist claims to be always about much more than itself. According to Robert Protherough and Judith Atkinson writing recently, English teaching makes special demands of the teacher: 'to be a special kind of person, to teach a subject that in many ways is more than a subject and that has repercussions outside the classroom walls, has imposed a special responsibility on English teachers.'<sup>4</sup> English teachers are charged not only with teaching a subject, but with offering a *training in life itself*. For Raymond O'Malley, 'The purpose of English teaching' required the English teacher to enable their students 'to face successfully every challenge and invitation of the life around them.'<sup>5</sup> Something of the impossibility of this mission is recognized in James Donald's description of 'the intractable problem of English' which is that 'it remained trapped

within its sense of being called to a social and cultural mission - whether healing the State or empowering people to escape its oppressions.’<sup>6</sup>

During its early phase, English was represented as having a unifying, communal, social purpose. From the early statements of this socially cohesive function of the subject in Newbolt Report to the Spens Report of 1938, English teaching was seen as the social balm that could ‘soften the distinction which separate men and classes in later life.’<sup>7</sup> The authors of *English for Tomorrow* (1997) see a correspondence between the early mission of national social cohesion for English with the aims of the contemporary National Curriculum: ‘National Curriculum English is a version of the subject which greatly stresses the concept of the nation as enshrined in its literary heritage.’<sup>8</sup> But, along with Gunther Kress (1995), they argue for a more inclusive sense of subject identity that can meet the need of students living within ‘fast capitalism’.<sup>9</sup> Here the idea of the needs of the students becomes the rationale of the subject and a means for advocating a particular subject model. Although shifted from the mission of social cohesion and the coherence of national identity, the sense of subject identity in this model remains tied to a vision of the social realm with which it is claimed to have special resonance. English teaching in recent times has remained a significant site for discussions about education and culture and the proper social functions of their interaction. My published works on English teaching were predicated on a sense of the centrality of English in the curriculum and its cultural political significance. The nature of that significance, however, has been contested powerfully by commentators who have found the contents of English teaching to be of less significance than its exemplary pedagogy.

### **Governmentality: An Alternative Perspective on English**

While John Dixon represented English as a vehicle for the completion of the proper cultural aspirations of the people and Terry Eagleton represented English as ‘an ideology’ hailing the liberation of literature as the release of democratic energies, there emerged a more sober account of the function English teaching within state education systems. As a challenge to the liberationist ambitions of the advocates of subject critique, Annette Patterson comments:

Generally, we've had such a good training, provided by Humanities Faculties in the free-wheeling, critical, resistant, self-reflective, hermeneutic practices typical of our fields of study (usually literature and the social sciences), that a term like governmentality triggers a rush to its assumed and endangered opposite, 'freedom'.<sup>10</sup>

According to this position, the resistance of would-be radical practitioners of English to the idea and practice of governmentality is a function of a certain kind of training, involving the cultivation of an interrogative, critical personal and professional style, forgetting the positive benefits of 'the modernist project of conquest through rational planning and action'. Those benefits are visible in 'compulsory education, universal entitlement to medical treatment, and systems of social welfare, public transport, sewerage and drainage.'<sup>11</sup>

The resistance of English personnel to bureaucratic manoeuvre is almost legendary: most versions of professional journals in the English field bear witness to the ways in which we so expertly and consistently adopt the mantle of critique. We see ourselves opposed to the administrators, bureaucrats, and politicians and therefore best able to ask the tough questions of them. Our distrust of empiricism and our anti-positivist stances are legacies of an education in self-reflective, critical practices; and since empiricism, rationality and positivism are some of the features of governmentality, the administrators, bureaucrats and politicians become a rather easy target for our concerns.<sup>12</sup>

The really significant point of this position is to shift the emphasis for subject identity from 'theories' and 'models' to 'pedagogy':<sup>13</sup> 'It is likely that a focus on theoretical 'models' is not very helpful in understanding or governing the institution of English.'<sup>14</sup>

The constitution of the subject - an issue I was increasingly anxious to address in the work I published on English teaching - is not, according to this view, to be located in the areas that my work was addressing: models of literacy, ideas about language, ingrained habits of thinking about subject content, its general value, its place in the curriculum. The 'true' identity of the subject is revealed in its specific and 'rare' techniques for 'ethical' training.<sup>15</sup>

Reviews of English are traditionally located within a history and theory of the subject which do not provide a very useful guide to understanding its constitution. Instead, English had maintained a tenacious historical continuity with a set of ancient pedagogical practices, practices which date from early

Christian pastoral traditions, and from which it has withstood successive attempts to redefine its territory.<sup>16</sup>

This position stands as a useful reminder of the often forgotten component of pedagogy in discussions about the identity of English. The truly fundamental things about English teaching are concerned more with the 'ethical comportment of the English teacher'<sup>17</sup> which is no more than the by-product of governmental developments in the emergence of state-funded education in the nineteenth century, rather than a realization of the subject's freedom from governmental, bureaucratic constraint.

It seems clear that this position may contradict the work of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* and the other papers I published on English teaching. My work had focused steadily on models of English teaching that had given rise to what I interpreted through the application of certain types of theory as politically questionable in terms of their social effects. My work was founded on the very idea of critique. Literature and language - how these components of subject content were modelled and deployed - were the main focus for the critique I offered. The position that Annette Patterson outlines insists on the primacy of the governmental, of the subject English as a certain kind of *pedagogy* as training in the cultivation of a certain type of person - or persona. The genealogical method from which this position arises avoids an essentialist theory of origins. The rise of English is traced through the emergence of the practice of pastoral surveillance of state education: with its emphasis on ethical comportment and the cultivation of the self-regulating subject. The occasion for this special procedure of governance might be, as in the case of David Stow, the teacher's presence in the school playground, operating as a kind of kindly moral manager. It might equally be the reading of a poem in the classroom, with the English teacher acting as a kindly ethical guardian, problematizing this response, gently correcting that response, but always cultivating a habit of reflexivity. This emphasis on the mundane particularities of subject emergence effectively deconstructs ideological interpretations of its motivation. On this view the practices of state schooling, as well as its emergent rationales, may be seen to be, in reality, ideologically contradictory.<sup>18</sup> In the real world of polity and history contradictions happily live together. According to this genealogy, the school system, and the subject



identities that operate within it, are contingent conglomerates of principles and brute practices yoked by historical necessity and pragmatic efficacy together.<sup>19</sup> Hunter wants to deny the supervision of the ideological project, to deny the idea of state education as an ideological shackling of the mind and soul via the practices of an English that either lost touch with its 'true' working-class roots or that came increasingly to realize popular aspirations for linguistic creativity and cultural development. Hunter sees similar tendencies at work in quite different critical views of education. Bowles and Gintis are given the same dismissive treatment as John Dixon or F. R. Leavis.<sup>20</sup> Both are the victims of a naïve privileging of principle over historical reality. Both inflate the missionary rhetoric of subject identity, partly as a function of professional status aspirations. By way of emphasizing the alternative nature of his approach, Hunter wants to represent James Kay-Shuttleworth as the worthy bureaucratic and true father of the subject and its proper governmental function.

### **Rethinking Governmentality and English in Education**

Annette Patterson's position - developed through a reading of Hunter and through researches into early reading training practices - offers a necessary caveat to any rethinking of the function of English teaching in state schooling.<sup>21</sup> The case for governmentality as the necessary condition of state education that fundamentally determines its functions is convincing. Annette Patterson's Hunterian emphasis on pedagogy is appropriate to understanding the mechanisms and institutional determinations of the curriculum. Equally, however, there can be no doubt that the functions of education *as governmentality* are varied, often contradictory and unpredictable in their development. In historically recent times, the Butler Education Act of 1944, the Robbins Report of 1963 and its aftermath, Circular 10/65 and the 1988 Education Reform Act have variously represented seismic shifts in the functions and agenda of state education with its manifold aims and contexts: and they have represented significant shifts in the conception and practice of the nature and functions of governmentality. The cultural contexts of education have shifted, too. Schools have changed significantly as institutions in terms of how they see their 'governmental' roles and functions. The professional identity of teachers has changed, with a range of positions being available to teachers in different traditions and

institutions. Governmentality is not a singular once and for all given phenomenon. It operates in various contexts with various different materials and with various effects.

No doubt there are deep continuities in a characteristic form of English pedagogy and its effects in person formation in schooling. Nevertheless, the *contents* of these pedagogies cannot be permanently put under erasure as negligible. The self-regulating subject of English that celebrates empire and that reads from a thoroughly personalist point of view is significantly different from the self-regulating subject of English that can produce an anti-sexist or anti-racist reading on demand. The form of governmental pedagogy that English inherited from Christian pastoral training, might be put to varied uses. There is no reason why governmental pedagogy could not also be turned against dominant forms of the subject where, for example, personalist ethical issues - as played out in the personal response game - get confused with linguistic capacities. This legitimately critical reading of the pedagogical effects of English teaching can be taken further to reveal the confusion evident in examining practices in English when a certain form of linguistic 'deportment' is incorrectly interpreted as linguistic excellence itself. It is in this area of the confusion of the 'personal', the ethical and the linguistic that the idea of governmentality might be most usefully and most critically deployed. This doesn't mean that the English teacher can step outside of the pedagogic structures that determine effects to some pure critical position. Nor does it mean that the critical English teacher escapes the logic of professional status aspiration. But, equally, it does argue against an acceptance of the dominant linguistic practices of English that key sociolinguistic positions and sociological analyses indicate cannot be reduced, as Ian Hunter might have it, to a general condition of legitimate inequality.<sup>22</sup>

Although genealogical in a 'deep' sense, Hunter's logic appears at times to be ahistorical. The expectations of state-funded education after 1944 have been quite different in significant ways from those expressed, for example, in The Newbolt Report, where the spiritual and linguistic health of the nation was a major and explicit concern. Since Newbolt the question of access has been a significant issue, and is evident in the movement towards circular 10/65 announcing the government's intention to introduce comprehensive education as well as in the Robbins Report (1963) with its recommendations for the dramatic expansion of access to Higher Education.<sup>23</sup> Contemporary issues in state education include concerns for the

problems of social exclusion - where schooling is seen as inadequate to the social needs of significant portions of the population. The analysis and critique of the social exclusion effects of public education embodied in the sociology of Bowles and Gintis, Bourdieu and Passeron and Paul Willis cannot be dismissed as merely functions of a misreading of the mundane governmental functions of schooling and the overinflated caste aspirations of critical intellectuals.<sup>24</sup> It seems that there remains an issue here concerning the teaching and measurement of learned capacities that involves examining the relations between the form and substance of the curriculum and the cultural attributes of social class groups. This seems to me to remain a problem across the curriculum and is not limited to the subject English. However, the issue is perhaps most interestingly and dramatically represented in the case of English. In the realm of secondary schooling in the field of textuality and language, English remains closely associated with forms of language and culture that are not so much the expression of learned capacities as the cultivation of a linguistic and cultural deportment - a set of social class attributes, as Bourdieu might have it. Paradoxically, this sociological analysis seems to me to be better informed by being placed alongside Ian Hunter's governmental vocabulary - rather than being set against it.

### **Constitutional Questions of English Teaching**

The published work I undertook in the field of English teaching was never an attempt to release and liberate English from its institutional, discursive and ideological shackles, into some unrealizable non-governmental space of pure freedom. It wasn't an attempt to reconfigure the subject to realize its overarching cultural ambitions of full development. The project was conceived within a very specific context and was rather an attempt to redeploy the specific but considerable institutional, governmental power that English represented to the teaching and learning of modes of reading and modes of language use and knowledge that were directly informed by contemporary theory, aware of contemporary cultural conditions, alert to the political relations between language, culture and the social and the cultural bearings of comprehensive school populations. In terms of culture, this meant taking on the question of the textual realm of English teaching as well as arbitrary value ascribed to canonical literature and to the general category of literature. It meant also taking on the reading practices that had become institutionalized within English teaching and had been

represented by the subject as reading itself. It meant addressing the complex issue of the centrality and privilege accorded to standard English within English teaching. This was all a product of my work in the classroom as an English teacher, and was the partial expression of my work as a departmental bureaucrat and as an accredited examiner of the subject. Much of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* gave a detailed account of how practices in English could be transformed - as well as a critique of the given modes of English teaching. All of that work was rooted in the real institutional contexts, histories and practices of English teaching, and all of it recognized the governmental dimension and the contingent conditions of the subject.

My published work on English teaching increasingly addressed the constitution of the subject. Annette Patterson seems to suggest that there is no constitution of the subject, rather there is a continuity of a 'rare' technology of person formation. This is rather like the distinction between surface structure and deep structure: the 'universal grammar' of English that gets manifested in various specific forms. These can always get retranslated into the governmentality model - and can redirect focus onto the structural, pastoral, corrective, normative pedagogic relations and practices that apparently conflicting practices rely on. But this is not to say that the differences are negligible, nor that all arguments about subject models are meaningless. While governmentality does seem to be an inescapable condition of the school as we know it, it doesn't automatically render differences negligible and it cannot deny the validity of questions about the cultural politics of specific forms of English teaching.

The value of this genealogical approach is to remind us firstly of the deep structures that determine practices and secondly of 'the hybrid reality' out of which educational practices are constructed and maintained.<sup>25</sup> This anti-essentialist account may provide a useful deterrent also to the over inflated aspirations of certain accounts of subject change towards liberty and 'complete development'.<sup>26</sup> In the drive to define and assert the priority of deep structures the governmentalist have tended to underplay the specific surface differences of the subject. These surface differences remain significant, however, I have argued, in terms of how they interpellate the constituency of the subject - the extent to which they are culturally and linguistically exclusive being important to the normative functions of the subject. They remain significant also in terms of how they powerfully define matters of literacy in the

public sphere. The fundamental categories of the National Curriculum in English - reading, writing and speaking and listening - come within the governmental scope of the subject and determine identities through practices that include examination and certification.

Differences in subject paradigm are significant in terms of effects and are, clearly, available to change. The present regime in English in England and Wales - expressed in *The National Curriculum in English* - indicates this.<sup>27</sup> The current constitution of English teaching in the National Curriculum arises from two key factors: governmental will - including a clear sense of what direction to pull the subject with a definitive paradigm of English; and the absence of a tradition of an alternative paradigm - a politically coherent, alternative version of English, that is - among body of English teachers who are now consigned to teaching the National Curriculum and who appear to have neither will nor means to resist it. The fact that English teachers have been able to work within the confines of the National Curriculum indicates the subject's current alignment with the contemporary neo-conservative hegemony in public ideas about education in England and Wales.

It is historically the case that its patchwork practices were held to be the strength of English - ensuring that it remain resistant to ideological take-over, but this very decentredness can also be interpreted as a vacuity.<sup>28</sup> In spite of the efforts of NATE and others to make this very absence the principle of subject identity, the effect is a political unconsciousness at the heart of the subject. Hybridity itself cannot guarantee political and cultural neutrality. In the case of English teaching, the National Curriculum - itself arguably a hybrid of traditional and liberal components - is very blatantly culturally loaded. English teaching has not self-consciously opted for a hybrid model of subject identity that will cater for the interests and needs of its very varied constituency. It has, rather, inherited a series of practices and ideas that have been organized into a whole that has been subject in recent times to political appropriation by a right wing hegemony in education.<sup>29</sup> Neo-conservative initiatives in education have involved a significant return to traditional concerns for culture and for subject identity. Hence the demand in English in the National Curriculum for pre-twentieth century *English* literature, compulsory Shakespeare and the emphasis on the use value of standard English speak of a traditional model. The reduction of coursework and choice components at A level along with the general emphasis on

standards and inspection that came with the National Curriculum also suggest the triumph of right hegemony. As I argued, in 'Key Stage 4: Back to the Future?'<sup>30</sup> the theoretical gap at the centre of the subject made it easy for government to impose a model. An explicit concern with definitions of literacy, however, with sociolinguistic questions and with a renewed sense of the problematics of the field of culture (none of which can be reduced to questions of performativity) - at least promise to reveal what kinds of choices are available to the future of English teaching in its significant role within the governmental arena of the school. Textual and linguistic theory offer opportunities for rethinking the links between with the social and cultural dimension of English teaching in its institutional contexts.

### **English teaching and Cultural Authority**

The question of the cultural authority of the subject remains an issue, palpable in the National Curriculum and its particular conception of literature and language. The National Curriculum confirms deep-rooted conceptions of subject identity powerfully operative in English teaching. The contemporary English school curriculum retains anachronistic echoes of The Newbolt Report (1921) and belongs, essentially, to a mode of thinking that is out of key with contemporary cultural and linguistic theory and conditions. Richard Johnson describes the national cohesion model of education:

This nostalgia for 'cohesion' is interesting, but the great delusion is that all pupils - black and white, working-class, poor, and middle class, boys and girls - will receive the curriculum in the same way. Actually, it will be read in different ways, according to how pupils are placed in social relationships and culture. A common curriculum, in a heterogeneous society, is not a recipe for 'cohesion', but for resistance and the renewal of divisions. Since it always rests on cultural foundations of its own, it will put pupils in their places, not according to 'ability', but according to how their cultural communities rank along the criteria taken as the 'standard'. A curriculum which does not 'explain itself', is not ironical or self-critical, will always have this effect.<sup>31</sup>

The published work I produced between 1984 and 1995 on English teaching was an attempt to address the issues of the curriculum 'in a heterogeneous society', attempting to define a theoretical position and a practice which would enable the political dimension of the subject to become visible and that would write a sense of cultural politics into the constitution of the subject. Theory was a means for achieving

the element of 'explaining itself' that Richard Johnson refers to above as a necessary condition for engaging with differences of cultural community in the school population. In its efforts to rethink the linguistic and cultural field of the subject, my work attempted to take into account 'the borrowing, mixing and fusion' of everyday cultural practices that characterize contemporary cultural conditions:

In formulations like these, culture is thought of as a homogeneous way of life or tradition, not as a sphere of difference, relationships, or power. No recognition is given to the real diversity of social orientations and cultures within a given nation-state or people. Yet a selective version of a national culture is installed as an absolute condition for any social identity at all. The borrowing, mixing and fusion of elements from different cultural systems, a commonplace everyday practice in societies like [ours], is unthinkable within this framework, or is seen as a kind of cultural misrule that will produce nothing more than a void. So the 'choices' are between ... a national culture or no culture at all.<sup>32</sup>

English had, it seemed to me, determined culture in a more or less singular manner. It had failed to give sufficient recognition and space to 'the real diversity of social orientations and cultures' among the diverse populations of secondary comprehensive schools. The application of theory to the traditional and established stuff of English also finds an echo in the attempt of Michael Apple (1996) to rethink the cultural politics of education:

A common culture can never be a general extension to everyone of what a minority mean and believe. Rather, and crucially, it requires not the stipulation of the facts, concepts, skills, and values that make us all 'culturally literate', *but the creation of the conditions necessary for all people to participate in the creation and re-creation of meanings and values.*<sup>33</sup>

This seems to me to argue for a much more dynamic and open conception of subject identity than has been the case in the institutions of English teaching. There remains a powerful conception of the potential function of state education involving notions of recognition of diversity, inclusivity and democracy. This is visible in the some of the work of Henri Giroux and Michael Apple in North America where the cultural politics of education is directly addressed in relation to questions about the distribution of knowledge, cultural authority, access and empowerment.<sup>34</sup> Writing recently, Andy

Green (1997) has formulated the imperatives of state education specifically around matters of culture, democracy and identity:

The major dilemma for government and educationalists in the coming decade will revolve around how to reconstruct cultures of citizenship and nationhood in ways which are appropriate to modern conditions and yet conducive both to a deepening of democracy and to a strengthening social solidarity.<sup>35</sup>

Although, of course, how you see these issues very much depends on your position. The contemporary and thoroughly postmodern emphasis on performativity in education and the centralization of controls of the curriculum, for example, seem to be very much at odds with the inclusive, democratic view expressed above by Green. The role of theory in my work on English teaching was to provide the means through which the contest of different notions of subject identity could be made visible and meaningful and could be related to larger questions about the functions of state education. Commentators on contemporary education have urged the need for a refreshed sense of direction. 'The challenge of the modern era,' Stuart Ranson (1994) has written, is 'the creation of a moral and political order that expresses and enables an active citizenship ... that has the capacity to participate actively as citizens in the shaping of a learning society and polity.'<sup>36</sup> But the validity of this challenge won't be recognized uniformly by all those who are engaged in the field. Pierre Bourdieu puts the case in more agonistic terms: 'Every field is the site of a more or less openly declared struggle for the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field.'<sup>37</sup> My work on English teaching was an original contribution to this process of contest. In it I sought to make explicit questions about theory and culture in English teaching to generate a debate about subject identity in ways that I was also able to enact as a classroom teacher of English and Media Studies in a comprehensive school, as a head of department and as a teacher trainer. In all these aspects of my work I continued to rethink the implications of the relations between English teaching in its institutionally powerful form, in its various alternative guises and the textual, linguistic and cultural theory that had challenged my own assumptions about what it should be.



## NOTES

**1. Introduction and Published Works**

- 1 See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); Raman Seldon and Peter Widdowson, *Contemporary Literary Theory* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); Patrick Parrinder, *The Failure of Theory* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1987); Peter Washington, *Fraud: Literary Theory and the End of English* (London: Fontana Press, 1989) - directed 'against literary post-structuralist pretensions to disciplinary, cultural and political authority ...', p. 11.
- 2 Terry Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 24 - 26.
- 3 *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O., 1975), the Bullock Report; *Learning to be Literate in a Democratic Society* (Sheffield: NATE); *English for Ages 5-16* (London: H.M.S.O., 1989); *English for Ages 5-16* (London: H.M.S.O., 1989), the Cox Report; *English in the National Curriculum* (London: H.M.S.O., 1995).
- 4 Characteristic, extensive accounts of English teaching are: *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O., 1975), the Bullock Report and Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991). Some accounts of English in Higher Education had begun to question the unities of the discourse, but little of that nature had been done to address the context of English teaching in schools.
- 5 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (London: Macmillan, 1988). Hunter draws attention to the work of both David Stow and James Kay-Shuttleworth, as pioneer figures in the genealogy of 'pastoral discipline': an unlikely but convincing link with contemporary English teaching.
- 6 This was how I read the arguments, such as they were, about the National Curriculum: the traditionalists, like John Marenbom, wanting to reinstall an English based on the national Literature as heritage and the liberals wishing to defend the post-Bullock orthodoxy. See Brian Cox, *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995) for a strangely partisan account of the arguments. Some account of my own position is given in Nick Peim, 'NATE and the Politics of English' in *English in Education*, vol. 24, no. 2, Summer 1990 and in Nick Peim, 'Keystage 4: Back to the Future' in Peter King and Robert Protherough (eds.), *The Challenge of English in the National Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- 7 Stuart Hall, 'Teaching Race' in *The English Curriculum: Race* (London: The English Centre), pp. 72 - 75.
- 8 See Roland Barthes *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1973); Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire* (Paladin: London, 1984).
- 9 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) and *Selections from Cultural Writings* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985); Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984).
- 10 I've attempted briefly to sketch out this position in the following pages and in the section on 'The Elements of Theory'. Some of the departmental practices referred to are described in Alastair West, 'The Production of Readers' in *The English Magazine*, Issue 17, 1986. The post-Bullock English mentioned is defined in the chapter, 'Histories of English Teaching'.

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- 11 Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); Stan Barstow *Joby* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988); Peter Terson, *Zigger Zagger [and] Mooney and his Caravans: Two Plays* (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1970). There has been a tradition, rarely explicated, in English teaching in schools of literature, ranging from *The Lord of the Flies* (1997) to *Zigger Zagger* (1970). At CSE 'classic' texts - often selected for their assumed relevance in terms of 'empathy' - included *Joby* (1988), *Kes* (1969), and the short stories of Roald Dahl; this tradition of a specifically school form of literature continues with GCSE English Literature where syllabuses include *An Inspector Calls* (1991), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1974), as well as newer examples, such as *Sumitra's Story* (1982) and *The Friends* (1977). See Nick Peim, *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (1993). See also Alastair West, 'The Limits of a Discourse', *The English Magazine*, no. 18, Summer, 1987 pp. 18 -22. West identifies 'an equally canonical selection of more recent texts and readings thought more relevant to adolescent readers' and continues 'This later canon is equally arbitrary and ideologically questionable as the one it replaced.' (p.22).
- 12 David Holbrook, *English for Maturity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); Anthony Adams and John Pearce, *Every English Teacher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Anthony Adams, *Team-Teaching and the Teaching of English* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970); Patrick Creber, *Lost for Words* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).
- 13 As expressed in F. R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930) and F. R. Leavis, *Nor Shall My Sword: Discourses on Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972).
- 14 See Alastair West, 'The Production of Readers', *The English Magazine*, Issue 17, 1986.
- 15 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), p. 23.
- 16 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 43.
- 17 David Holbrook, *English for the Rejected* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964). On occasions it was possible to manipulate the assessments at CSE to reward such low-status writings - that often lacked the surface smoothness of 'standard' English - with higher grades at CSE. This was not always possible, and was certainly out of the question at GCE 'O' level.
- 18 For various accounts of the communicative power of non-standard forms of language, see: William Labov 'The Logic of Nonstandard English' in Jock Young (ed.) *Tinker, Tailor - The Myth of Cultural Deprivation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) recently republished as 'Academic Ignorance and Black Intelligence' (<http://www.theatlantic.com/atlantic/issues/95sep/ets/labov.htm>); Harold Rosen, *Language and Class: A Critical look at the Theories of Basil Bernstein* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972); Harold Rosen, 'Language in the Education of the Working Classes' in *English in Education*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (1982), pp. 17 - 25; M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979). The issue of language, class, English and education is dealt with in the chapter, 'The Elements of Theory'.

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- 19 See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 1 - 60; and Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction* (London: Sage, 1979).
- 20 Richard Exon, 'The Post Structuralist Always Reads Twice', in *The English Magazine*, Issue 10, 1982.
- 21 Terry Eagleton, 'The End of Criticism' in *English in Education*, Vol. 16. no 2. (Summer, 1982); Catherine Belsey, 'Rereading English and the Uncommitted Reader' in *English in Education*, Vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1984).
- 22 See the *Literature Teaching Politics* series. For example, in *Literature Teaching Politics 6*, 1985, Literature Teaching Politics Conference Papers, Bristol Polytechnic, 1985: Fred Inglis, 'Remaking Culture: England and "English"', pp. 148 - 156; Jim Porteus and Steve Bennison, 'Crisis? Whose Crisis?: Schools, Literature and Academia', pp. 157 - 163; Cathy Bowden, 'How we should approach 6th form teaching with specific reference to "Bread and Roses" and a bit of personal history thrown in for good measure', pp. 164 - 173.
- 23 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *Positions* (London: Athlone, 1987), *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982); and *Positions* (London: Athlone, 1987).
- 24 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1977); *Discipline and Punish* (London: Allen Lane, 1977); *Technologies of the Self* (London: Tavistock, 1988).
- 25 My initial encounters with Lacanian theories came through various accounts in: Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986); Juliet Mitchell *Women: The Longest Revolution* (London: Virago, 1984); Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan* (London: Free Association Books, 1986). These were 'supplemented' by translations: Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock, 1977) and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).
- 26 This is a model of English exemplified in John Dixon's *Growth through English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) that represented a new constitution for the subject as the central component in a liberal, comprehensive education.
- 27 *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O., 1975), also referred to throughout as the Bullock Report.
- 28 William Labov 'The Logic of Nonstandard English' in Jock Young (ed.) *Tinker, Tailor - The Myth of Cultural Deprivation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). Labov's more recent involvement in the 'ebonics' controversy in the United States of America represent a continuation of this work in an educational context: see 'Testimony submitted by William Labov, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania', January 23, 1997 ([http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~labov/L102?Ebonics\\_test.html](http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~labov/L102?Ebonics_test.html)) and 'How I got into linguistics and what I got out of it' (<http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~labov/Papers.HowIgot.html>: 1997). See also M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hassan, *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective* (Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1985).
- 29 Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989).

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- 30 *The Languages Book* (London: The English Centre) was distributed through the I.L.E.A. and was based in a comparative rather than critical linguistics.
- 31 Harold Rosen 'Language in the Education of the Working Classes' in *English in Education*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1982), pp. 17 - 25.
- 32 Harold Rosen's interest in sociolinguistics, though, seemed to be to sensitize English teachers to the needs of non-standard language varieties without challenging the order of things that sustained the power of the standard. Rosen's later career as theorist was interesting in so far as it involved a liberal accommodation of theory as narratology to save the textual category of 'stories' from the critique that challenged the cultural power of Literature.
- 33 See Eric Michaels, 'Hollywood Iconography: A Warlpiri Reading' [1987] in his *Bad Aboriginal Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
- 34 John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) and *Reading the Popular* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). Fiske asserts that '... semiotic resistance that not only refuses the dominant meanings but constructs oppositional ones that serve the interests of the subordinate is as vital a base for the redistribution of power as is evasion.' and 'the ephemerality of popular tastes and fashions is an expression of the constantly changing experiences and formations of the people ...' *Reading the Popular*, p. 10 and p. 216. See also *Understanding Popular Culture* on the significant 'mobilizations' of country and western music 'in different white subcultures, in some Aboriginal and some Indian cultures' and Meaghan Morris, 'Things to do with shopping' in *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism* (London: Verso, 1988). It seems to me that there is a parallel, in the arena of English teaching, between these rethinkings of popular culture with the position expressed by sociolinguistics on dialectal variation, expressed characteristically in Peter Trudgill, *Accent Dialect and the School* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975).
- 35 Labov, William. 'The Logic of Nonstandard English' in Jock Young (ed.) *Tinker, Tailor - The Myth of Cultural Deprivation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).
- 36 Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* by (New York: Columbia UP, 1989).
- 37 This is the position developed in detail and at length in Ian Hunter's *Culture and Government* (London: Macmillan, 1988).
- 38 Terry Eagleton, 'The Subject of Literature', in *The English Magazine*, 15 (1985), pp. 4 - 7.
- 39 No doubt hunter would eschew the conflation of his genealogy with a sociological slant on language and culture.
- 40 Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- 41 *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O., 1975), the Bullock Report; Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991). See chapter, 'Histories of English'.
- 42 See Michael Marland, 'A Working Model' in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 1988, p. B11; Roger Knight, 'Trivial Pursuits' in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1989, p. B11; Jim Sweetman 'Off Course and Rolling Backwards?' in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1991, p. 39; Gunther Kress, 'Future Tense' *The Times Educational Supplement*, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1992, Special Report, p. I.

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- 43 GCSE examinations were introduced in 1987. The story of the shift from GCSE to the National Curriculum can be extrapolated from Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* and Brian Cox *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995). The history of syllabus changes in English may also be charted through the English Magazine (later *The English and Media Magazine*) and through *English in Education*. For a handy outline of recent changes in English teaching see also Jon Davison and Jane Dowson, *Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 35 - 54.
- 44 Nick Peim, 'Keystage 4: Back to the Future' in Peter King and Robert Protherough, eds., *The Challenge of English in the National Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- 45 Nick Peim, 'Redefining A-level' in *The English Magazine*, no. 17, Autumn 1986.
- 46 I had a lengthy correspondence with Geoff Parker, the chief moderator for the UCLES 1000/10 scheme, dealing with his concerns over some of the non-literary coursework that our A level English students were doing. When I wrote 'Redefining A level' for *The English Magazine* I was given sombre warnings by the editor about including references to the policing functions of moderators.
- 47 This position is probably best represented in the figure of the former black paper author, Brian Cox, in *Cox on Cox* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991) and *The Battle For The English Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).
- 48 Terry Eagleton, 'The Rise of English', in *Literary Theory* (1983), pp. 17 - 54; Brian Doyle, 'The Invention of English' in R. Colls and P. Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and culture, 1880-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986) and *English and Englishness* (London: Routledge, 1989); Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848 - 1932* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).
- 49 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (1983); John Dixon, *A Schooling in English* (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1991).
- 50 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (1988) and *Rethinking the School* (1994).
- 51 Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (1991) and Brian Cox, *The Battle For The English Curriculum* (1995); Ken Jones, 'The Cox Report: Working for Hegemony' in *English and the National Curriculum* (London: Kogan Page, 1992); and Alastair West, 'How We Live Now: LINC, Politics and the Language Police in Toytown LEA' in *The English and Media Magazine*, Issue 26, 1992.
- 52 S. Ball, J., A. Kenny, and D. Gardiner, 'Literacy, Politics and the Teaching of English' in I. Goodson, and P. Medway (eds.), *Bringing English to Order* (Lewes: Falmer Press, 1990), p. 47.
- 53 Brian Cox, *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (1995), p. 25.
- 54 Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), p. 153.
- 55 The similarity has been noted by many, including James Donald in the context of a discussion of the emergence of state schooling and of Thatcherite shifts in policy with the 1998 Education Reform Act. See 'Beacons of the Future: The State as Educator' and 'Mrs Thatcher's Legacy: The Re-regulation of Broadcasting and Education' in James Donald, *Sentimental Education* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 17 - 48 and 122 - 140.
- 56 *A Language for Life* (1975), the Bullock Report, p. 5.
- 57 Terry Eagleton, 'The Subject of Literature' (1985).

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- 58 See John Dixon, *A Schooling in English* (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1991), David Shayer *The Teaching Of English In Schools 1900 - 1972* (London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) and Alastair West, 'How We Live Now: Politics and the Language Police in Toytown LEA', *The English and Media Magazine*, 26 (1992), pp. 4-12.
- 59 NATE: the National Association for the Teaching of English, known for its 'broad church' stance and its disavowal of political questions relating to English teaching.
- 60 See Alastair West, 'How We Live Now: Politics and the Language Police in Toytown LEA' (1992) and Brian Cox, *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (1995).
- 61 This paragraph effectively describes English as defined in the National Curriculum in *English in the National Curriculum* (1995). It also accords with English as defined in NATE's *Learning to be Literate in a Democratic Society* (no date) and Brian Cox's *Cox on Cox* (1991).
- 62 See Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975); and Brian Doyle *English and Englishness* (London, Routledge, 1989).
- 63 *The Teaching of English in England* (London: H.M.S.O., 1921), the Newbolt Report.
- 64 In contemporary terms, this can be seen in statements on literature, language and the media in the National Curriculum and in Brian Cox's commentaries on its development: *Cox on Cox* (1991) and *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (1995).
- 65 Paul Moran and Nick Peim, 'Never Mind English: This is Theory in the Classroom' in Peter Brooker and Peter Humm (eds.), *Dialogue and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 90-105.
- 66 Richard Johnson, 'A New Road to Serfdom' in Education Group II, eds., *Education Limited*. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991), pp. 79 - 80.
- 67 See Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Rereading English* (London: Methuen, 1982); Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke, and Chris Weedon, *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (London: Methuen, 1985); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).
- 68 For example: James H. Kavanagh, *Emily Bronte* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Laura Brown, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Edward Larrissy, *William Blake* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Stan Smith, *W.H. Auden* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Steven Connor, *Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Alan Sinfield, *Alfred Tennyson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); William Shakespeare (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).
- 69 See, for example, School of Humanities, 'Degree Scheme in Arts and Humanities: English Subject Handbook, 1997 / 1998', De Montfort University, Leicester. Modules include 'The Working Class in Film and Literature', 'The Thirties in Britain - Alternative Voices' and several other non-literary options, as well as more conventionally literary modules, but with no obligation to balance the student's programme to include compulsory canonical 'literary' elements.
- 70 Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985) and Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Both deal systematically with poststructuralist thought, feminism and feminist criticism. Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1985) includes a significant section on

- 'Women as Subjects', pp. 192 - 200; Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) includes accounts of French feminism's influence on film theory, p. 98 and Laura Mulvey's influential account of the 'female gaze', p. 99.
- 71 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). Gilbert and Gubar claim that women 'must escape just those male texts which, defining them as 'Cyphers', deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen', p. 13, and celebrates the idea of 'true female literary authority', p. 73:
- 72 See Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives* (London: Verso, 1983): 'it was in American fiction that many British working class readers found a realism about city life ... and an unpatronizing portrayal of working class experience and speech ...', p. 35; and Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke, and Chris Weedon, *Rewriting English* which is critical of 'the texts, the canon, the great tradition safely installed in the literature syllabus and regularly reconsecrated in the annual round of published criticism.', p. 3, and seeks to define 'a broader definition of culture', p.7.
- 73 See Catherine Belsey *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980).
- 74 *Rereading Literature*, general editor Terry Eagleton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell).
- 75 See Jane Miller, *Many Voices: Bilingualism, Culture and Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).
- 76 Harold Rosen, *Stories and Meanings* (Sheffield: NATE, 1984).
- 77 See Elaine Millard, 'The Tyranny of Taste' in Post 14 Committee, *English A Level in Practice* (Sheffield: NATE, 1988), pp. 5 -19.
- 78 Terry Eagleton, 'The End of Criticism' in *English in Education*, Vol. 16. no 2. (Summer, 1982); Catherine Belsey, 'Rereading English and the Uncommitted Reader' in *English in Education*, Vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1984).
- 79 See, for example, Harold Rosen, 'Language in the Education of the Working Classes' (1982).
- 80 Fred Inglis, 'Remaking Culture: England and "English"'; Jim Porteus and Steve Bennison, 'Crisis? Whose Crisis?: Schools, Literature and Academia'; Cathy Bowden, 'How we should approach 6th form teaching with specific reference to "Bread and Roses" and a bit of personal history thrown in for good measure' pp. 148 - 156, 157 - 163, 164 - 173, *Literature Teaching Politics 6*, 1985, Literature Teaching Politics Conference Papers, Bristol Polytechnic, 1985.
- 81 See Peter Slade, *Child Drama* (London: University of London Press, 1958); Dorothy Heathcote, *Drama in Context* (Sheffield: NATE, 1980); Gavin Bolton, *Towards a Theory of Drama in Education* (London: Longman, 1979).
- 82 Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1985); John Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares* (Methuen: London, 1985); Terence Hawkes's *That Shakespeherean Rag* (Methuen: London, 1986); Graham Holderness (ed.), *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1988); Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (Routledge: London, 1992).
- 83 Terry Eagleton, 'The Subject of Literature', *The English Magazine*, no. 15 (1985).

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- 84 Elaine Millard, 'The Tyranny of Tastes' in Post 14 Committee, *English A Level in Practice* (Sheffield: NATE, 1988), pp. 5 -19.
- 85 This was the phrase used by the moderator for our Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate's A level English '9000/10' scheme.
- 86 See Harold Rosen, *Stories and Meanings* (Sheffield: NATE).
- 87 Quoted in Harold Rosen, *Stories and Meanings*, p. 4.
- 88 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) were differently influential in rethinking assessment in English.
- 89 Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas* (London: Methuen, 1985), Meaghan Morris, 'Things to do with shopping' in *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism* (London: Verso, 1988), John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) and *Reading the Popular* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); and John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991).
- 90 Paul Moran and Nick Peim, 'Never Mind English: This is Theory in the Classroom', pp. 90 - 93.
- 91 *English in The National Curriculum* (London: H.M.S.O., 1995).
- 92 *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was commissioned and edited for Routledge by Peter King of the School of Education at Loughborough University.
- 93 Harold Rosen, *Stories and Meanings* (c. 1984).
- 94 See Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (London: Athlone, 1987) and Michel Foucault: 'What is an Author', in David Lodge (ed.) *Modern Criticism and Theory* (London: Longman, 1988).
- 95 Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Ivor Goodson and Peter Medway, *Bringing English to Order* (Lewes: The Falmer Press, 1990).
- 96 See *English in the National Curriculum* (1995).
- 97 See *English in the National Curriculum* (1995) and Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (1991).
- 98 This is crude expression of the position expressed in Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1986), relating the cultivation of specific cultural habits and tastes to specific social groups.
- 99 Paul Moran and Nick Peim, 'Never Mind English: This is Theory in the Classroom' (1989). Nick Peim, 'GCSE Post-Structuralism: It Can Be Done' (1989), p. 105.

## 2. The Elements of Theory

- 1 Nick Peim, 'Keystage 4: Back to the Future' in Peter King and Robert Protherough (eds.), *The Challenge of English in the National Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 167.
- 2 Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. xiv - xv.
- 3 See Christopher Norris, *The Truth about Postmodernism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1993) and Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration* (London: Verso, 1988).
- 4 See, for example, Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. xiv - xv.



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- 5 Brian Cox, *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994), p.181.
- 6 The 'London school': James Britton and Harold Rosen are its key representatives. Annette Patterson defines the London School thus: 'a group largely based at the London Institute of Education and including such well known English educators and writers as Barnes, Britton, Dixon, Martin, Meek and the Rosens ...' and continues: 'The work of the London School centred during the 1960s and 1970s on the promotion of English as a technique for 'personal growth' understood to be a challenge and departure from the elitism of Leavisism and the formalism of New Criticism.' Pre-publication draft of "'Personal Response" and English Teaching' for Denise Meredyth and Deborah Tyler (eds.), *Child, Citizen and Culture: Genealogies of Australian Education* (Brisbane: Griffith University: Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, 1992), pp. 21 - 24.
- 7 Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975); Stephen Ball, Alex Kenny and David Gardiner, 'Literacy, Politics and the Teaching of English' in *Bringing English to Order* (Lewes: The Falmer Press, 1990), pp. 47 - 86. In both cases there are accounts of how the language work of 'the London school' tends under a particular way of reading Vygotsky to take a liberal creative turn, with a functionalist emphasis on group talk, participation and self-expression.
- 8 This transition can be represented by comparing the contents of Rosen's work on education and class, in Harold Rosen, 'Language in the Education of the Working Classes', *English in Education*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (1982) and Harold Rosen, *Stories and Meanings* (Sheffield: NATE). Both Rosen and Britton have been sanctified within NATE, being represented as joint father figures embodying the essential spirit of the subject.
- 9 See G. Batho, *Political Issues in Education* (London: Cassell, 1989), pp. 20 - 43.
- 10 Described in Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (1975).
- 11 Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (1975).
- 12 An account of the genealogy of English teaching is offered in the chapter, 'Histories of English Teaching' of this deposition.
- 13 See Laurence Stenhouse, 'The Humanities Curriculum Project', in *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 1 November, 1968), p.27.
- 14 See *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O., 1975), the Bullock Report; and James Britton, 'Vygotsky's contribution to pedagogical theory', in Susan Brindley, *Teaching English* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 259 - 263.
- 15 James Donald 'Beyond Our Ken: English, Englishness, and the National Curriculum' in Peter Brooker and Peter Humm (eds.), *Dialogue and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 13-30, p. 25.
- 16 John Dixon, *A Schooling in English* (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1991).
- 17 *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O., 1975), the Bullock Report. The Bullock Report remains influential, and in recent times has been nostalgically hailed as epitomizing a sober definition of the true purpose and shape of the subject. See Jane Miller, Review of V.J. Lee, *English Literature in Schools* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987) in *The English Magazine*, Summer, 1987, pp. 38 - 39.
- 18 Key texts include Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control: Vol. 1.* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971); Basil Bernstein (ed.), *Class, Codes and Control: Vol. 2* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973); M.A.K. Halliday,

- 'Language in a Social Perspective', *Educational Review*, 23 (1971), pp. 165 - 188. M.A.K. Halliday, *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (London: Arnold, 1973).
- 19 See Anthony Adams and John Pearce, *Every English Teacher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974) and Anthony Adams, *Team-Teaching and the Teaching of English* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970).
- 20 Harold Rosen, 'Language in the Education of the Working Classes', *English in Education*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (1982), pp. 17 - 25.
- 21 Harold Rosen, *Stories and Meanings* (c. 1984).
- 22 Alastair West, 'The Production of Readers' *The English Magazine*, no. 17, Autumn, 1986, pp. 4 - 9; Alastair West, 'The Limits of a Discourse', *The English Magazine*, no. 18, Summer, 1987, pp. 18 -22.
- 23 Brian Cox, *The Battle For The English Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995). Alastair West, 'The Centrality of Literature', in Susan Brindley, *Teaching English* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 124 - 132.
- 24 Jon Davison and Jane Dowson, *Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 51, gives a table of events in the recent history of English examinations from the introduction of GCSE in 1987 to the implementation of Dearing's modifications to the National Curriculum in 1996.
- 25 See the description of this category in *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, p. 178.
- 26 *A Language for Life* (1975); William Labov, 'The Logic of Nonstandard English' in Jock Young (ed.) *Tinker, Tailor - The Myth of Cultural Deprivation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (1971).
- 27 See, for example, *Learning to be Literate in a Democratic Society* (Sheffield: NATE).
- 28 According to Ian Hunter the normative function of English is its inescapable *raison d'être*. See Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (London: Macmillan, 1988).
- 29 See Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1987); Chris Weedon: *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: 1987): both were key texts among the many outlines of theory in terms of their emphasis on the social and political relevance of post-structuralist theory.
- 30 See Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989) and Hilary Janks (ed.), *The Critical Language Awareness Series* (Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton and Wits University Press, 1993).
- 31 See Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government: the Emergence of Literary Education* (1988).
- 32 See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1977) where the idea of 'cultural capital' indicates an unevenly differentiated cultural field in the institutions of education; Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Aldershot: Gator, 1979) where the idea of a counter-culture represents the school as an environment for the conflict around cultural differences; and M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979) where the culturally-loaded nature of the school as a linguistic arena is outlined.

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- 33 Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), M.A.K. Halliday, 'Language in a Social Perspective', *Educational Review*, 23 (1971) and William Labov, 'The Logic of Nonstandard English' in Jock Young (ed.) *Tinker, Tailor - The Myth of Cultural Deprivation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) are significant here.
- 34 Athol Fugard, 'Sizwe Bansi is Dead' in *Township Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon, *Woza Albert!* (London: Methuen, 1983). Both were taught - unusually - in work I had done with students preparing for O level, GCSE and A level coursework at various times. I selected these texts as bearers of significant and explicit political content.
- 35 *The Plays of Georg Buchner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- 36 James Callaghan's Ruskin speech: cited in Education Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *Unpopular Education* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp. 218 - 220.
- 37 See Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992). This book provides an account of the rise, development and influence of Cultural Studies.
- 38 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).
- 39 See Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Rereading English* (London: Methuen, 1982) and Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke and Chris Weedon, *Rewriting English* (London: Methuen, 1985). Both exemplify this attraction to Cultural Studies and include work in Cultural Studies broaching culture and social relations.
- 40 See Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- 41 See, for example, Michelle Stanworth, *Gender and Schooling* (London: Hutchinson, 1983); Dale Spender, *Invisible Women: Schooling Scandal* (London: Women's Press, 1983); *Education for All* (London: H.M.S.O., 1983), the Swann Report.
- 42 Paul Ashton and Michael Simons 'Reading and Race: A Short Story Case Study' *The English Magazine*, Issue 4, 1980. Marion Glastonbury, 'What Books Tell Girls: A Memoir of Early Reading' in *The English Magazine*, Issue 9, 1982.
- 43 *The English Curriculum: Race*, p. 73.
- 44 Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).
- 45 See G. Batho, *Political Issues in Education*, pp. 20 - 43. This book gives a condensed, historical and representative account of the development of state education policy in England and Wales.
- 46 See Louis Althusser, *Essays On Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984).
- 47 Antony Easthope, *British Post-Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 17.
- 48 Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1987).
- 49 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 218.
- 50 Nick Peim, *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 45 - 47.
- 51 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*.

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- 52 Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Aldershot: Gator, 1979)
- 53 See, for example, Sifree Makoni, 'Renting Not Owning English', unpublished conference paper (English Teachers Connect, The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1997) on 'Bakhtinian double voicing' in the context of state education.
- 54 Paul Corrigan, *Schooling the Smash Street Kids* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 70.
- 55 Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 56.
- 56 For example, Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 57 Through Cultural Studies, sociology developed its interest in matters of culture, representation and textuality. See, for example, Dick Hebdige, 'From culture to hegemony' in Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1993).
- 58 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *Positions* (London: Athlone, 1987), *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) and *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982)
- 59 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology* (1976), p. 158.
- 60 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (1987).
- 61 In Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 280.
- 62 Ibid., p. 289.
- 63 Ibid., p. 290.
- 64 Ibid., p. 292
- 65 Ibid., p. 293.
- 66 Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author', in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory* (London: Longman, 1988) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1977).
- 67 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (1987), p. 19.
- 68 See Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993): Derrida 'sees the sign as a structure of difference' p. 33; Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1987) refers to Derrida's 'critique of the Saussurian sign', p. 25.
- 69 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (1987), p. 26.
- 70 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1976), p. 9, p. 128.
- 71 Terence Hawkes, *That Shakespeherian Rag* (Methuen: London, 1986); Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (Routledge: London, 1992).
- 72 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (1987).
- 73 Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism* (1987), p. 56.
- 74 Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author' (1988), p. 201.
- 75 Ibid., p. 201.
- 76 Ibid., p. 202.
- 77 Ibid., p. 202.

- 78 Ibid., p. 209
- 79 Ibid., p. 210
- 80 Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in Robert Young (ed.), *Untying the Text* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 48 -78.
- 81 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1977), pp. 48 - 49.
- 82 See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Allen Lane, 1977).
- 83 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1977), p. 185.
- 84 Michel Foucault, 'Afterword: The Subject and Power' in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 225.
- 85 See Ian Hunter's account of the role of James Kay-Shuttleworth in the development of the idea of state education in *Culture and Government* (1988), pp. 52 - 7, pp. 81 - 64 and *Rethinking the School* (1994), p. 68 - 75.
- 86 See Ian Hunter's account of David Stow's prototype school in *Culture and Government* (1988), pp. 68 - 71; pp. 75 - 78.
- 87 See Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- 88 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 95 - 100.
- 89 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock, 1977): p. 147, p. 149. p. 176.
- 90 See Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan* (London: Free Association Books, 1986), pp. 80 - 82.
- 91 My description of Lacan is based on some reading of Jacques Lacan: *Ecrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock, 1977); *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); but is also informed by a number of secondary mediations, notably: Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, Chapter 6, 'On the Subject of Lacan' in *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 93 -121; Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan* (London: Free Association Books, 1986), Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Allen Lane, 1974); Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher, eds., *Lacan and the Subject of Language* (London: Routledge, 1991).
- 92 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock, 1977), p. 150.
- 93 Ibid., p. 151.
- 94 Jacqueline Rose, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).
- 95 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (1977), p. 152.
- 96 Ibid., p. 154.
- 97 Ibid., p. 153
- 98 Ibid., p. 155.
- 99 Louis Althusser, *Essays On Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984).
- 100 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), *Zettel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968).
- 101 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977).

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- 102 Nick Peim, *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, pp. 45 - 47.
- 103 In some accounts of poststructuralism and postmodernism language or textuality seems to be supervene over any grasp of real social life. Poststructuralism's insistence on the slipperiness and unrootedness of all signification seems to imply an absolute relativism and absence of ethic or responsibility. This position is given full expression in Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration* (London: Verso, 1988) and Christopher Norris, *The Truth about Postmodernism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1993). Richard Rorty presents a different account of post-structuralist thinking, allowing for ethical responsibility within a relativist framework of ideas in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 4 - 6, pp. 189 - 198. The case for poststructuralist and postmodernist perspectives in English was expressed, albeit briefly, in a paper I delivered at the 1996 NCTE conference in Heidelberg: 'The Postmodern Politics of English'.
- 104 As stated above, I addressed the question of postmodernism and English teaching in a paper delivered as a featured speaker to the US NCTE conference at the Max Weber House in Heidelberg entitled 'The Postmodern Politics of English' (August, 1996).
- 105 Some discussion of postmodernism and education is available in Robin Usher and Richard Edwards, *Postmodernism and Education* (London: Routledge, 1994). The section on education and textuality (pp. 136 - 153) has a good deal to say about English teaching - implicitly at least - while the section on grand narratives and 'efficiency and resistance' (pp. 172 - 185) corresponds to the position briefly outlined here.
- 106 See David Shayer, *The Teaching Of English In Schools 1900 - 1972* (London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) and John Dixon, *A Schooling in English: Critical Episodes in the Struggle to Shape Literary and Cultural Studies* (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1991). Both Shayer and Dixon represent English as itself a vehicle for enlightenment, realization and fulfilment, reaching towards complete development in classic modernist terms.
- 107 See Robin Usher and Richard Edwards, *Postmodernism and Education* (London: Routledge, 1994): 'The principle of performativity in education is linked to the performativity of the social system, with each aspect of the educational process being subject to the requirements of efficiency.' p. 174.
- 108 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 327 - 356.
- 109 Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Semiotexte, 1983), *Simulations* (New York: Semiotexte, 1983), *The Illusion of the End* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).
- 110 See Richard Edwards and Robin Usher, *Postmodernism and Education* (London: Routledge, 1994). Edwards and Usher include a section in their book on education, poststructuralism and textuality that parallels some of the work I was doing in English teaching: ch. 7, 'Education and Textuality', pp. 136 - 153.
- 111 Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).
- 112 Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (1971), especially chapters 7 - 10.
- 113 Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (1971), p. 122.
- 114 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

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- 115 M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), p. 26.
- 116 M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* (1979), p. 24.
- 117 Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (1971), p. 122.
- 118 M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* (1979).
- 119 M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic* (1979), p. 24.
- 120 William Labov, 'How I got into linguistics and what I got out of it' (<http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~labov/Papers.HowIgot.html>: 1997), p. 4 - 5.
- 121 William Labov, 'The Logic of Nonstandard English' in Jock Young (ed.) *Tinker, Tailor - The Myth of Cultural Deprivation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).
- 122 Harold Rosen, 'Language in the Education of the Working Class' in *English in Education*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (1982), pp. 17 - 25; *Language and Class: A Critical look at the Theories of Basil Bernstein* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972).
- 123 William Labov, 'How I got into linguistics and what I got out of it' (1997), p. 4 - 5.
- 124 Ibid., p. 5.
- 125 Something of the intensity of debate about language issues in South Africa in the aftermath of apartheid is expressed in the thought of Neville Alexander, whose work is a powerful reminder of the politics of language issues in education. For example, in the new South Africa Alexander detects an 'automatic steering on television and in newspapers, mainly towards English, but also towards Afrikaans.' Language Plan Task Group statement 'Government Should Pressure Media to Promote Black Languages' ([http://www/virginia.edu/SALang,etc/langtag\(na\).h...ANCinformationservices](http://www/virginia.edu/SALang,etc/langtag(na).h...ANCinformationservices), 1996).
- 126 Hilary Janks, 'Why We Still Need Critical Language Awareness in South Africa' Unpublished paper, 1996, p. 18.
- 127 Hilary Janks (ed.), *The Critical Language Awareness Series* (Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton and Wits University Press, 1993).
- 128 Hilary Janks, *The Research and Development of Critical Language Awareness Material for Use in South African Secondary Schools*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Lancaster University, 1995, p. 413.
- 129 Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse' (1981), pp. 48 -78.
- 130 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), p. 48.
- 131 See *Curriculum 2005* (Pretoria: National Department of Education, 1997).
- 132 H. Granville, H. Janks, M. Mphahlele, E. Ramani, Y. Reed and P. Watson: 'English with or without G(u)ilt: A Position Paper on Language in Education Policy for South Africa', Applied English Language Studies, University of the Witwatersrand presented at the English Teachers Connect International Conference, 12 - 14 July, 1997 at the University of the Witwatersrand. p. 21.
- 133 LINC: Language in the National Curriculum. 'The authors of the materials see their work as an attempt to form a synthesis of the language theories of Britton and Halliday' from Jon Davison and Jane Dowson, *Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.7.
- 134 Ronald Carter (ed.), *Knowledge about Language and the Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990).
- 135 See West, Alastair. 'How We Live Now: Politics and the Language Police in Toytown LEA', *The English and Media Magazine*, 26 (1992), pp. 4-12.

- 136 Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), pp. 25 - 33; *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p.6, pp. 141 - 143; *English in the National Curriculum* (London: H.M.S.O., 1995).
- 137 See Nick Peim, 'Knowledge about Language: A Grammar for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', *The Secondary English Magazine*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (April, 1999).
- 138 Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas* (London: Methuen, 1985); *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991); *Living Room Wars* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- 139 Donna A. Demac, 'New Communications Technologies: a Plug and Play World?' in John Downing, Ali Mohammadi, Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, *Questioning the Media* (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 207 - 216.
- 140 John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993)
- 141 John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 313.
- 142 E. Katz and T. Liebes, 'On the Critical Ability of Television Viewers', paper presented at the seminar, 'Rethinking the Audience', University of Tübingen, February 1987 (quoted in John Fiske, *Television Culture*).
- 143 John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).
- 144 *The English Magazine / The English and Media Magazine* (London: The English Centre, from 1980).
- 145 John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), p. 178
- 146 Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, 'US Media Covers the World' in John Downing, Ali Mohammadi and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi (eds.), *Questioning the Media* (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 296 -307; Ali Mohammadi and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
- 147 See Neena Behl, 'Equalizing Status: Television and Tradition in an Indian Village', in James Lull (ed.), *World Families Watch Television* (London: Sage, 1988), pp. 136 -157 and Manjunath Pendakur 'A Political Economy of Television: State, Class, and Corporate Confluence in India', in Gerald Sussman and John A. Lent (eds.), *Transnational Communications: Wiring the Third World* (London: Sage, 1991), pp. 234 -262.
- 148 Donna A. Demac, 'A Plug 'n' Play World?' in John Downing, Ali Mohammadi and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi (eds.), *Questioning the Media* (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 195 - 206.
- 149 *The National Curriculum in English* (1995); Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (1991).
- 150 Gayatri Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* (London: Routledge, 1990); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978); Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory* (London: Verso, 1992).
- 151 Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny* (New Left Books: London, 1979).
- 152 Ibid., p. 175.
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- 155 Ibid., p. 331.
- 156 Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848 - 1932* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1983), p. 230



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- 156 Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848 - 1932* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1983), p. 230
- 157 Ibid., p. 230.
- 158 Ibid., p. 231.
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- 160 Ibid., p. 1.
- 161 Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Rereading English* (Methuen, New Accents: London 1982)
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- 167 Ibid., p. 18.
- 168 Ibid., p. 18.
- 169 Ibid., p. 18.
- 170 Peter Doyle, Ibid., p. 28.
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- 174 Terry Eagleton, *An Introduction to Literary Theory* (1983), p. 17
- 175 Ibid., p. 22.
- 176 Ibid., p. 216.
- 177 Ibid., p. 217.
- 178 Derek Longhurst, Ibid., p. 150.
- 179 Terence Hawkes, *That Shakespeherian Rag* (Methuen: London, 1986) and *Meaning by Shakespeare* (Routledge: London, 1992); Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1985);
- 180 Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 3.
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- 182 Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
- 183 Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (1980), p. 144.
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- 185 Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies* (Routledge: London, 1991), p.18
- 186 Ibid., p. 60 - 61.
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- 189 Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985).
- 190 Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).
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- 207 Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (Routledge: London, 1992), p.143.
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- 213 Richard Johnson, 'What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?' CCCS stencilled paper No. 74. p.35
- 214 James W. Carey, *Communication and Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 195.
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### 3. Histories of English Teaching

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- the Limits of Postmodern Theory', [http://vest.theorysc.gu.se/vest\\_mails/0742.html](http://vest.theorysc.gu.se/vest_mails/0742.html), p. 1.
- 2 David Shayer, *The Teaching of English in Schools, 1900-1970* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); John Dixon, *A Schooling in English: Critical Episodes in the Struggle to Shape Literary and Cultural Studies* (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1991).
  - 3 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness* (London: Routledge, 1989); Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848-1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (London: Macmillan, 1988), Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989).
  - 4 Brian Doyle, 'The Hidden History of English Studies', in Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Rereading English* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 17-31; and 'The Invention of English', in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 89-115; and *English and Englishness* (London: Routledge, 1989); Terry Eagleton, 'The Rise of English' in *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).
  - 5 Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny* (New Left Books: London, 1979); Terry Eagleton, 'The Rise of English' in *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); Peter Widdowson, 'The Crisis in English Studies', in Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Re-Reading English* (New York: Methuen, 1982); Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke, and Chris Weedon *Rewriting English* (London: Methuen, 1985).
  - 6 Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920*, pp. 89-115; Brian Doyle, 'The Hidden History of English Studies', in Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Rereading English*, pp. 17-31; and Perry Anderson, *English Questions* (London: Verso, 1992).
  - 7 Margaret Mathieson's key study of English teaching and English teachers *The Preachers of Culture* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975) traces these links very thoroughly.
  - 8 *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O., 1975), the Bullock Report.
  - 9 *The Teaching of English in England* (London: H.M.S.O., 1921), the Newbolt Report. Margaret Mathieson's *The Preachers of Culture* (1975) represents it as central.
  - 10 The role of the English Association, for example, is significant in culturalist pressures for the establishment of English on the school curriculum. See Brian Doyle *English and Englishness* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 31 - 39.
  - 11 Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932).
  - 12 Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (1975); Michael Raleigh and Michael Simons, 'Where We've Been: A brief History of English Teaching 1920 - 1970', *The English Magazine*, 1980.
  - 13 David Shayer, *The Teaching Of English In Schools 1900 - 1972* and John Dixon, *A Schooling in English* celebrate Newbolt as a significant moment in the subject's progressive history. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* and Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness* represent a more critical account of Newbolt's ideological premises and purposes.

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- 14 As occurred recently in the public arena in discourses concerned with the form and place of English in the National Curriculum. A recent account of the episode is available in Jon Davison and Jane Dowson, *Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 35 - 74.
- 15 Raleigh and Simons, 'Where We've Been: A Brief History of English Teaching 1920 - 1970' (1980), p. 3.
- 16 Ibid., p.3.
- 17 The Swann Report, for example, refers to the teaching of multicultural literature in relation to race riots in the UK. See Terence Hawkes, *That Shakespeherian Rag* (Methuen: London, 1986).
- 18 See Caroline Benn, 'Common Education and the Radical Tradition' in Ali Rattansi and David Reeder, *Rethinking Radical Education* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992); G. Batho, *Political Issues in Education*; Donald K. Jones, *The Making of the Education System* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), John F. Mann, *Education* (London: Pitman, 1979), Harold Silver (ed.) *Equal Opportunity in Education* (London Methuen, 1973).
- 19 Michael Raleigh and Michael Simons, 'Where We've Been: A brief History of English Teaching 1920 - 1970'. This idea is constantly the theme of key documents in modern English: notably The Bullock Report, The Kingman Report, The Cox Report and a whole liberal tradition of the advocacy of the subject.
- 20 On a personal / professional note, Leavis had been crucial in my development as an English student and as an English teacher. I was schooled in a Leavisite environment and as an undergraduate was haunted by Leavis's presence / absence ending up writing a dissertation on Leavis's theoretical foundations for B.A. finals, though with a strict warning about the dangers of the topic. As a newly qualified English teacher - as indicated in the introduction - I worked in a department that had fused a Leavisite sense of the cultural value of great literature, strangely perhaps, with an egalitarian commitment to the ideal of the still relatively new comprehensive education. Accounts giving prominence to the role of Leavis in English are legion. See Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (1975), Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny* (1979), Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983).
- 21 F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); *Revaluation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); *The Great Tradition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). F. R. Leavis, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930). This strand runs throughout Leavis from *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930) through *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1933) - co-authored with Denys Thompson, himself cited as a key figure in the development of English teaching - to the later phase of *Nor Shall My Sword* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972) and beyond.
- 22 F. R. Leavis, *Nor Shall My Sword* (1972). References to Jimi Hendrix (p. 189) and Tottenham Hotspur football club (p. 92) indicate an unawareness of the redefinitions of popular culture that was to come with the development of cultural studies, that yet borrowed some of Leavis's concern for cultural 'health'. *Nor Shall My Sword* follows *English Literature in Our Time and the University* (1969) in Leavis's oeuvre and anticipates *The Living Principle* (1974) and *Words, Thought*

- and Creativity* (1976): they are all concerned with the plight of civilization, with the ideal function of the university as elite centre and with the promotion of the significance of English literature in relation to spiritual health.
- 23 Leavis's relations with philosophy - including an account of the philosophical assumptions implicit in Leavis's critical approach - are fully explored in John Casey, *The Language of Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1966).
- 24 Alastair West, 'The Centrality of Literature' in Susan Brindley *Teaching English* (London: Routledge, 1994), *The National Curriculum in English* (London: H.M.S.O., 1995) and current KS4 syllabus documents. The position I later developed espoused a more Gramscian faith in the potential philosophical capacities of comprehensive school populations, retained a sense of teaching as a kind of cultural mission, but given an unLeavisian egalitarian slant, critical of the social arbitrariness of the category of literature and based on a quite different notion of reading practices. As indicated, Leavis had been a powerful influence on my own conceptions of English, but also influenced my sense of the value of literature and its role in state comprehensive education, providing a sense of its missionary, cultural function that I had felt to be especially significant in the comprehensive school in my early teaching career.
- 25 Denys Thompson is the subject of 'Some Uses of English: Deny Thompson and the Development of English in Secondary Schools', CCCS Stencilled paper No. SP64, University of Birmingham, 1981. Raymond O'Malley, crofter, pacifist, progressive educationist, university teacher of English and Education, was my director of studies for a while and taught me during my PGCE year. I was aware of his connection with Leavis about which he wrote to me in 1976. Raymond O'Malley and Denys Thompson collaborated on the *English One to English Five* series (London: Heinemann, 1958) that became the classic English teaching textbook of the 1950s and 1960s.
- 26 *Half Our Future* (London: H.M.S.O., 1963), the Newsom Report. The Report addressed the education of pupils between 13 and 16 considered to be of average and less than average ability. Although The Newsom Report accepted the tripartite system, it did put onto the agenda the inadequate existing provision for pupils falling into its target category.
- 27 F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson *Culture and Environment* (1942), Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1932), David Stow *The Training System, the Moral Training School, and the Normal Seminary* (London: Longman Brown Green, 1850); James Kay-Shuttleworth, *Four Periods of Public Education* (London: The Harvester Press, 1973) and *Memorandum on Public Education* (London: Woburn Books, 1969). Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971). Deficit model sociology is expressed (albeit unwittingly) in the context of English teaching by Peter Abbs in *Education for Diversity* (London: Heinemann, 1969) where the representative of progressive English advocates the virtues of middle-class child rearing and language development as superior to working-class practices and language which are denigrated as limited and limiting.
- 28 In Leavis this idea of cultural disinheritance is expressed as the loss of a past form of life: 'what we have lost is the organic community ... and a responsive adjustment growing out of immemorial experience, to the natural environment and the rhythm of the year.' *Culture and Environment*, p.1.

- 29 'Popular culture was not identified by the people but by others, and it still carries two older senses: inferior kinds of work (cf. popular literature, popular press as distinguished from quality press); and work deliberately setting out to win favour ...' Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780 - 1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p 199.
- 30 The cultural mission of Leavisism goes along with the idea of literature as the open occasion for self-exploratory / speculative reading - in the famous formulation of the development of judgement: 'This is so, isn't it?' - that is more congenial to the spirit of liberalism that English increasingly came to espouse. See Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (1988), pp. 222 - 226.
- 31 Progressive education in this country tends to be associated with a particular historical period, whereas on the continent the idea of reform pedagogy as an ongoing movement is much stronger and has a much more significant influence on state education practices where Jena-plan schemes, Dalton-plan schools and Montessori schools exist in the public sector.
32. Quoted in Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture*, p. 86.
- 33 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780 - 1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958 / 1977).
- 34 Caldwell Cook *The Play Way* (London: Heinemann 1917). Caldwell Cook was, ironically perhaps, actually a teacher of Leavis at the Perse school in Cambridge).
- 35 One of the dominant themes of *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* was to restore the validity of popular culture, involving a critique of the assumptions of English teaching for their cultural bias.
- 36 See Ali Rattansi and David Reeder (ed.), *Rethinking Radical Education* (1992); Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (1975).
- 37 *Secondary Education, with Special Reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1938), the Spens Report, p. 152.
- 38 John Dixon, *Growth through English* (1967).
- 39 David Stow, *The Training System, the Moral Training School, and the Normal Seminary* (1850), James Kay-Shuttleworth, *Four Periods of Public Education* (1973) and *Memorandum on Public Education* (1969).
- 40 See Margaret Phillips's *Education of the Emotions through Sentiment Development* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937); Marjorie Hourd's *The Education of the Poetic Spirit* (London: Heinemann, 1949); Herbert Read, *Education through Art* (London: Faber, 1946); Marion Richardson, *Art and the Child* (London: University of London Press, 1948) - all concerned with the child as artist and with the spiritually positive benefits of the arts as a form of personalist, developmental education.
- 41 See Kevin J. Brehony, 'What's Left of Progressive Primary Education' in Ali Rattansi and David Reeder, eds., *Rethinking Radical Education* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992), pp. 196 - 221.
- 42 The negative effects on the colliers - 'the boys I went to school with' - of the pursuit of material wealth and education is expressed by Lawrence: 'the din - din - dinning of board schools, books, cinemas, clergymen, the whole national and human consciousness hammering on the fact of material prosperity above all things.' D.H. Lawrence, 'Nottingham and the Mining Country' in D.H. Lawrence, *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p. 119. This rejection of

- materialist values is a common theme among cultural advocates of English, including Leavis, Holbrook and Inglis.
- 43 Fred Inglis, another former pupil of Leavis, writing in 1969, promotes the value of literature teaching for all as an antidote to 'spiritual impoverishment', and 'our loveless, placeless homes' in Fred Inglis, *The Englishness of English Teaching* (London: Longman, 1969), p. 22.
- 44 Peter Slade formulated the idea of creative drama in *Child Drama* (London: University of London Press, 1958): and was a significant influence in a tradition. See Gavin Bolton, *Towards a Theory of Drama in Education* (London: Longman, 1979) (and note Bolton's references to Piaget and Vygotsky); Brian Way, *Development Through Drama* (London: Longman, 1967); Dorothy Heathcote, *Drama in Context* (Sheffield: NATE, 1980).
- 45 See Raymond O'Malley, 'Creative Writing in Schools' in *English in Education* Vol. 3 no. 3, Autumn, 1969. As indicated earlier, O'Malley is something of a representative figure, drawing together various significant aspects of English: Leavisism, progressivism, creativity and an enthusiasm for comprehensive education. O'Malley's credentials were an interesting amalgam: a former pupil of Leavis and contributor to *Scrutiny* who was a founder member and significant contributor to *The Use of English*, co-author with Denys Thompson of a set of English textbooks for schools, teacher at Dartington Hall, later teacher trainer at Cambridge University where he took classes on progressive education, he wrote 'Creative Writing in Schools' which appeared in the influential NATE journal in 1969. O'Malley was influenced by the work of Arthur Clegg in the West Riding of Yorkshire as much as by Leavis's cultural mission. See Arthur B. Clegg (ed.), *The Excitement of Writing* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964). O'Malley espoused the ideal of the comprehensive school and believed in the value of progressive education for all. As an English teacher he was interested both in retaining a sense of the significance of the cultural status and value of the great tradition, but was also committed to ideas about self-expression through talk and creative writing and offers a useful embodiment of the condition of English teaching and its emergent dominant form in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.
- 46 Chris Searle's *The World in a Classroom* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative, 1977) combines a sense of a political mission with the cultural assumptions of creativity. The later work of David Holbrook is a more desperately sombre version of this combination. See *Education, Nihilism and Survival* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977). Holbrook laments 'the failure of education to foster processes of personal development which are essential for democracy, while pursuing the chimeras of dogmatic egalitarianism', p. 113, and diagnoses the 'existential neurosis' of 'affluent, materialistic society', p. 63. My own genesis as an English teacher was influenced by discourses around personalist creativity and active engagement that derived from a history I was largely unaware of at the time.
- 47 Anthony Adams, *Team-Teaching and the Teaching of English* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970), p. 14.
- 48 *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O., 1975), the Bullock Report, p. 134.
- 49 Ian Hunter, *Rethinking the School* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994).

- 50 It finds written expression perhaps most quintessentially in *Learning to be Literate, English in a Democratic Society* (Sheffield: NATE, c.1989). *A Language for Life* (1975) (The Bullock Report) is a more full, if more difficult and tortuous expression of the position.
- 51 See Jane Miller, Review of V.J. Lee, *English Literature in Schools* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987) in *The English Magazine*, Summer, 1987, p. 39: 'How sad it is to return to the Bullock report after all these years, and to their sane and down to earth piece on literature. What an impressive attempt it was to explore and reflect the complexity of classrooms as well as the complexity of language.'
- 52 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (1988) and *Rethinking the School* (1994).
- 53 See G. Batho, *Political Issues in Education*.
- 54 Bob Evans, 'Countesthorpe College, Leicester' in B. Moon (ed.), *Comprehensive Schools: Challenge and Change* (London: NFER Nelson, 1983).
- 55 Lawrence Stenhouse, 'Open-Minded Teaching', *New Society*, 24 July, 1969.
- 56 Nick Peim, 'LINC: Reading The World Of English' in *English in Education*, Autumn 1992; *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 154 - 172.
- 57 Vygotsky's theories of language have been influential in English, especially in the work of the 'London school'. See Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in Society* (London: Harvard University Press, 1978) and *Thought and Language* (London: MIT Press, 1986). See also James Britton, 'Vygotsky's Contribution to Pedagogical Theory' in Susan Brindley (ed.), *Teaching English* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 259 - 263.
- 58 *The Teaching of English in England* (London: H.M.S.O., 1921), the Newbolt Report, p. 21.
- 59 *Half Our Future*, The Newsom Report. For brief accounts of Labour education policy, see Batho, G. *Political Issues in Education* (1989); Donald K. Jones, *The Making of the Education System* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).
- 60 See Dennis Lawton, *Social Class, Language and Education* (London, Routledge, 1968), p. 152.
- 61 Ibid., p. 76.
- 62 Ibid., pp. 140, 158.
- 63 See Nick Peim, *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, pp. 154 - 172.
- 64 Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (1975), p. 147.
- 65 M.A.K. Halliday, 'Linguistics and the Teaching of English' in James Britton (ed.), *Talking and Writing* (London: Longman, 1967), p. 81.
- 66 Halliday, M.A.K., McIntosh, A. and Stevens, P. *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* (London: Longman, 1964), p. 241.
- 67 See William Labov on the 'ebonics' issues in the USA: 'Testimony submitted by William Labov, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania', January 23, 1997. ([http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~labov/L102?Ebonics\\_test.html](http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~labov/L102?Ebonics_test.html))
- 68 P. Doughty, *Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching* (London: University College London and Longman, 1968), p. 42.
- 69 *A Language for Life* (London: H.M.S.O., 1975), the Bullock Report, p. 5.
- 70 Ibid., p. 5.
- 71 James Britton, *Language and Learning* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).



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- 72 James Britton, 'Note of Extension', in The Bullock Report, *A Language for Life*, p. 555.
- 73 John Dixon, *Growth through English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).
- 74 *A Language for Life* (1975), p.54.
- 75 Ibid., p. 23.
- 76 See Jane Miller, Review of V.J. Lee, *English Literature in Schools* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987) in *The English Magazine*, Summer, 1987, pp. 38 - 39; and Brian Cox, *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).
- 77 See A.H. Halsey, A. Heath, J.M. Ridge, *Origins and Destinations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); A.H. Halsey, J. Floud and C.A. Anderson, *Education, Economy and Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1961).
- 78 See G. Batho, *Political Issues in Education* (1989).
- 79 Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (1975).
- 80 Brian Doyle, 'Some Uses of English: Denys Thompson and the Development of English in Secondary Schools' Stencilled Occasional Paper (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1981); Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny* (1979); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983); *Rewriting English* (1985).
- 81 Shayer clearly adopts a particular historical perspective, without ever *consciously* subscribing to it.
- 82 There is no history of *The English Magazine* itself. A recent collection of articles represents its focus and work: Michael Simons (ed.), *Where We've Been: Articles from the English and Media Magazine* (London: The English and Media Centre, 1996).
- 83 David Shayer, *The Teaching Of English In Schools 1900 - 1972*, p. 16.
- 84 Ibid., p. 126.
- 85 Ibid., p. 1.
- 86 Ibid., p. 2
- 87 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (1988).
- 88 Ibid., p. 262.
- 89 The Bullock Report, *A Language for Life*.
- 90 John Dixon, *Growth Through English* (1967).
- 91 John Dixon, *A Schooling in English* (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1991).
- 92 Terry Eagleton, 'The Rise of English' in *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).
- 93 Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma* (London: 1873): 'Culture is acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and thus with the history of the human spirit.' Quoted in The Matthew Arnold Web Page: <http://www.bemorecreative.com/one/462.htm>.
- 94 George Sampson, *English for the English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. xv.
- 95 Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848-1932*, p. 40, pp. 14 - 15, p. 163.
- 96 Ibid., p.229.
- 97 Ibid., p.234. See also Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (London: Verso, 1984).

- 98 Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness* (1989), p. 25 and pp. 35 - 36.
- 99 Stephen Ball, 'A Subject of Privilege: English and the School Curriculum 1906 - 35', in Martyn Hammersley and Andy Hargreaves (eds.), *Curriculum Practice: Some Sociological Case Studies* (London: The Falmer Press, 1983).
- 100 Ibid., p. 80.
- 101 See Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991) and *The Battle For The English Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).
- 102 Stephen Ball, 'A Subject of Privilege: English and the School Curriculum 1906 - 35', in p. 83.
- 103 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 122.
- 104 Ibid., p. 34.
- 105 Ian Hunter, 'Learning the Literature Lesson' in Carolyn D. Baker and Allan Luke (eds.), *Towards a Critical Sociology of Reading Pedagogy* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1991), pp. 49 - 82. Refers to 'new pedagogical techniques' for the relaying of 'social norms' via the 'negotiable currencies of 'experience' and the 'personal' relation to the teacher.' p. 64. And '... techniques of incitement and supervision - spontaneity and normativity - focused by the teacher-student relation *create* specific capacities for self monitoring and self shaping.' p 60
- 106 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (1988), p 129.
- 107 James Britton, 'Reading and Writing Poetry' in R. Arnold (ed.), *Timely Voices: English Teaching in the Eighties* (pp. 1-16) (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 4.
- 108 John Dixon, *A Schooling in English: Critical Episodes in the Struggle to Shape Literary and Cultural Studies* (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1991).
- 109 Catherine Belsey, 'A Space in the Syllabus' in *Literature, Teaching, Politics, 1*, 58-65, p. 163.
- 110 Ian Hunter, 'Criticism as a Way of Life' in *Typereader 4* (Centre for Studies in Literary Education: Deakin University, 1990), pp. 5 -20.
- 111 See James Britton, 'Reading and Writing Poetry' and John Dixon 'English Literature: A Course in Writing' in R. Arnold (ed.), *Timely Voices: English Teaching in the Eighties*, pp. 1-16 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- 112 Alan Sinfield, 'Give an Account of Shakespeare and Education, Showing Why You Think They Are Effective and What You Have Appreciated about Them. Support Your Comments with Precise References' in J. Dollimore, and A. Sinfield (eds.), *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* pp. 134-157 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 132.
- 113 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1977), p. 185.
- 114 See John Dixon, *Growth through English* (1967).
- 115 Annette Patterson, *Reading Response: An Analysis of the Gendered Construction of Adolescents' Written Responses to Short Fiction*, unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Western Australia, 1989).
- 116 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government* (1988), p. 3.
- 117 Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 216.
- 118 Ian Hunter, *Rethinking the School* (1994), chapter 4: 'Unprincipled Equality', pp. 93 - 136.

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- 119 Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (1975), p. 195.
- 120 Ibid., pp. 195 - 196.
- 121 Ibid., p. 195.
- 122 Ibid., pp. 143 - 172.
- 123 Chris Searle, *The World in a Classroom* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative, 1977); *Teaching London Kids*.
- 124 Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives* (London: Verso, 1983).
- 125 The *Literature Teaching Politics* series.
- 126 Richard Exon, 'The Post Structuralist Always Reads Twice', in *The English Magazine*, Issue 10, 1982.
- 127 The revised draft of the Avon NATE A Level Working Party, the Avon A Level Proposal for 'English - Cultural Studies' (Sheffield: NATE, 1989).
- 128 David Homer, 'Curriculum: Subject English and the Discourse of Levels'. Keynote address at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English, Edith Cowan University, July 9th, 1994. Occasional Paper, Centre for Professional and Public Communication, University of South Australia. Homer muses: 'I remember, also from 1989, at the NATE conference in Swansea being involved in an animated discussion with a group that included Nick Peim, about whether a pair of jeans is a text. The group was evenly divided. One group, to which Nick and I belonged, said it was. Another said no. A third group though that it might have been; but not an A level text!'
- 129 Nick Peim, 'Keystage 4: Back to the Future' in Peter King and Robert Protherough, eds., *The Challenge of English in the National Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- 130 Peter Thomas, 'GCSE English: Planning for 2000' in *The English and Media Magazine*, no. 36, Summer, 1997, pp. 24 - 26. In spite of a lament for the 'victory of a peculiarly political version of English' imposed by the National Curriculum, the piece moves onto a more chirpy accommodation within the limits of the framework for English.
- 131 GCSE examinations were introduced in 1987. See Jon Davison and Jane Dowson, *Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School* (London: Routledge, 1998), p 51.
- 132 Nick Peim, 'Keystage 4: Back to the Future' in Peter King and Robert Protherough, eds., *The Challenge of English in the National Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- 133 Quoted in Ken Jones, 'The Cox Report: Working for Hegemony' in Ken Jones (ed.), *English and the National Curriculum* (London: Kogan Page, 1992).p. 16
- 134 Ibid., p. 16.
- 135 Brian Cox, *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (1995), p. 185.
- 136 Ibid., p. 186.
- 137 Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (1991); pp. 21 - 22.
- 138 Ibid., pp. 20 - 24.
- 139 Brian Cox, *The Battle for the English Curriculum* (1995), p. 180.
- 140 Ibid., pp. 176 - 180.
- 141 Ibid., p. 181.
- 142 Ibid., p. 187.

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- 143 This phrase is taken from Brian Cox, *The Battle For The English Curriculum* (1995).
- 144 Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox* (1991), p. 181
- 145 Ibid., p. 187.
- 146 Brian Cox, *The Battle For The English Curriculum* (1995).
- 147 Ronald Carter (ed.), *Knowledge about Language and the Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990).
- 148 Ronald Carter (ed.), *Knowledge about Language and the Curriculum* (1990).
- 149 Ibid., p 14.
- 150 John Richmond, 'What do we mean by KAL?' in Ronald Carter (ed.), *Knowledge about Language and the Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), pp. 23 - 44.
- 151 Ibid., p. 26.
- 152 With one exception: Roz Ivanic, 'Critical Language Awareness in Action' in Ronald Carter (ed.), *Knowledge about Language and the Curriculum* (1990), pp. 122 - 132, draws extensively on ideas developed 'in the Centre for Language and Social Life' (p. 122), including references to the critical language work of Norman Fairclough.
- 153 Nick Peim, 'LINC: Reading The World Of English' in *English in Education*, Autumn 1992.
- 154 Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness* (1989), p. 33.
- 155 Trevor McDonald. 'Better English Benefits *Everyone*' in *NATE News*, Summer, 1996, p. 13.
- 156 Ken Jones, 'The Cox Report: Working for Hegemony' in Ken Jones (ed.), *English and the National Curriculum* (London: Kogan Page, 1992), p. 25.
- 157 Ibid., p. 15.
- 158 Ibid., p. 15.
- 159 Ibid., p. 8.
- 160 The Independent, 5th June, 1991.
- 161 Ken Jones, 'The Cox Report: Working for Hegemony' (1992), p. 3.
- 162 See Nick Peim, 'Keystage 4: Back to the Future'.
- 163 Trevor MacDonald, 'Better English Benefits *Everyone*' in *NATE News*, Summer, 1996, p. 13.
- 164 'Keystage 4: Back to the Future'.
- 165 See Geoff Witty, 'The New Right and the National Curriculum: State Control or Market Forces' in Bob Moon (ed.) *New Curriculum - National Curriculum* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990).
- 166 This is my own account of things. it is echoed in Ken Jones's 'The Cox Report: Working for Hegemony'.
- 167 Writing frameworks appear in *EXEL - Exeter Extending Literacy Project* (Reading: The Reading and Language Centre: no date given).
- 168 *The National Literacy Project* (London: The National Centre for Literacy and Numeracy, 1997).
- 169 Jeanne Gerlach, Annette Patterson, Robin Peel, *Questions of English*, pre-publication outline (Routledge, 1997).
- 170 See the AATE (Perth, 1993) conference outline, for example. I was invited to address this conference on questions of subject identity in a video linked forum

that was explicitly concerned with redefinitions of English in relation to contemporary theory.

171 See Bronwyn Mellor, Marnie O'Neill, Annette Patterson, *Reading Fictions* (Scarborough: Chalkface Press, 1991) and Bronwyn Mellor, Annette Patterson, *Investigating Texts* (Scarborough: Chalkface Press, 1996).

172 *English: A Statement for Australian Schools* (Australia: DEET, 1994). This includes references to 'The capacity to discuss and analyse texts and language critically ...' and 'A knowledge of the ways in which textual interpretation and understanding may vary according to cultural, social and personal differences ...' p. 3. See also South African Language Plan Task Group statement 'Government Should Pressure Media to Promote Black Languages' ([http://www/virginia.edu/SALang,etc/langtag \(na\).h...ANCinformationservices](http://www/virginia.edu/SALang,etc/langtag%20(na).h...ANCinformationservices), 1996).

173 Colin McCabe, *English in Education*, Spring, 1998, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 26 - 28.

#### 4. Conclusion

1 Keynote speaker at AATE 'Realizing the Future' conference, 1994, Perth; featured speaker at NCTE 'Global Conversations on Language and Literacy', Heidelberg, August, 1996; invited speaker at 'English Teachers Connect' conference, Johannesburg, July, 1977.

2 Roger Knight, *Valuing English* (London: David Fulton, 1996), p. 118.

3 Valentine Cunningham, 'They go to the disco, buy Jackie, watch a vid, catch a soap...' in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, November 6, 1998.

4 Judith Atkinson and Robert Protherough, *The Making of English Teachers* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), p. 15.

5 Raymond O'Malley, 'The Purpose of English Teaching', *English in Schools*, Vol. 2 no. 5, p. 72.

6 James Donald, 'Beyond Our Ken: English, Englishness, and the National Curriculum' in Peter Brooker and Peter Humm (eds.), *Dialogue and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.28.

7 *Secondary Education* (London: H.M.S.O., 1938), the Spens Report, para. 222.

8 Anthony Adams, Stephen Clarke, Peter Scrimshaw, Sally Tweddle, Shona Walton, *English for Tomorrow* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1997), p. 17.

9 This refers to Gunther Kress, *Writing the Future: English and the Making of a Culture of Innovation* (Sheffield: NATE, 1995).

10 Annette Patterson, 'Occasions for reading: Some Thoughts on Secondary English Syllabus Reform', Paper presented at the Australian College of Education National Conference, Cairns, 1997:

[http://www.internetnorth.com.au/ace\\_conference97/patter.htm](http://www.internetnorth.com.au/ace_conference97/patter.htm), p. 4.

11 Bruce Wilson, 'Profiles Meet Poststructuralism', *Curriculum Perspectives* Newsletter edition, June, 1994, Vol. 14, no. 2, p. 20.

12 Annette Patterson, 'Occasions for reading: Some Thoughts on Secondary English Syllabus Reform', p. 4.

13 Ibid., p. 9.

14 Ibid., p. 5.

15 'English is a rare and peculiar means for forming a patchwork range of ethical and literate capacities.' Denise Meredyth, 'English, Civics and Ethical Competence', *Interpretations*, Vol. 27, no. 3, p. 74.

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- 16 Annette Patterson, 'Occasions for reading: Some Thoughts on Secondary English Syllabus Reform', p. 6.
- 17 Ibid., p. 6.
- 18 Ian Hunter, *Rethinking the School* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994).
- 19 Ibid., p. xiv.
- 20 Ibid., p. 100 - 103.
- 21 See Annette Patterson, 'Setting Limits to English: Response to Ian Hunter', in Sandy Muspratt, Allan Luke and Peter Freebody, *Constructing Critical Literacies* (Grasskill, NY: Hampton Press, 1977).
- 22 Ian Hunter, *Rethinking the School* (1994), pp. 93 - 136.
- 23 For an account of the impact of the Robbins Report, see John Mann, *Education* (London: Pitman, 1979), p. 227 - 228.
- 24 See Ian Hunter, *Rethinking the School* (1994), p. xvi on the role of 'the enlightened scholar or critical intellectual'.
- 25 Ian Hunter, *Rethinking the School* (1994), p. 63.
- 26 Hunter's critique is directed towards 'radical' proposals for refunctioning education practices in the name of large ideas, like democracy or equality. A typical target would be Bill Green's 'A Dividing Practice: 'Literature' English Teaching and Cultural Politics' in Ivor Goodson and Peter Medway (eds.), *Bringing English to Order* (London: Falmer, 1990), pp. 135 - 161.
- 27 *The National Curriculum in English* (London: H.M.S.O., 1995).
- 28 See Chris Davies, *What is English Teaching?* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1996), Michael Raleigh and Michael Simons, 'Where We've Been: A Brief History of English Teaching 1920 - 1970', *The English Magazine*, 1980 and Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975).
- 29 For a detailed account of the features of this 'right shift', see Michael Apple *Cultural Politics and Education* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), p. 6.
- 30 'Keystage 4: Back to the Future' in Peter King and Robert Protherough, eds., *The Challenge of English in the National Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 164 - 181.
- 31 Johnson Richard 'A New Road to Serfdom' in Education Group II, eds., *Education Limited*. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991), pp. 79 - 80.
- 32 Johnson Richard 'A New Road to Serfdom' in Education Group II, eds., *Education Limited*, p. 71.
- 33 Michael Apple, *Cultural Politics and Education* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), p. 39.
- 34 See Michael Apple, *Cultural Politics and Education* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), Henri Giroux, 'Modernism. Postmodernism and Feminism' in *Border Crossings* (London: Routledge, 1992). Giroux argues for the proliferation of dialogue, the cultivation of a critical pedagogy and sees teachers as - potentially, at least - cultural workers and transformative intellectuals.
- 35 Andy Green, *Education, Globalization and the Nation State* (London: Macmillan 1997), p. 186.
- 36 Stewart Ranson, *Towards a Learning Society* (London: Cassell, 1994), p. 102.
- 37 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 242.

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**Rethinking the Teaching of English in  
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## Published works

1. An article: 'Othello: A New Approach to A-level English' in *2D*, Vol. 3, no. 3, Summer 1984.
2. An article: 'Redefining A-level' in *The English Magazine*, no. 17, Autumn 1986.
3. A chapter: 'GCSE Post-Structuralism: It Can Be Done' in Mick Burton, ed., *Enjoying Texts*, (London: Stanley Thornes, 1989).
4. A chapter: 'Never Mind English: This is Theory in the Classroom' with Paul Moran in Peter Brooker and Peter Humm, eds., *Dialogue and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 90-105.
5. An article: 'NATE and the Politics of English' in *English in Education*, vol. 24, no. 2, Summer 1990.
6. An article: 'Hanky-Panky' in *English in Education*, Autumn 1991.
7. An article: 'LINC: Reading The World Of English' in *English in Education*, Autumn 1992.
8. A book: *Critical Theory and the English Teacher* (London: Routledge, 1993).
9. A chapter: 'Key Stage 4: Back to the Future?' in Peter King and Robert Protherough (eds.), *The Challenge of English in the National Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 164 - 181.

# OTHELLO: A Drama Approach to 'A' Level English

Nick Peim and Gerry Elmer

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"I've gained terrific insight into the play by acting out roles and hearing others act out their roles. Also I found by the end of the stay I could relate to Shakespeare far more easily, the play seemed more real, not like a play written long ago that we had to analyse and study..."

"I feel that many of us now understand and have not only a more in depth explanation of *Othello* but of ourselves, too."

These comments come from a group of twenty-eight 'A' level English students writing on the final morning of a 3½ day residential course at Quorn Hall in Leicestershire. The course was devised and run by two English teachers from Beauchamp College with the Drama Adviser, Maurice Gilmour, and one of his advisory team, Cherry Stephenson. The comments of the students and the intensity of their engagement in the course we think testify to the value of drama beyond the claims usually made for it. We would like to proclaim strongly the value of creative drama as a rigorous methodology for the intellectual exploration of a text, as a means of enabling students to take possession of the text and to go beyond that — to experience it as makers of and participants in its various possible meanings. We would also want to claim that the kind of approach we shall try to outline here is not only enriching in terms of social and individual growth, but also an academically profitable method of 'A' level preparation — whatever the restrictions of the syllabus and its forms of assessment. The fact that drama work is now incorporated into many 'SPE' schemes suggests there has never really been any doubt about its value in terms of personal and social development, but we suppose that it isn't often offered or used explicitly as a means of achieving academic 'discipline', nor do we suppose that drama has been much used to make

available to 'A' level students some of the recent developments in literary theory which are now becoming part of some university courses in this country.

We started building the ideas for the course around some assumptions which have since formulated themselves more or less clearly. We felt that static reading of a text in a classroom (or in a seminar room) in the static learning relationship that the group (learners) plus the teacher (learned) formula tends to imply has limited value and is not, on its own, the most effective method of enabling students to acquire, to create and to share their joint experience of a text. The too clear role definition of teacher and taught, and the fact that what passes for open discussion is often elaborately and unconsciously directed and restricted by the teacher, tend to create a situation which is fundamentally different from one in which everybody — teachers and students — learns. We felt that rather than merely making acquaintance with the play we had chosen to study and passively absorbing its contents and structure, we should approach the play through active methods which involve getting inside the text and constructing its meaning. Accompanying that last idea we felt that our students should be encouraged to discover mainly through enactment that a variety of ideological approaches to literature are available to them from which they can, with developing confidence, choose freely and that to so choose involves the recognition that literature is rooted in ideology. The implicit general point is that 'reading' is really an active process of making.

We believe that the methods involved in realising these assumptions are more productive in terms of time expended and that they are more intellectually demanding and rewarding than a lot of standard 'A' level fare: participation is more complete and not merely external. A lot of 'A' level teaching — no matter how open and sensitive — doesn't make the dual process of "affecting and being affected by the material" happen. So we had adopted Dorothy Heathcote's idea of what students reading of a text can achieve: "they will function as inventors and interpreters at the same time" — an aim that coincides with the main thrust of post-structuralist theories of literature and reading, theories which were explicitly introduced to the students and which were seen as a centre of growth in the inception of the whole course.

The main body of this area of theory can perhaps be loosely defined as asserting the significance of the social group generations of meaning that produce texts and that also produce readings of texts. The negotiability of meanings according to the nature of the social groups locating them and the ideologies they live by is made conscious and explicit. Texts are seen not so much as containing meaning to be unleashed by the perceptiveness of the reader or audience but as occasions for the production and exchange of meanings. The whole business of reading and of interpretation is seen as active and social. We hope to explain briefly how this generalized theoretical framework was expressed in the activities of the course.

Our students found themselves confronting new experiences from the beginning. These were challenging for them partly because they did not conform to their expectations of how the teaching and learning of 'A' level English is or should be conducted and partly because of feelings of awkwardness at being asked to participate in active drama work. Perhaps the connection between those two misgivings is closer than the last sentence suggests. Games and improvisations were devised that demanded immediate involvement in group activities. Instant creativity was called for in the creation of meaningful situations. Though these activities might be quite familiar to drama teachers, they were much more than merely 'warm-up' exercises because the processes of creation which they entailed were essential to what was later to become a full engagement in the text and the kind of group co-operation they entailed was also to be essential. For instance, the whole group was involved in this first session in the creation of still pictures in tableau form. It seemed natural to go to the text from this and so in four groups the students were asked to depict their ten most significant moments from *Othello* as frozen, still scenes.

That relatively simple idea has very interesting implications for learning and it was very successful, though it did involve the breaking through of barriers for our students to arrive at the point where they all felt they could fully participate. One of the biggest barriers to the active engagement we wanted to promote is a natural resistance which many students feel to activities which don't conform to deeply-rooted notions of what constitutes appropriate learning-teaching methods. The breaking down of this kind of inertia involves adjustments in relationships between teachers and taught while challenging at the same time received ideas about the way that learning takes place at 'A' level.

"I thought there would be much more lecturing and note-taking than there has been and I was pleased to be able to participate freely. Throughout the course I have felt relaxed and enthusiastic."

Many students similarly professed they had expected their *Othello* course to include lectures, note-taking and formalized written work. So it must initially be difficult to feel that you are learning in open improvisations, for instance, if your experiences of learning have more or less systematically excluded that kind of exploration. The success of the course, though, suggests how positively and readily students can respond to what must have been in many cases alarmingly new situations. This ought, we feel, to have far-reaching implications for change in the teaching of English 'A' level in general. The students certainly felt immediately engaged when having to produce *Othello* as a series of stills and an important aspect of the process was their realization that the teachers were visibly learning from their efforts when the process was being discussed. In that way they were able to feel the relevance of the initial 'workshop' activities and to take on new ways of dealing with Shakespeare.

"The idea of picking out the ten most important scenes to us was very

interesting and valuable. It made me realize more what the play was really about...And it was done in such a simple way — making it easier to look at from different points of view."

So in a very brief space of time were created quick, accessible representations of their distilled thought in relation to very specific textual detail and this also demanded instant consideration of the structure and progression of the whole.

A more intellectually demanding experience came in the form of role-play in which every student was given a role from the play, roles ranging from Othello to the Turkish navy. Roles were distributed at random with the carefully formed and emphatic instruction that it was not merely the role within the play that was to be examined, but that the play was to be viewed in its entirety from the point of view of the role. This effectively forces each student to view the play from 'within': to examine character, event and issue from a very specific viewpoint involving a restructuring of perspective. It also demands and makes that quality of apprehension beloved of examiners — a close knowledge of the text. Students wrote later about the intense pressure which this role-taking created and they became quite articulate about how that pressure proved productive. They had, in fact, less than twenty-four hours to prepare roles for the first role-play session which was conducted by having each role interviewed by the whole group. In this session the interviewers were out of role to simplify the procedure and the text was kept ready to hand and referred to as a documented version of events, though many questions asked went beyond the literal confines of the document. Quite fine points of motivation, for instance, could be worked at by sustained questioning. The curious movements of the Turkish fleet, the Duke's precise relationship with Othello prior to the action, Desdemona's upbringing and the rights of paternity and many other issues were raised and, if not dealt with conclusively or exhaustively, they were quite fully explored moving from the text to imaginative projection outside it and back to the text again. A kind of post-structuralist interest in the 'gaps' of a text was thus made real within an activated imaginative context which became increasingly plausible as more roles were interviewed. At a later stage telephone conversations between roles were engineered which heightened the original role-play effect and which afforded marvellous opportunities for the students to make very suggestive possible connections in relationships.

Different perspectives were introduced into the course from a visiting speaker — a teacher/research student from Oxford — who provided considerable intellectual input in a more conventional form. Taking as a starting point some post-structuralist analysis of assumptions about the content and the nature of

literature, his talk offered an explanation of the importance of ideology in literature and the media. He explained how various ideological perspectives could open up the possibilities for exploring a text. This idea was applied to *Othello* more explicitly, and feminist and marxist approaches were briefly outlined while suggestions were made as to how the play might be approached from a commercial point of view and how the racist content of the play could be highlighted. *Othello* was thus put into a new intellectual context which later drama activities were to elaborate. Many of the ideas on offer in the talk were very new to the students, but they were able to absorb and to activate them by being involved in dramatic presentations which incorporated the ideas.

Four groups of students were each assigned an approach to *Othello* from which they were to make a presentation of the play in a kind of collage form, abbreviating and selecting from the text itself. It was the ideas and the ideology in relation to the text that was to be the main focus of interest not the quality of the acting. These group presentations were the culmination of the whole course and made tremendous demands on the relationships within the groups — forcing them in effect to become co-operative learners in a much more immediate way than most classroom practice can allow for. Like the role-play this activity also demanded minute and very thorough appraisal of the text and very active reappraisal of its possible meanings. The students were able to refer back to the talk they had received and to make their own thorough enactment the often complex ideas they had until then only notionally taken on.

The presentations were intellectually convincing and effectively condensed the material of the whole to emphasise each particular perspective. Part of their success can, we think, be attributed to the pressure that the request to produce creates and to the limited time allocated — just over twenty four hours in this case, with some of that time given over to other activities. The presentations made vivid very significant points of interpretation in an immediately apprehended way which provoked much stimulating discussion immediately afterwards and gave cause for much long term thought:

- The marxist group, for example, portrayed the class distinction between Emilia and Desdemona in a more exaggerated way than is usual. The text seemed to support a Desdemona who was aristocratic, precious and unfeelingly aloof from the more real and humanly substantial Emilia. Iago was presented as the enemy of snobbery in a status-dominated world. Watching this sequence it became visibly apparent how the conventional ethics in which the play is cast could be remoulded and reread.
- The 'racist' version of *Othello* emphasized references to Othello's racial isolation as a significant element in his career within the text.
- The feminist group highlighted the play's interrogation of the roles and status of women in the social framework.

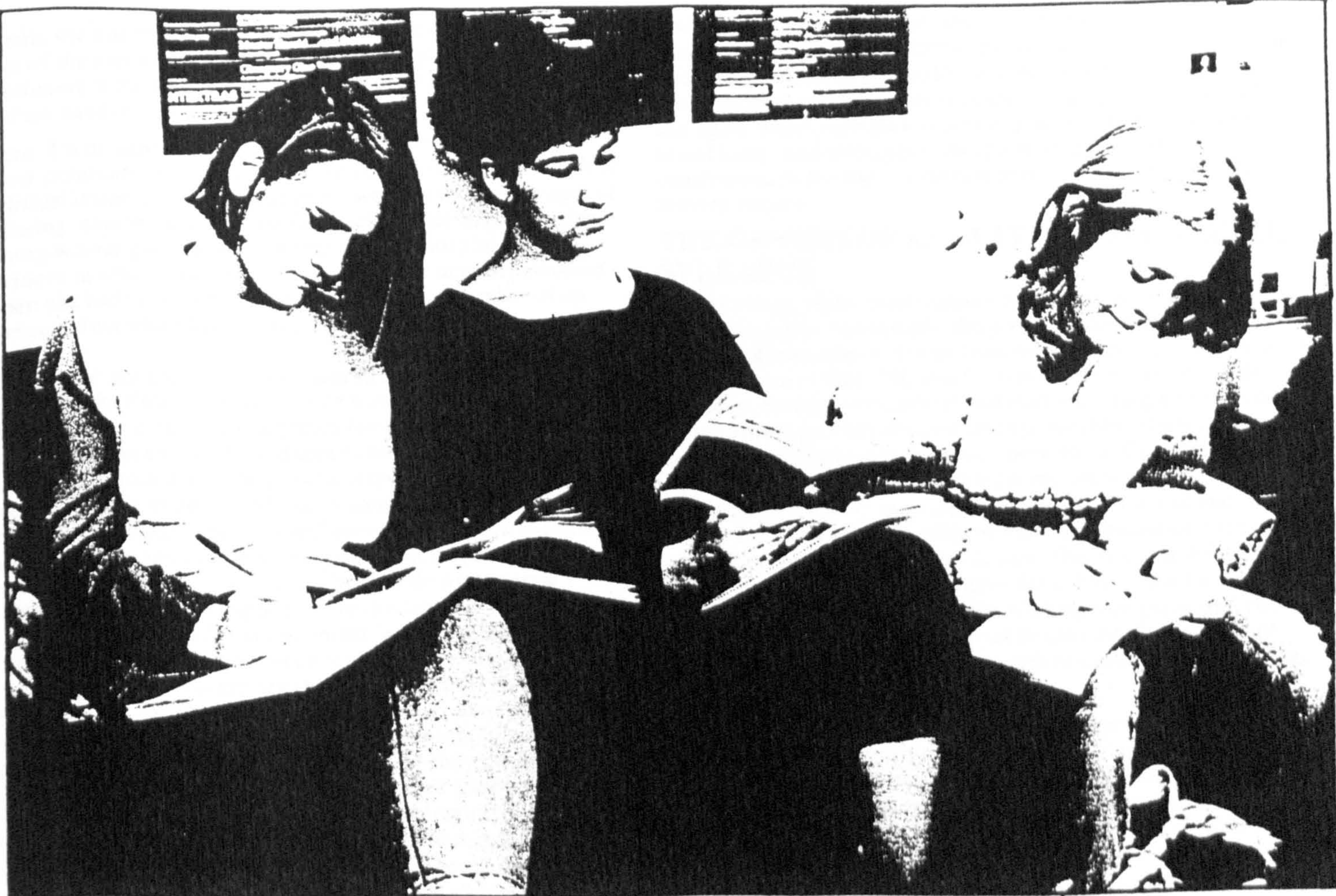
- The commercialized version took the form of a film trailer and condensed the action and emotional content of the play down to a more familiar world of televised love, passion and tragedy.

In all cases the play provided a means of discovering much about the nature of the perspectives taken, and the perspectives taken offered new ways of making sense of the whole experience of the play. Our students in making these productions were participating in the joint construction of meanings and were learning something new about what it can mean to be a reader. It was the use of active drama approaches that made this possible and made it possible for our students to discover a great deal about the play in so short a period of time.

It strikes us increasingly that the use of drama to activate study in English doesn't just make it more interesting, but that it makes the study of literature more rigorous and more complete. It has important implications, as well, for the consideration of the way in which reading, and the whole notion of what constitutes literature, occurs within a social context, a reading community. The kind of course outlined here, the kind of activity involved in such a course, we think emphasises the study of literature as 'solidary experience' (a phrase borrowed from David Hargreaves) and helps students to see that the exploration of literature involves the exploration of ourselves, not just as individuals but as social beings too. This point is made explicitly in one of the quotations with which this article begins as is a further but related point about how the course provided many of our students with a new insight into their capability as people and as readers, though the social experience of the course would suggest that that is a false distinction — capability in this context applies to academic and to personal and social achievement.

We are now trying to incorporate more of the approaches we learnt about on our course into our English teaching at 'A' level — and in the fourth and fifth years. The kind of approaches taken in this case to *Othello* could quite easily be applied to other texts, and not just to plays. One of the teachers on the course had done similar things previously with *The Waste Land*, for example, but the possibilities in this area do seem to be genuinely limitless. A residential course obviously creates a very special atmosphere and provides unusual opportunities for trying new teaching techniques, but we have, we think, achieved considerable success by enlivening our day-to-day English teacher lives with a much more conscious use of drama and we have discovered new methods for ourselves which otherwise we wouldn't have been motivated to find.

Due to lack of space Book Reviews have had to be held over until the next issue.



# Redefining A Level

The subject which is called English is not and has never been easy to define. Nowadays there is quite a lot of disagreement about what English is and about what it ought to be, differences that are felt at many different levels - from the ministerial right down to the ordinary English teacher. There are even people - some of whom are teaching the subject in schools and in universities, in FE colleges and polytechnics - who appear to be claiming that English, strictly speaking, should no longer exist. Terry Eagleton's 1985 NATE address didn't seem to be going quite that far (though some of his writing has done); but it did offer a challenge to most currently accepted definitions of the subject, a challenge based on the idea of incorporating within the subject an explicit awareness of the 'political'. The 'political' in this sense - to put it very simply - refers to the various ways in which it is possible for men and women to organize their lives or to have them organized, as social groups and as individuals within social groups. Such an approach to English would seek, for example, not only to understand the 'political' contents of texts, but also to understand the 'political' significance of the existence of the subject English itself, and, as Eagleton's article suggests, the 'political' dimension of language.

For English teachers wanting to accept the challenge to redefine their practice at sixth form level, for instance, the first and most massive impediment might appear to be the constraints imposed by the boards. Without at least their acquiescence, the possibilities of practically implementing a re-reading and re-writing of English are likely to appear remote. The administrators, examiners and moderators of the exam system

might not readily be assumed perhaps to have read their post-structuralists, to have deconstructed the literary canon, to have encountered alternative rhetorics in the subject which it is their business to guard and protect - perhaps even less to have confronted the political implications of these moves. I would, however, like to argue and, hopefully, to demonstrate that, even though *Dallas* and *East Enders* haven't yet made their way onto the set text lists, it is possible to teach English at A level as an alternative form of discursive practices' without having to make too many concessions to the restrictions of certification (so that you end up subverting the ideals you wanted to realize). I want to suggest that it is possible to construct a practice of A Level English which incorporates a wider conception of cultural studies, signifying practices and rhetoric: a practice which offers an alternative mode of understanding the nature of 'reading' which does not balk at the political implications generated by the recent developments in literary theory.

## NICARAGUAN STUDIES?

Let me begin with an example of one specific lesson. Recently I showed an upper sixth A level English group of sixteen students a recording of a C4 programme on Nicaragua. With very little introduction, they watched as Susan Meiselas's words were spoken over some of the images she'd collected as an observer during the pre-revolutionary period. We heard, among other things, about 'reading the signs', about the complex of stories which each image didn't tell, about their absences and gaps, about herself as being very much excluded to begin with from the

\*There is a directory of terms at the end of this article.



events she was trying to make images of. The narration spoke also of the uses which had been made of her photographs by the producers of the magazine she'd been working for, uses she had had no hand in controlling.

Here, I'd thought, was simply a useful opportunity to explore some points about semiotics (and the commercial distribution of political images); but the programme went on to show images of 'missing' persons, a defiant public funeral procession for a dead young woman guerilla, and the text told the story of the first incident in which Susan Meiselas had become actively involved when she had informed a group of students the number of an armoured car which had opened fire on them.

It emerged that there were two main strands in the learning to be had from the Nicaraguan video: one was to illustrate and develop some points about *signification* and *textuality*; the other was to introduce a specific and specifically political topic. In this case, and in accord with the general response of the students, the second strand turned out to be dominant. The main focus of interest turned out to be more on immediate matters of content - what had been and what was going on in Nicaragua, an issue of contemporary world politics (very little to do with eternal verities). Students wishing to explore this text will need to acquire some knowledge of its context (and therefore will need to consider the relations between text and context, in some way, at the level of political literary theory), of the politics of central America and, judging from the reactions of these students, will want to find out more about the particular recent history which gave rise to the images and the commentary they saw and heard. They may want to read something of the work produced by the Nicaraguan poetry workshops, to read '*Nicaragua for Beginners*', to compare this video with televised images of insurgence in South Africa, or to consider other examples of the photography of political events, by way of extension. The issues that they might want to tackle and towards which they might be directed could include some reflections on how specific political struggles will give rise to certain kinds of texts and to certain modes of interpretation; or might involve looking at various kinds and uses of rhetoric for various political purposes. Any of these would involve some direct consideration of how the literary object is related to political events and forces.

The point of this description is merely to give an indication of one kind of possible activity teaching A level English literature on an alternative syllabus which has been reconstructed to incorporate something of the message implicit in 'The Subject of Literature'. Whether or not students choose to explore the Nicaraguan topic further, they have the option, on the syllabus which we currently teach, to submit work produced from such a venture for examination. It may well be objected that neither the topic nor its cursory treatment properly belong to the subject(s) gathered under the sign 'English Literature'. While arguments still persist over what constitutes a legitimate text or approach (see Roger Knight's article in the TES Jan '85 attacking the erosion of traditional values in English), the kind of project sketched above is quite within the requirements of the syllabus I teach, and would probably fall into the category of 'non-fiction', a major element in its coursework component. (The organization of this syllabus is flexible enough to allow for a free interpretation of what texts and what approaches are possible within the stipulated categories, as well as allowing for a freedom of exchange among them.)

My own teaching of A level English Literature and the teaching of some of my colleagues, then, is an attempt to institute a practice of 'alternative criticism' within the examinations system and under the traditionally accepted name of the subject. The broad aims of the project are to activate and develop awareness of the operations of ideology in literature and the media, to establish, that is, 'culturally' conscious ways of reading texts and understanding textuality; to explore cultural mythologies and their production; and while doing so to attempt to go some way

towards deconstructing the power relations within the classroom. This is an attempt to evolve, at A level, a teaching of 'literature' which deals frankly with matters of ideology and ideological conflicts, which examines ideas, feelings, ways of seeing by which men and women experience and construct their social lives - and attempts to do this from a point of view constructed in the light of certain developments in cultural and literary theory.

## THE GENESIS OF AN ALTERNATIVE A LEVEL SYLLABUS

This syllabus, when constructed a few years ago in a Swindon comprehensive, was initially designed as 'alternative' in its method of assessment. It was born from the desire to liberalize A level in the way that CSE and O level had been for years. Its inception meant that teachers and students had greater freedom to determine possible content and approaches. There remained the standard Shakespeare paper, there was a 'Comment and Appreciation' paper and the third component was the school's assessment, which in our case consisted of a folder of end-of-course coursework comprising of four main essays on each of the novel, poetry, drama and non-fiction. This remains the basic structure. Each component counts for a third of the total marks. There are only four set-texts: two Shakespeare plays and two usually brief texts which can be taken into the 'Comment and Appreciation' exam which is designed to examine close-reading, interpretation skills.

We had designed a course which would allow for intensive study of only a few texts, which would enable us to teach our A level students 'to read' and which would have scope and occasion for them to become readers of fiction, poetry, drama and non-fiction more than the standard A level allowed. The intention was to create the most minimal syllabus possible at A Level and we felt we had achieved this. In a school in which the O level and CSE courses had been very open and coursework oriented, and in which the value of reading fiction of quality had been emphasised, our A level students, though almost exclusively from culturally innocent backgrounds, covered a great deal of individual reading. The A level syllabus - with no specified texts, genres or periods for the coursework - was as open as we could hope an A level syllabus to be.

In recent years, my own teaching of this syllabus has become 'alternative' in other senses, based on a re-reading of the theoretical base of the subject. This doesn't mean that (good old) English Literature had to be abandoned for media studies, that Jane Austen has to be replaced by Mills and Boon, nor that the Nicaraguan novel is to oust the great tradition of English fiction. It means a broadening of the content of the subject and a redefinition of its orientation which will perhaps best be explained, in the case of this syllabus, by a description of how it can work...

## ALTERNATIVE SHAKESPEARES OR SHAKESPEARE THE FEMINIST?

But how does an English teacher who aspires to eschew the values and practices of liberal humanism teach The Shakespeare Paper, the bastion of traditional literary values and reading techniques, politically? There's no escaping this component of the course which the controllers of the examiners insist on for alternative syllabuses as an insurance of parity with the conventional exam.

One way in which I tried to begin to tackle this area was to organize a residential course with our local drama adviser, involving four days off timetable for thirty lower sixth students on *Othello*, using various kinds of role-play and other drama exercises to activate a productive mode of working with the text. The drama activities were designed to emphasise the role of these readers, working co-operatively as a group, as makers of joint meanings: interrogating roles, looking at different ways of presenting the narrative structure, creating different possible



structures of ideas. For instance, each student was given a role from the play (including the Turkish navy and third gentleman) to be interviewed by the rest of the group. 'Telephone conversations' were set up between the roles. Groups were asked to present the play as a series of ten stills, identifying ten key moments in the narrative. The course culminated in the presentations, by four different groups, of ten to fifteen minute versions of the play from four different perspectives to which they'd been introduced by a visiting speaker who'd given a talk on literary theory. They created a marxist *Othello* - highlighting the importance of status and the struggles for power in the play, a feminist *Othello* - looking at women's situations and attitudes to women, a version which emphasised racist attitudes and Othello's racial isolation, and a commercial *Othello* - exploring what a trailer for an American soap opera might look like.

When a colleague and I came to team-teach this text the following year to a group of ten upper sixth students preparing for their impending exam, we had a number of experiences of productive reading to draw upon. From a few prefatory discussion sessions we began to examine *Othello's* apparent concern with questions of status and gender. Our group discussion focussed increasingly on the roles and positions of women, on male attitudes to women, on male bonding, male sexuality, female sexuality and male attitudes to female sexuality: the dominating perspective that emerged was feminist.

We read the play with the students, discussed it generally and in detail, and taught it as an interrogative, feminist text.

Students were assigned topics to prepare for discussions. In this case we chose and allocated the breakdown of issues which included: the Othello myth - its construction within the text, Brabantio and Venetian power politics (or, how Othello got away with it), sexual politics and the language of love, the social hierarchy and reputation, Emilia's role as feminist conscience, Bianca and the meaning of the word 'whore', Othello's marriage to Desdemona, Iago's role as purveyor of male attitudes - and others. As a group we performed various acts of sacrilege on the play to highlight these issues, comparing it with *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, for instance, and transposing it into 'alien' contexts. A group reading of the play emerged which took into account the warfare state, the abuse of women, sexual politics and the politics of success. All the time we insisted that our interpretations were group productions, chosen and directed by everyone involved, conducted as a corporate enterprise.

### AS YOU LIKE IT

Teaching *As You Like It* this year to a larger group in the upper sixth, some students immediately after the initial reading described the play as 'essentially a feminist text'. A lively and sometimes heated debate ensued to question the implications of that bold assertion, in relation to the text and more generally. We discussed what we understood feminism to be, authorial intention (can a twentieth century perspective be applied to a seventeenth century text?), whether or not the ending could be seen as a happy conclusion since it seemed to crush many of the questions the play had raised about gender determinations. The students then took on the task of identifying the issues which they would share out among themselves to lead subsequent discussion and analyses. Because of the experiences of their lower sixth year, there was no need to prompt them into identifying some of the main issues as centring on power struggles of various kinds, patriarchy, class divisions, the pastoral myth, the ambiguity of the ending, Touchstone and Jaques as subversive elements - as well as the roles and the narrative structure. At all stages in the discussions there was a deliberate attempt to relate issues and details to theory.

The role-play games in this case particularly seemed to throw the gaps in the text into sharp relief and to attack the text's pretensions to unity. When questions such as: 'What was your mother like, Rosalind?' are brought into play, for example, the text as a construction of language comes much more into the foreground; the idea of characters as people is less tenable than looking at character roles as signifiers within a restricted system of signification, functioning to exclude as much as to reveal. We were able to discuss the implications for the play as an ideological construct quite explicitly having identified and explored this phenomenon. Students were also introduced at this stage to some of the main ideas of post-structuralism in simple form in order to clarify and to feed into the various readings of the text that were emerging (see 'directory of terms' at the end of this article): textuality and intertextuality, language, writing as difference, presence-in-absence, deferral of meaning, death of the author, Foucault's notion of competing discourses, language and repression, in order to clarify and to feed into the various reading of the text that were emerging.

The discussion lessons on the issues the group had identified provided notes which were then redistributed and which provided other texts for consideration, enabling a refinement in the application of ideas to textual detail to remain within the influence of the students themselves. There was a great deal of 'play' involved in these discussions designed to release and make available the potential 'pleasure of the text'. Ideological content, textual gaps and textual construction can be understood, for example, by conducting an enquiry into the mystery of the missing mothers, beginning from Thurber's reading of Macbeth as a detective story.

Working in this kind of way, emphasising textual ideology and creating the conditions in which students actively produce meanings and interpretations, seems to me to come closer to achieving a learning co-operative working towards commonly shared aims than other practices I've been involved in. This kind of methodology seems to me to be not only ideologically preferable, but a more effective preparation for the demands of the exam. Fluency of ideas, close knowledge of textual detail seem to be acquired more readily when students are more comprehensively engaged in creating and testing their own readings; and when they're given awareness of the kinds of choices and equipment - literary critical, ideological - than can be brought to bear on the operation of reading.

The issues of feminism, for instance, which may appear to dominate the teaching/learning described above, are bound to engage the attention and interest of students today. The majority of them are likely to be girls and they are likely, whether girls or not, to have strong opinions on the subject and to have already begun to think about it, one way or another, politically. It seems to me to be one of the more important ways in which we can explore Shakespeare's plays, not so much for their received wisdom as for their capacity to engage our attention in a range of personal political issues.

If we can't escape from the exam's will to impel the teaching of Shakespeare, this fact needn't be simply an occasion to lament, nor to revert cynically to old formulae and worn-out ideas (no matter how enthusiastic and engaged our teaching of them) simply to get them through the syllabus. As Jonathon Dollimore writes: 'Teaching Shakespeare's' plays... is unlikely to bring down capitalism, but it is a point for intervention'. (*Political Shakespeare*, ed. Dollimore and Sinfield, 1985)

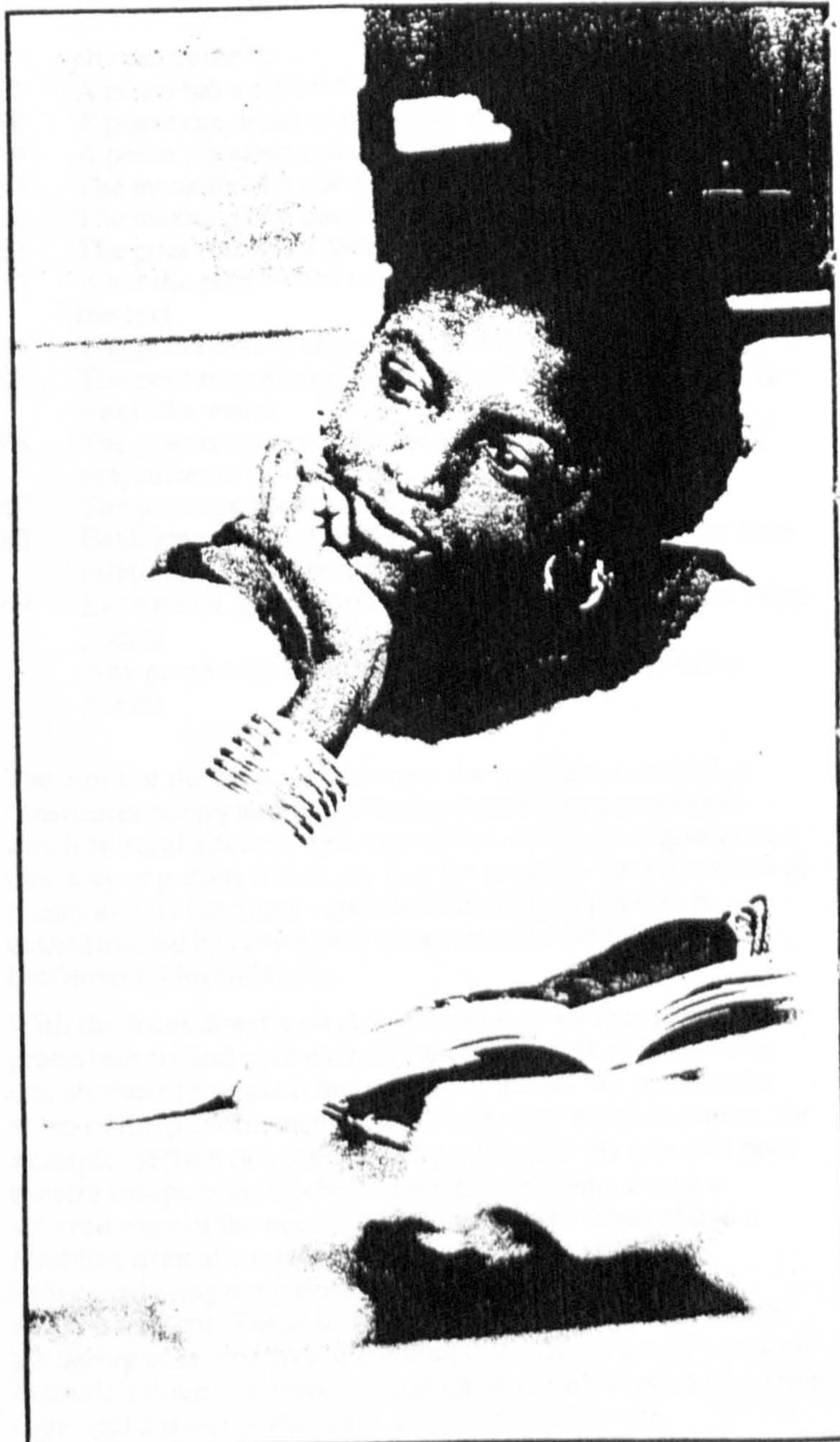
### ASH WEDNESDAY: DISMEMBERING THE TEXT

I'd like to go on to describe the teaching of another set text, although set texts don't dominate the syllabus I've described. The authors of the 'Comment and Appreciation' paper have demonstrated their enlightenment by allowing the designated texts into the exam room: thus asserting that English is not about learning or knowing an object in the conventional sense. It is more about mastering a discourse: having available appropriate responses to whatever happens to be deemed worthy of inclusion on the list of texts.

Last year a colleague and I decided that we would team-teach *Ash Wednesday*. We were interested in exploring the idea of demystifying a text via the application of some semiotic and 'deconstructive' techniques, without working out too much of this in advance. We wanted to attack conventional notions of textuality. *Ash Wednesday* seemed a good choice, partly because it's brief, partly because its inaccessibility (not to be underestimated) lends itself to a suspension of the question about meaning, and partly because it is an established item in the canon which in some quarters engenders reverence. We chose a joint-teaching approach not just to share ideas, but also to attempt a decentring of the role of the teacher.

So we began simply by asking our students to describe in their own terms linguistic features in section I. They came up with a fairly lengthy list, identifying key words, repetitions, frequent negatives, typography, absence of punctuation, the frequent use of 'I', irregular line divisions, elements of religious language, and variations in similar syntactic structures. It was thus easier to begin with their perceptions about *Ash Wednesday* as a verbal construct, rather than asking for anything in the way of interpretation and the nuances of 'response'. We raised the question of meaning at this point, only to deflect it by introducing two quotations which we thought would be useful in our group reading of the rest of this text. The first was from Barthes:

... the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of text...



the other from Genette:

... the real author of the narrative is not only he who tells it, but also, at times, even more he who hears it...

We also produced sheets which gave simplified accounts of Saussurian linguistics introducing the notion of language as a system of differences, the relationship between signifier and signified, langue and parole and which gave an account of some of the post-structuralist developments of the theory of language and literary production. The writings of Barthes, Derrida, Lacan and Foucault are notoriously difficult, but some of their central ideas are easy enough to communicate quite simply, and students, on the whole, can only gain from a deepening of their theoretical armoury. It is quite possible, in my experience, to introduce and discuss with A level students, for example, the idea of the reader as producer, or the death of the author: in fact, students warm readily to notions of democratizing reading which grant them equality of voice. Other ideas which are teachable, which we taught, and which provide an alternative and in some ways radical critique of common sense notions of language and media include: denotation and connotation, metonymy, the text as mythology, the dominance of the signifier, the cultural production of reality, signification as 'play', language as metaphor, undecidability, presence in absence, inescapable textuality, meaning as repression, the creation of the unconscious in language, the acquisition of language as

repression, the production of human subjects in language, discourse and the transmission and resistance of power.

Not all of these may seem to have any direct bearing upon teaching a group of A level students, most of whom are unlikely to be signing up for avant-garde university courses in cultural studies and semiotics, how to read *Ash Wednesday* for the 'Comment and Appreciation' paper. As analytical tools, however, they seem to be sharper than, say, ideas about imagery and movement, tone and rhythm. With *Ash Wednesday* we taught these ideas quite explicitly in order to provide a frame of reference within which the text could be studied and prepared for the purposes of the exam, and as issues which the analysis of this text could illuminate. We hoped to liberate *Ash Wednesday* from its limited (for the students anyway) status as an element of 'high', remote culture uncontaminated by more immediate issues, such as the 1984/85 miners' strike and the risings in South Africa which were raging at the time. To attempt to illuminate its position within a network of discourses was an attempt to indicate a connection between its literary status and those contemporary historical events.

In order to free *Ash Wednesday* and our students from the pieties which are sometimes used to enshrine it, we devised a number of strategies. We chose for our second annual residential course for A level students the subject of 'poetry'. An invited speaker came to talk about alternative approaches to poetry, but instead of offering a lecture, produced sheets containing 72 questions on What is Poetry? to be answered with ticks, crosses or question marks, and to be discussed:

- 9 The language used in poetry is a special kind of language
- 10 The language used in poetry is everyday language used in an unusual kind of way
- 11 All the figures of speech used in poetry occur frequently in everyday language
- 12 A poem can employ any vocabulary at all
- 13 Some words are not suitable in poetry
- 14 The language of poetry should be as close to ordinary speech as possible
- 15 The language used in poetry should be as remote as possible from everyday speech
  
- 34 A poem is never complete
- 35 A poem is complete when the author says it is
- 36 The final version of a poem by the author is the best correct one
- 37 Every part of a poem contributes towards the meaning of the whole
- 38 The statement in 37 is not true for everyday utterances
- 39 It is in poetry that the language of a nation is exemplified at its best
- 40 Definitions of poetry are almost limitless but they always agree on this central fact: that it is man speaking to men, of his and their condition, in language which consists of the best words in the best order, language used with the greatest possible inclusiveness and power (Bullock Report, 1974)
- 41 The heritage of English Poetry 'is part of the common inheritance which helps to build up a national consciousness and to forge invisible links of union between those who at their first meeting may think they have little in common' (Spens, 1938)
- 42 Poetry provides us with a common system of values
- 43 Every cultural document is also a record of barbarism
- 44 Occasionally poets are added to the list, but generally there is wide agreement over the centuries as to which poets in a language are the best
- 45 Great poetry is universal and speaks to all people in all times
  
- 55 A poem always has a hidden meaning (which your teacher knows and might tell you)
- 56 A poem has a single meaning which all readers (or almost

all) can agree to

- 57 A poem has a different meaning every time it is read
- 58 A poem can mean anything its reader wants it to mean
- 59 A poem's meaning changes over time
- 60 The meaning of a poem lies within it
- 61 The meaning of a poem is made by the reader
- 62 The poet conveys a message to the reader in a poem
- 63 What the poet meant to say can be recovered simply from the text
- 64 The poem always says more than the poet realises
- 65 The poet rises above the preoccupation of his/her day in what s/he writes
- 66 The poet is always under the sway of the ideas and prejudices of his/her time
- 67 The poet expresses his/her experience in a poem
- 68 Each great poem is unique and individual, with very little relation to earlier poems
- 69 Each poem, great or otherwise, always owes most to other poems
- 70 Any poem only acquires meaning in relation to other poems

The point of the exercise is to open the question about what constitutes poetry and to put that question into a context in which cultural artefacts and their status are likewise questioned. One way of putting it is to say that the students' latent notions of poetry and its functions - and their ideology of poetry - is deconstructed by calling into question and doubt its implicit fundamental formulation.

With the focus directly on *Ash Wednesday*, we then divided the group into six and gave each sub-group the task of presenting one section of the poem in a particular mode. We produced a video of the performance of *Ash Wednesday* which included, for example, section two presented by a group in the role of a poor theatre troupe running short of scripts stumbling across a tattered copy of the poem and trying to make sense of it in a fumbling dramatic reading. The event culminated in an irreverently sing-song version of section six with guitar accompaniment. These were set against a religious, candle-lit rendering of section five, a contemporary dance group's version of section three, a television production team's version of section four, and a street performers' version of section one.

Back in the classroom, we discussed and set up activities that involved playing with the text: treating the poem as a collage, for example, chopping it up and rearranging it to see if there was any difference; reducing the poem to not more than twenty lines; performing imaginary transpositions into other media, asking ourselves what kind of novel could you make of it, what kind of video, film, painting or music. We compared its use of metonymy with the song 'Walk Away Renee' by The Four Tops and with the opening sequence of the Clint Eastwood film *For a Fistful of Dollars*. We encouraged and discussed questions about what kinds of poetry are likely to appear on A level set text lists: why T.S. Eliot on Anglo-Catholic religious experience? Why not Bruce Springsteen on Vietnam? Or 'Wham''s account of interpersonal relationships?

This deconstruction, or dismembering, of T.S. Eliot was conceived and performed, as I've said, very much as a group operation. It depended for its existence on the active participation of the students, not simply in offering their own readings of the text, which at many stages they were not in a position to produce, but more in developing an attitude which was prepared to raise questions about the nature of poetry (and of this poetry), its social functions and its status as Literature and as exam fodder. Knowledge of the text acquired in this way is just as sound as any afforded by (say) 'close-reading' approaches: and most students enjoy being irreverently subversive about Literature: it's fun and affirms their right to the pleasure of the text, no matter how apparently inaccessible the text in question, as members of a reading community.



## COURSEWORK

The coursework component represents the most open area of the syllabus. It is designed by the school, assessed by the school in negotiation with the moderator, and may be modified from year to year according to shifts in practice. As many have testified, coursework at A level has many advantages, not just in terms of offering greater freedom of choice of content for the teacher(s). Coursework makes it possible to restructure teaching styles to make significant alterations in emphasis - to teach in a much more open kind of way, to allow for creative manipulation and individuality.

In our particular version as it's evolved there are no real restrictions on what texts are acceptable. The possibilities are truly limitless - an almost dreadful freedom. The lower sixth year can be approached as entirely introductory and exploratory, involving, for example, an introduction to ideas on literature and language, learning how to read and how to operate as a group, making decisions about what to discuss, what to write about, what kinds of discussion and writing are most useful and most appropriate to the issue in hand. Students are invited to become active readers of many things: films, television, popular music, poetry, novels, plays, children's fictions, non-fiction and of

English lessons too. Lessons are conducted as a forum for debate within which an awareness of theoretical issues is cultivated and alternative reading strategies are presented. The traditional canon of Literature is no longer exclusively dominant, though a great deal of time is devoted to giving students access to such cultural capital. We also attempt to provide them with a critical apparatus for reading it as group and as individual readers, and for challenging its primacy.

A way of giving an idea of how this course has been taught and learned is to give examples of subjects tackled as coursework or being tackled at the moment in the various designated categories:

### THE NOVEL

*Little Red Riding Hood* - the changing fate of a fairy tale; 'popular' Black American women's novels (Maya Angelou and Alice Walker); 19th and 20th century representations of women in English fiction: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller...* and the idea of 'metafiction'; Joseph Conrad and images of imperialism; the various accounts of women's roles in the fictions of D.H. Lawrence; women and society in Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy; a survey of women in literature based on extracts from fiction and articles from the 18th to the 20th century.

## POETRY

War and protest poetry through the twentieth century; Pablo Neruda and T.S. Eliot - twentieth century ideologies compared; Nicaragua and the idea of poetry workshops; Blake and Billy Bragg - poetry and the promotion of social change; images of Black America in popular music; race and the poetry of Lorna Goodison; forms of popular music - subversion or diversion?

## DRAMA

Poor theatre; images of women in American and English soap opera compared; South Africa and the drama of social protest; *Look Back in Anger* and *Plenty* - post-war disillusionment in Britain; the drama of the American dream - O'Neill and Miller; Harold Pinter's mystery plays; *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, and solidarity with the oppressed; Shakespeare's comedies of sexual politics.

## NON-FICTION

Mining communities - Lawrence, Orwell and the Battle for Orgreave; Enid Blyton and class representations in children's fictions; the theoretics of feminism; masculinity and *Men* (by Philip Hodson); Vietnam: *Rambo* and *Haunted Heroes*; linguistics, education and social class; comparing Freud and Jung on religion; theories of language - and the implications for the idea of literature; the meaning of football hooliganism (*Knuckle Sandwich*).

The above examples emphasize the importance of contemporary social issues and cultural forms to our teaching of A level. The topics any student chooses arise from their own and the group's reading through the course. The lists I've given don't include much of the standard literature that many students also opt for. But students who do (say) choose to write about the love poetry

of Wyatt and Donne, the novels of the Bronte sisters or Shakespeare's tragedies for their coursework are doing so in a context which has encouraged them to approach whatever they're reading and writing about, from 'Born in the USA' to *All's Well That Ends Well*, as cultural constructions produced, purveyed and reproduced within specific political and cultural conditions.

## CONCLUSION

The real goal of a truly radical 'deconstructive' approach to English A level might well be to dissolve the subject altogether and to transform the vacant space with a redefined set of practices addressed to a reconstituted group of people. There is certainly a strong need to dismantle the barriers which keep post 16 education an arena for the socially undesirable separation of the 'academic' from the 'vocational'; and which keep English falsely distinct from history, sociology and media studies. At present, though, it is possible to work towards occupying English with freshly defined purposes and practices. While the signifier - 'English' - remains, the signified - what and how people get taught - may yet be considerably revised.

If 'Literature is what gets taught', it is possible for teachers to exert what power they have to redefine the boundaries of the subject, to enact the death of literature on behalf of and with the connivance of the people they teach. I would add that if we genuinely aspire to challenge current modes of subjectivity, working in institutions as steeped in the rituals and ideology of power as schools are, we should also be aiming to enact, in some measure at least, the death of the teacher: but that's another story.

Nick Peim

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## DIRECTORY OF TERMS

The language of post-structuralism is notoriously difficult, its texts notoriously obscure, its authors likewise elusive, at times it seems, deliberately arcane. All the main ideas of post-structuralism, though, can be translated into simpler terms. All of the terms below can be taught to A level students during their course in various ways, not necessarily by direct and explicit explanation.

**SEMIOLOGY:** the 'science of signs'. The idea originates from Ferdinand de Saussure, who, in the early part of this century, wrote: 'A science is conceivable which would study the life of signs at the very heart of social life.' Semiology aims to understand the production and dissemination of signs in relation to the social order which produces and receives them. Language is a sign system. Television is another. Newspapers form another sign system. Semiology concerns itself with many different sign-systems and its implications reach into many different areas of interest: sociology, history, philosophy, as well as what is known as English.

**POST-STRUCTURALISM** is a movement of various directions in different fields which had been identified especially with the writings of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and, to some extent, the later work of Roland Barthes. The recently (re)discovered writings of Mikhail Bakhtin have also been of interest to post-structuralists ideas. Post-structuralism isn't exclusively to be identified with the work of these authors. One of its implications is to do away with the idea of the author in its current form.

Post-structuralism may be crudely characterized as denying any fixity of meaning, whether it be in language, in a text or in a human subject. It emphasizes, rather, a division or play of meanings and meanings subject to a range of different factors and not reducible to any given structure. In literary criticism 'deconstruction' is its main product, though the implications of post-structuralist psycho-analysis also have a bearing on the understanding of textual processes - if you want them to.

**A SIGNIFYING PRACTICE:** simply refers to an established use of signs to produce meanings. Examples would be: cinema, television, novels, mathematics, shampoo bottle labels, etc.

**A DISCURSIVE PRACTICE:** is a domain of language use with a specific place in culture and history, like, say, literary criticism, philosophy, Christianity, education, post-structuralism. Discursive practices are to be closely related to institutional practices.

**An INTERROGATIVE TEXT:** is a text which has the effect of calling things into question - among which may be included its own status as a text. Obvious examples could be *The Waste Land*, *King Lear*, almost any text by Kafka or Brecht, *Woza Albert!*, *Paris, Texas* and almost any 'modernist' text. No text is interrogative in and of itself, though, and in the right (or wrong?) hands any text can be made to do interrogative work.

**FEMINISM:** is not a specialist term at all, but its role in 'political criticism' might have a slightly different emphasis from its more common uses. Feminism might revive an interest in women's writings, might provide the impetus for a complete re-reading of an established author, like Freud or D.H. Lawrence, to take obvious examples. Feminism might provide new insight into old texts, might have a lot to say, for instance, about the madness and death of Ophelia in *Hamlet* (or the roles, textual and social, assigned to women in *The Otterbury Incident*, *I Am David*, the complete works of Enid Blyton, and so on.) Feminism, by challenging accepted norms and by attacking the accepted gender division - male and female - can be a far-reaching, wide-ranging and explosive means of re-examining all kinds of cultural practices.

**TEXTUAL GAPS:** the gaps in a text say a great deal about its ideological construction. What is left out and not said is as important as and not altogether separable from what is said. To take the example of *As You Like It*, a major gap in this text is the mothers. There are plenty of fathers, but no mothers. So we may suspect a patriarchal ideology to be at work. Gaps may be of this relatively simple kind, or may be of a more complex nature and impact. Some texts, like *The Waste Land*, will expose their gaps

shamelessly. Others, like the so-called 'realist novel', seek to conceal gaps in their construction.

**DECONSTRUCTION:** is a big and difficult term.

Deconstruction seeks, to put it too crudely and too quickly, to question the text's claim to unity of purpose. Deconstruction has become a widely used term and an established practice in literary critical institutions. Its originator, Jacques Derrida, has upbraided some of its American exponents for employing a tamed version which effects 'institutional closure'. Derrida wants deconstruction to have challenging political implications and to explode not just textual myths but also, for instance, the economic interests they might serve.

Deconstruction emphasizes instability of meaning, its unfixed nature and seeks, among other things, to undermine the authority upon which any attempt to fix (or affix) meanings relies. Deconstruction sees the production, reception and dissemination of meanings as problematical. In its most radical form it aims to subvert the dominant modes of thinking in our culture. All the same, it can retain more modest aims which any English teacher can put into practice with (say) a fourth year mixed ability class working on television soap operas, magazines, or *Macbeth*.

**TEXTUAL IDEOLOGY:** is the set of ideas or norms which seem to be at work in any text, or which give the text its illusory unity. No text can claim to be free from ideology, either in its production or in its reception. The word ideology tends to suggest a political bent, but it may encompass the political in the wider sense, for instance, of the politics of gender. The textual ideology of *Mein Kampf* would be fascism or nazism, of *Das Kapital* would be communism, of *Great Expectations* would be difficult to define, but no less operative because more elusive.

**LANGUAGE/WRITING AS DIFFERENCE:** emphasizes the effect of writing in articulating - dividing up - not experience itself, but ways of organizing our thinking about experience within language. According to Saussurian linguistics, language is a system of differences. Post-structuralism plays upon this point to emphasize the slipperiness of meaning. A word means what it means only because it doesn't mean something else. The meaning of one word is only present by the absence of and its difference from others. There's no logical connection between word and thing and you can tease out the implications of these ideas until nothing is but what is not. Writing complicates this point about language further by taking away even the presence of a speaker that might verify or guarantee a particular use of language.

**PRESENCE IN ABSENCE:** is a way of referring to the principle outlined above. The mothers in *As You Like It* (like the poor and the blacks in *Dallas* or the slaves in certain representations of ancient Athenian democracy) are glaringly present because they're not there. This is a way of talking about textual gaps.

**DEFERRAL OF MEANING:** is a post-structuralist idea about language, related to difference, which refers to the way that meanings are always both incomplete and about to come, though never quite arriving.

**DEATH OF THE AUTHOR:** is a phrase originating from Roland Barthes. Barthes says that the effort of literary work is (or should be) to make the reader a producer of the text. The death of the author means the birth of the reader. The reader's liberation movement takes away authority from the author, emphasizing the role of the reader in making the text.

**OPEN TEXT/CLOSED TEXT:** this idea refers to the text's attempt to fix meaning and to restrict the freedom of the reader. An open text gives the reader the liberty to make whatever s/he likes of itself. A closed text denies options. A closed text is likely to be more ideologically rigid and one of the aims of deconstruction might be to prise it open. There are of course, degrees of closedness and openness in all texts. Closed texts

might be, say, *Dr No* or *Rambo*; open texts - *Hamlet*, *The Waste Land*.

**INTERTEXTUALITY:** indicates the dependence of texts on each other to achieve their effects. No novel could function as a novel without there being novels which it, in an indirect way, refers to and gains force from. Even the most original, avant-garde of texts refers in its originality to the conventional texts it is different from. *The Waste Land*, with its scandalous use of quotation, offers an extreme and very obvious case of intertextuality.

**COMPETING DISCOURSES:** refers to the way that within any culture there will be certain ways of speaking, writing, representing and thinking which compete with one another. In our own time the discourse of feminism competes with the discourse of masculine domination, the discourse of the peace movement with the discourse of deterrence and the warfare state, and so on.

**SIGNIFIER AND SIGNIFIED:** refer to the two parts of a sign. The signifier is the part that points, as it were - the sound or shape of a word. The signified is what it points to - the meaning. Post-structuralism emphasizes the failure of one to adhere to the other, and proclaims the domination of the signifier.

**LANGUE AND PAROLE:** Saussure distinguished between 'langue', the language system as a whole, and 'parole', the individual utterance which depends on langue. The trouble with langue is that it's very difficult to get hold of.

**DENOTATION AND CONOTATION:** are effects of signs. Denotation tends to restrict and limit possible meanings. Conotation suggests and opens up meanings.

**METONYMY:** is where one thing stands for another or where a part may stand for a larger whole. The view at the beginning of *Coronation Street* may be a metonym for Manchester or for working-class life in Manchester in the late twentieth century. Similarly, the apparently trivial pop song, 'Walk Away Renee', may be a metonym for being black in modern urban America.

**TEXT AS MYTHOLOGY:** emphasizes the ideologically loaded nature of texts. Various myths may be at work in various texts. The myths of our own culture are many and varied and are born, sustained and developed in the dominant media of our time.

**SIGNIFICATION AS PLAY:** refers to the ceaseless movement involved in the use of signs. One signifier mobilizes many others into play and can point towards many (different) signifieds. Language, signs, meanings are never at rest.

**LANGUAGE AS METAPHOR:** all language is, in a sense, a substitute for something else, and is therefore metaphoric. 'Cat', the word, for instance, does not refer to a cat, but the the idea of a cat and this referral involves a metaphoric substitution. Deconstruction tries to identify and expose the hidden metaphors in our language which we have ceased to read as metaphors.

**LANGUAGE AND REPRESSION:** 'Language is fascist' (R. Barthes) because it compels speech. Language uses us and decides what can and what cannot be spoken. In this sense language is repressive. According to Jacques Lacan, even to acquire language in the first place involves repression in the individual on a pretty massive scale.

**LANGUAGE AND THE UNCONSCIOUS:** Lacan claims that in acquiring language the unconscious is created. The unconscious contains everything that isn't said and that can't be said, but like langue is the condition for what can be said. The unconscious, according to Lacan, is structured as a language, language divides us as human subjects and is a symbolic order to which we must submit and relinquish our desire. Lacan puts this rather poignantly: 'I am not a poet; but a poem. A poem that is being written...'

# 3 GCSE post-structuralism: it can be done!

Nick Peim

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— Why should English teachers at this particular juncture of the history of English in schools bother with literary theory? There is, after all, a lot to be said against it. The language of literary theory is often peculiarly complicated, can be sometimes deliberately obscure – and is very remote from the languages of the people we teach. It's élitist, exclusive, academic; it promotes a star system of intellectual superheroes and an ever-lengthening cast of supporting acolytes. It inhabits the 'academy' – a world very much removed from the hard realities of comprehensive schools. It is contemptuous of common sense, has little time for experience, refuses to have truck with simplicity and directness. It's brutal: it attacks our most cherished assumptions about the value of what we teach, destabilizes our central ideas, our established practices, and calls many productive activities into question.

Remote, chic, avant-garde, intellectually haughty, pointlessly inaccessible and generally too unwieldy to furnish practical ideas for teaching, literary theory has discussed its rewritings of English literature with scant reference to English teaching in schools. As academic literary theory – intoxicated with its own intellectual achievements – spirals dizzyingly into ever more circular debates about post-modernism, post-colonialism, post-capitalism, it seems to leave the realities of the mass medium of English teaching in schools far behind.

At the same time, aspects of theory represent immense power of ideas. Structuralism and post-structuralism constitute a massive field encompassing quite revolutionary ways of understanding fundamental issues and questions about the whole field of cultural practices, including everything

that has ever come under the heading of English literature, whatever the brand of the discourse. The major productions – in terms of ideas – of theory, whether in the field of psychoanalysis or literary studies, can promote a whole new way of thinking about language, representation and communication. These are, potentially, immensely productive in the way they address cultural objects and practices.

Literary theory is to do with much more than literature or with theories about literature alone, calling into question the privileges granted to the category 'literature' and the processes of exclusion that its maintenance often involves. Literary theory begins with ideas about what literature is, then addresses itself to the whole field of cultural production and reception, and examines the wider social context within which these things are constructed. Thus it can change the 'object' of study, alter practice and extend the field of view of the subject, drawing into itself thought from other discourses that may have a bearing on this newly defined field of knowledge.

One name for this field could be GCSE English and English Literature.

## All language is sign language

In spite of the mystique of literary theory, teaching aspects of semiotics with fourth- and fifth-year classes is perfectly possible without making reference to any prohibitively difficult ideas. 'Theoretical' terminology can be usefully introduced, can be illustrated, and can be handed over, as it were, simply and directly. Once in the hands of students, activities and working structures can be developed which will engage them in a more active appropriation and utilization of theory. The first and fundamental terms of semiotics, for example, establishing the analysis of the sign as composed of signifier and signified – soon to become the objects of much 'play' in a more general drive towards deconstruction – can be quickly illustrated and can then immediately lead to some 'practical' applications.

A class of fourth-years, newly arrived into the 14–18 community college, with varying levels of ability ascribed to them by the high schools they've just left, embarking on the course that will take them, via the certification machinery, to GCSE English and English Literature, are invited to give examples of signs – any kind of signs: traffic lights, road signs, written signs, picture signs, signs on toilet doors. A discussion can then follow about how the signs work. The terms 'signifier' and 'signified' can be introduced and explained, according to the simple Saussurian definition of the structure of the sign. The traffic lights example provides a useful model for discussing the idea of a sign system in relation to a specific cultural practice: the traffic lights constitute a discrete (Saussurian) sign system, but one which operates within the cultural practice (discourse) of road-use and which is related to other signs and other sign systems (discourses). The arbitrary nature of the sign – how the signifier relates to the signified in no intrinsic way – may also, though it represents a very significant theoretical leap, be



discussed quite simply. This major and potentially radically deconstructive point – sometimes alluded to in mysterious terms as the free-floating signifier – in this context can be used to exemplify the way that contexts and conventions, rather than meanings, give signs particular values and directions. A couple of fifty-minute lessons would be enough to convey all this. From such a starting point, activities can be devised and offered to make the ideas more properly available for exploration, discussion and debate.

From the humble example of the traffic lights and the perhaps not so humble toilet door, introducing the ideologically loaded issue of gender, the analysis of signs in language can follow. (That is, language language as opposed to traffic lights language or some other kind of sign language.) The example can be taken of a single, fairly simple – written and spoken – signifier, 'dog': what is the signified? The response is likely to be varied. A list of different signifieds can be compiled by the whole class to illustrate how the signified is not held in any simple, single relationship to the signifier. Equally important, the signified also turns out, in this case, to be at one time one thing, at another something different, but on the way it has been set up, finally, to be an indefinitely long list of other signifiers; though not necessarily, perhaps hardly ever, all of these at once. The implications of these points – which do not seem to be entirely consonant with familiar and with common-sense notions of language – can be further teased out by examining other kinds of signifiers in language: conjunctions, shifters, adjectives, and so on. Important ideas, fundamental to structuralist and post-structuralist thinking have been dealt with here: the predominance of the (free-floating) signifier, the deferral of meaning and the signifying chain, the cultural specificity of discourses or language-games, for instance: all of which can be (and often are) described in arcane terminology with knotty syntax, but which don't have to be.

The preparatory stage need not take long nor be over-complicated. The problematic nature of the sign in language has been established. Semiotic thinking and analysis is under way; common sense has been displaced; English lessons are not quite what they used to be. The use of signs within different kinds of sign systems and the relationship between signs, sign systems and cultural practices has, in a preliminary way, been illustrated. Students, who at this stage are unlikely to have formulated any explicit models of the workings of language, are quick to take up these points and can make them their own with relative ease. The conceptual matter they're dealing with is, after all, no more difficult than, say, topics in geometry. The vocabulary is no more alienating than some they'll come across in design subjects. It isn't necessary to assume that semiotics (nor deconstruction, theory of discourses and related concerns), because it has become associated with the 'high' and exclusive (excluding) culture of academic discourse, is therefore inaccessible to fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds. To assume necessarily that it is may well be to discredit their capacities as well as to collude with the academic inflection of these ideas, and of ideas in general.

## Introducing cultural practices

The theoretical apparatus has been established: some practical exploration can now take place. The exercise to begin with is to take two common signifiers and produce lists, individually or in pairs or in small groups, of 'signifieds' for the culturally loaded terms 'man' and 'woman'. Two separate lists are to be written on either side of a page divided lengthwise into two. Games may then follow, including pairing terms, finding what terms can't readily be paired, grouping terms to do with activities, listing clothing, grouping adjectives and then, perhaps, analysing through discussion the implications of these findings. Important points about the cultural power of signifiers can emerge from these kinds of discussions. The gender issue is one which is not particularly unfamiliar and so the proposed new terminology and new way of examining language should be unhindered. As gender divisions are so much actively constructed and reproduced through everyday linguistic exchange, students will find themselves quickly making their own discoveries.

Two particularly useful terms in this context, which can be stored for further use, development and reference, are metaphor and metonymy – according to Lacan's use of Jakobson, the twin axes of language. The man and woman lists are likely to throw into sharp relief many examples of metonym and metaphor which can make some explicit pointing of their effects. Their importance relates closely to what has already been hinted at in the arbitrary structure of the sign, as the ever-shifting chain of signification, the elusive trail of fixed meaning. The ways in which they displace and defer meaning can be illustrated by the students themselves using their own examples. Very attractive, amusing and powerfully illustrative displays can be mounted using pictorial representations of metonyms and metaphors that students have produced.

At any stage in the progress of the work being described here, students can be told that what they are studying is semiotics relating to cultural practices, that they are learning about or actually actively conducting an examination of signs at work in specific cultural practices; that they are developing an understanding of language (in relation to the construction of social meanings and social realities) that doesn't always accord with common sense, but that is nonetheless perfectly sensible, demonstrable and useful in terms of practical analyses and which is theoretically more powerful and inclusive than common sense. The practical analysis can then become the point at which the students themselves take control of their work. They are invited to consider examples of representations/constructions of gender distinctions using signs in children's fictions, magazines (of any kind), television adverts and soap operas. Before or during this stage it can be useful to spend more time discussing cultural practices – what kinds of things they are, how they work, in what contexts, to what effects – in a general and open-ended kind of way. Students select their own examples, their own texts, to emphasize that to begin with we're interested in any manifestations of the form or genre in question, that representations of gender differences are likely to be per-

vatively present in cultural practices concerned with common social life.

Some time is spent with students in class examining in detail their own selections of magazines, children's stories, television soap operas and adverts, time to draw up lists of examples of various kinds of representations of gender in these media. It's an important element of this kind of work, I think, to allow students to work on these tasks collaboratively with the teacher available for clarification, especially as new ideas and terminology are being introduced. All of this phase, where students are collecting examples, attempting to analyse how they work and what their likely effects are, may be prefaced by whole-group activities which examine initial instances together. With one fourth-year group we've discussed a single *Peter and Jane* text collectively, and done collectively a kind of semiotic analysis of the Swan kitchen magazine advert and the Pretty Polly tights poster advert, paying particular attention to metonymic evocations of femininity, ultimately asking whether these evocations are not, in fact, products or constructions more than neutral representations of ideals. With the right kind of clarity in the questioning and openness in response, ensuring that students are always given time to formulate their own responses first and ensuring that most of the discussion comes from them, detailed and quite sophisticated analyses are possible.

The final result of all this work could well be a piece for GCSE examination coursework, and could equally be submitted for the English or the English Literature folder. It is important, as I've said, that students work collaboratively – and that they do so consciously. Any kind of cultural studies project that fails to emphasize that aspect of the work fails, I think, to grasp some essential points about the kind of classroom organization that is most desirable, but equally is most likely to give rise to questions about common assumptions, popular myths, individual differences and ways that all these often conflicting factors are involved in the reception of cultural signs and in the production of sign systems. The specifications of the GCSE criteria demand, for obvious and highly deconstructable reasons, that all pieces submitted should be the individual work of the candidates. That doesn't, though, discount students working closely on the organization, detail and handling of ideas in one another's writings. An 'essay' can be produced which is the individual product of an individual student yet which has been produced in close dialogue with others who may have commented on its contents, argued its ideas through, suggested developments in the analyses it enacts and the form it finally takes. This way of encouraging students to work counteracts the absurdly limited model of language which grants true authenticity only to the individual consciousness, and it inexplicitly affirms the notion that cultural phenomena can only be properly understood collectively.

This example – of teaching about cultural practices in relation to gender constructions through an understanding of how signs work – is one chosen from many possible examples, and is intended to illustrate how semiotics, or some of its terms and ideas, can be put to use in an introductory way with incoming fourth-year students. Since the schemes we teach at GCSE are of

the Mode 3 persuasion, there's absolutely no problem about any of the content of course-work pieces being disallowed or subject to negative scrutiny by external controlling examiners who may have different ideas about what is and isn't legitimately English. This open freedom means that the kind of work already described can be conceived as preliminary to an indefinite number of other related activities that raise issues of textual and extra-textual relations, which will begin from some of the themes announced in the phase of work described above. What follows is not at all offered as the outline of a course that follows progressively through a necessary continuum of themes or topics. I have rather attempted to describe examples of discrete activities which may follow different directions from those I've suggested and which may be variously related to one another. There will always be significant connections between the particular topics described, and these strands can be made more or less explicit.

### From semiotics to deconstruction: textual analysis

A general deconstruction of some of the privileged categories of English can begin at almost any point and can involve any activity concerned with the de-centring of any text, set of texts, reading or writing practices. I begin with an example of some of the ideas which emerged from the teaching of a single text: the television play about nuclear war, *Threads*. The main motivation in using this text was that it commanded a great deal of interest and seemed, for obvious reasons, to engage students in a particularly attentive way of watching. The point was certainly not, at least at first, to tackle the nuclear issue, but to put emphasis on a reading of textual production. A number of issues relating to textual production arose from discussions held after the programme had been watched by the whole group. In a production which had put together material from such diverse sources, and which was obviously quoting quite often from external sources – directly in the case of its use of government publications, for example, indirectly in the case of television news format – the relations between intertextual forces and the status granted to the author may be explored. The play (is it a play?) has an author, but also a director and a producer, and has clearly been constructed collectively – as can be evinced from a close analysis of much of the text. In what kind of style, or genre, has the production been cast? Is it, as many would assert, realistic? Is 'realism' the same as 'real'? What elements in the 'play' are there which would encourage us to read it as realistic? What elements might suggest otherwise? Information is flashed onto the screen which at times may claim the status of fact, but which at other times is clearly speculation, for example. The 'constructedness' of the programme may be highlighted by an examination of the deliberate accumulation of metonyms, which follows the initial 'threads' metaphor in the opening sequence. The role, for instance, of the milk-float can be followed by re-running the sections in which it appears. The narrative thread initiated by the metonymically

implied moment of conception, and which ends with the ambiguous representation of a birth at the close of the 'film', can be discussed. The sombre music and the serious, male documentary intonation of the voice-over can be identified by students as productive of certain kinds of effects. The kind of people who are portrayed as central characters can be identified as selected – specifically to enhance audience identification.

All of these elements can be identified by students, their local and specific effects discussed and their accumulated effects explored. The question of the cultural specificity of *Threads* as a text dependent on inexplicit reference to so many established conventions from various aspects of television production, can also be discussed and can become part of a more general consideration of television and its use and production of cultural references that shape our ways of seeing things. This phenomenological point, once again, need not be shrouded with any difficult terminology or any especially knotty thinking – but can lead into a consideration of the power of discourses, like the discourse of television in this case, actively working to produce their objects; also, to produce the audience that is capable of consistent, coherent readings, of the object. In the particular case of *Threads*, a whole new dimension may be explored in relation to questions about reader response. The impact of *Threads* is unlikely to have very much that is variable about it, and with fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds is likely to be powerful and disturbing. It's easy to ask what is being disturbed and to explore the ideological composition of what it is that passes for normal life. One of the most interesting opportunities afforded in my own teaching of this text with fourth-years has been discussing with students what happens to this impact once it has passed beyond its initial, shocking phase. How is integration, incorporation, effected without serious disturbance to everyday life? In other words, where does *Threads* go when it's not dominating consciousness?

Fairly straightforward ideas, represented simply, in diagrammatic form on a blackboard, can serve as introductory to a consideration of a psycho-analytic theory of the subject which locates cultural phenomena like *Threads* with a consideration of subjectivity in its relations more generally to culture and to language. Freud's model of the decentred subject, divided between conscious and unconscious and experiencing controlled interchange between the two realms, can be shown to incorporate the idea of repression, the likely contents of the unconscious, the nature of dream experience, the mechanism of censorship, the principles of displacement and condensation. These can all be represented and discussed, and none of it seems to be beyond the competent grasp of fourteen- and fifteen-year-old students.

To this can be added the Lacanian incorporation of language into the Freudian model which emphasizes the construction of the subject and subject positions through the acquisition of language. The splitting of the subject and the relations and differences between the imaginary and symbolic orders and the 'real' can also be described, brought into play and discussed. In the particular case of one fourth-year group, the work they did on *Threads* during their second term was entitled '*Threads* and the Unconscious' and began in

most cases with descriptions and diagrams which placed the experience of *Threads* within the ideas they had picked up on subjectivity and its relations to a wider culture that might correspond to ways of understanding the imaginary, symbolic orders and the real, to borrow Lacanian terminology.

The teaching of a single text as described above attempts to highlight the relations between text and extra-textual forces that are at work in the production of textual meaning. The text, in this case, becomes an object of interest itself but is also a pre-text for a more general teaching directed at the understanding of cultural forms and cultural practices in a more theoretical way. One point that was discussed, when dealing with *Threads*, was the context within which it was likely to be viewed. Where would it most likely be watched? What would people be doing while they were watching? What kinds of things might people have been watching before, might they watch after? Does the fact that it is cast in the mode of a narrative television play override other things about it? What difference might these factors make to its impact? The invitation to engage in a contextualizing of media texts emphasizes the determination of the text in its relations with other texts and the social at work in its moment of reception. What happens, though, after the moment of reception? Does the text remain inertly lodged in the conscious or unconscious of individuals? Or is the text talked about, reformulated in some senses and re-read in an important way in the kinds of exchange that are likely to go on about a text with a large audience?

### Deconstructing English: discourse analysis

In preparation for extension studies demanded for the GCSE English Literature coursework, one class began a simple exercise in thinking about discourses which became increasingly deconstructive as it progressed. The only thing about these proceedings and their subsequent development which might be considered in the least obscure was the introduction of the word 'taxonomy', which students began to use pretty quickly with facility. The lesson began with the idea of producing a taxonomy of fiction, since it was likely that the extension study for English literature would be concerned with fiction. 'What kinds of fiction are there?' was the opening question, and a list was produced. Departmental policy has been strong for a number of years on a practice of promoting individual reading among students, so that significant time – in most cases a quarter of the time allotted to English – had been dedicated to giving students quiet personal reading sessions, access to the library, opportunities to talk freely among themselves about books they'd read, to accumulate reading capital, to have this recorded by themselves and by their teacher. Much of this reading was their own and not in the possession of the teacher nor subject to the teacher's guiding control. Students had, then, much direct experience of varied fictions.

The point about a taxonomy is that, used in certain ways, it can be made to disrupt exactly what it is supposed to effect; that is, to organize its con-

stituent elements into discrete categories, or to organize clear thought by making distinctions between the essential differences that keep boundaries defined, and to hold orders in order and to stabilize an otherwise shifting and uncertain world. A fiction taxonomy was produced very quickly by '5g':

romance	magazine stories
crime/detective	cheap paperback fiction
war and adventure	extensive paperback fiction
domestic fiction	school library fiction
science fiction	
horror	
	serious fiction
	entertainments
English fiction	literature
Russian fiction	Literature
modern fiction	adult fiction
19th century fiction	teenage fiction
	children's fiction

This taxonomy made it apparent that the world of fiction could not maintain a perfectly stable ordering of its inhabitants. Other factors and forces had to intervene to decide, for instance, the difference between literature and Literature, differences between the prices of types of fiction, between their various audiences. The genre categories were found to be unstable and to have infinite interlinking and overlapping possibilities. Perhaps more seriously for the integrity of the category, the idea that fiction could be constrained to include only novels, or novelettes, or extended prose stories seemed to dissolve all too quickly. Are fictions only contained in books? Is fiction just that kind of writing, those kinds of writing, found on the fiction shelves in libraries or bookshops? Fiction cannot be synonymous with stories. There are other kinds of story which are not fiction. Fiction can't simply be divided from that which is true, either. It might be possible for fiction to represent truth, and it might be the case that what passes for non-fiction -- television news stories, documentaries -- are highly fictionalized products. What about soap operas, television ads, jokes, anecdotes: what kind of relation do these things have to fiction?

Students will tend to be deeply sceptical of the division between literature and Literature, thinking it falsely social, more probably to do with snobbery and exclusion than absolute value and truth. They will certainly see that the distinction cannot be a property of textual forces alone. And a major move,

easily made at this stage, is to make the connection between all the questions, and the uncertainties they gave rise to, about fiction -- and what English was all about or could be all about. If a major concern of the subject, English literature, is fiction, if the category fiction itself eludes definition and identity so obviously, doesn't that itself have implications for the identity, integrity and presumptions of the subject which is English? Of course it does; and fourth- or fifth-year comprehensive-school students are as quick to see this point and to understand its implications as sophisticated academics are. There is nothing arcane about this line of thinking and nothing inaccessible about its deconstructive, anti-centric drives, though the academic formulations of similar positions have, unfortunately, tended to shroud themselves in a mystique of difficulty and an exclusive, reference-bound obscurantism which actually obstructs dissemination and which lends such concerns the aura of an excluding practice.

To engage students fully in any discussions which might be dealing with theoretical approaches, to devise activities that enable students to make their own theoretical discoveries, while at the same time letting them know that there are arguments about the issues they're dealing with, that there are differences in the ideology of the subject, that for many the kind of theory they are utilizing is thought to be difficult or rarefied: these approaches are more likely to engender greater confidence than to inspire the terror of inadequacy. Neither the idea of a taxonomy nor the idea of using a taxonomy for deconstructive purposes proved beyond the competence of these students engaged in the topic described above. Once a couple of simple explanations had been given and a full discussion had taken place, students were able to see for themselves the implications and to decide for themselves the kind of position they wanted to adopt in relation to the discussion. This preliminary work certainly enabled them to see more clearly the possibilities for opening up their approaches to the extended, comparative study. They were able to decide with confidence to offer work that, for instance, considered the differences in status between popular and canonical fictions, to give serious consideration to the matter of enjoying texts across a variety of kinds of fiction.

### Narratology: stories and truth

More can be done with a more textually focused examination of the structures of fictions and their relationships to readership and to the socially determined production of reading and readings. A scheme of work on the structures of fiction can be initiated by a simple exercise which takes a fiction whose construction is immediately available for analysis. Students are invited to compose a story in not more than, say, sixty words. The story is produced, the author and the audience are ready to hand and, therefore, a more-or-less complete and exhaustive analysis of reading relations can begin. Any number of simple activities are possible which could begin to set familiar habits of

reading fiction and ideas about reading fiction into question. In this piece of work it was possible to show how many of our ways of reading, our categories of fiction and our vocabulary of understanding fiction are always constructions that escape the explanation of any given fiction's structural properties.

Once the stories have been written, students may be invited to go on to write or to speak the 'meaning' of their own story. They may also invite another student to read their story and to offer their version of the story's meaning. The two meanings can then be compared. It takes no very complex process to convey to students that the meaning of any text, when examined in this way, is problematic. It becomes quickly apparent that a text is not identical with its meaning; that the meaning of a text is not somehow lodged within it, that the meaning of a text can vary considerably from reader to reader. It is also apparent that the idea of a meaning is in itself a conventional fiction that tends to suppress important aspects of textual relations – such as the social status of the text, the position of the reader, the control of the reading response by the domination of certain conventions. Such conventions tend to read, for instance, certain proper names as indicative of individual character, assumptions of specificity of time and of place, identifications with the strategy of the narrative, the effecting of closure, the suppression of gaps and inconsistencies, and so on.

Students may be invited to join in the collaborative construction of a 'structure box'. Inside the box, which can be drawn as a box in chalk on the board, will go all the elements that go to make up the story: a list that may include features such as beginning, end, middle, title, descriptions, proper names, characters, places, times, and so on. Any one of these can then be taken and examined. Or they can all be taken and applied to any handily available story – fictional or otherwise. The relativity of any one of the terms conventionally used to describe or to catalogue the elements of fiction can be shown to be, at least philosophically, provisional, by suggesting or by providing alternatives. An analysis of 'the symbolic code', for example, in any story would be likely to reveal objects and characters in certain kinds of relation to one another. A function for each, within the strategy of the narrative, could be proffered. Ways of assigning functions to any element, though, will be determined by the kind of reading which is going on. This clearly operates at the level of individual interpretation, but a more radical point can be grasped by students if they are made aware of how kinds of reading themselves – reading practices and positions – are determined by things other than stories or personal idiosyncracies. A simple introduction of basic terms from phenomenology pointing out the difference between object and aspect may be illuminating in this context, 'the object' here referring to the thing itself, and 'the aspect' referring to the image of the thing itself as seen from a particular viewpoint by a particular viewer. The cultural encoding of meaning – explicitly identified in the work done on gender – can be referred to once again, and examples may be given from stories that inhabit different sectors of cultural space.

One particular example, an item taken from the *Daily Mirror*, 'Treading the Path of Tears', which formed part of a complex text that occupied the first three pages of an issue of the paper, was the basis for a discussion from which a whole section of this work emanated:

#### Treading the Path of Tears

Jan, a sturdy little police collie, tore into the earth of the haunted moorland wilderness. Dank mud caked her black and white fur as she dug relentlessly into the ground, her finely tuned nose seeking to lay the ghosts of Wildcat Quarry.

For handler Sergeant Neville Sharp, of West Yorkshire police, it was a horror revisited.

He gritted his teeth and held back his fury and tears as his seven-year-old dog scratched furiously into ground that holds secrets and terrors.

Two decades ago he was a young copper assigned to help dig up the mutilated victims of the deranged madness of Myra Hindley and Ian Brady.

He had watched as the bodies were exhumed and taken away.

'I was just a lad at the time', he said yesterday. 'I was so sad, very sad, when I saw those little bodies. I'm a 43-year-old now with two daughters of my own. But I shall never forget what I saw on that awful day.'

Sergeant Sharp is one of the eight-strong sniffer dog team who will be minutely inspecting every blade of grass, every mound of earth and every rock on this desolate moorland called Saddleworth.

It is a disturbingly grim place, hovering above the Dove Stone reservoir. Little of this bleak landscape has changed since the stomach-churning discoveries that first shook the nation all those years ago.

In the quiet village of Greenfield, just two miles away down a winding muddied road, the people are bracing themselves with grim lips to relive the horrors.

The village pub, The Clarence, is the place where Brady and Hindley calmly and callously played dominoes after their frequent trips to the moors.

It gives you a feeling of chilling eeriness to stand on Hollin Brow Knoll where the abused and tortured body of Lesley Ann Downey had been found.

Or to walk across the charmingly named Isle of Skye road and stare at the earth where the mutilated remains of little John Kilbride were discovered.

'What kind of writing is this?' precipitates the recognition that in this case the factual and the fictional are not clearly textually distinct. The elements which make it seem like a fiction are easily identified. Further questions expose more of the text's use of the conventions of fiction. What role is assigned to the policeman? What role is assigned to the dog? What role is assigned to Brady and Hindley? What is the function, in the 'story', of the village pub? What are the effects intended by the use of the adjectives? Identify them and describe their functions, and so on. What are the effects achieved by the uses and the positionings of place names? All of the elements of the text, their various functions and components, can be shown to be

dependent on familiar, culturally common references, showing how this text of uncertain status refers to other commonly available textual forms. Insights gained through this interrogative analytical mode may be further explored and analysed in the process of the students' producing their own similarly-constructed, blatantly inter-textual texts, intermingling the styles of fiction and reality, story and truth. All of this work on the idea of narrative, the idea of the story and the role of the reader and the reading community, might be developed in different directions and in different ways. Once again, the various strands may be brought together by students for an examinable piece of writing. An open structure (organized using a structure box) can be proffered so that students can handle the ideas they're most confident with according to their own ordering.

## Closure

English has quite recently discovered its own history, sociology and philosophy. Although this exposure has tended to happen predominantly in the upper academic circle, the movement has at least made available some grounds for transformation in the stalls. It is no longer possible, academically, at least, to maintain a practice of English based on innocence, uncontaminated by theory. That the transformation has not yet occurred on any large or meaningful scale is simply a function of where theory is validated at the moment. Accommodation, appropriation, transformation: of theory itself as well as of English, of the kind of theory now at large which has its own mystifications and exclusivity; resituating theory, liberating and redistributing it, deprivileging it in spite of its own claims to undermine privilege: these moves might best be effected by its infiltration of the mass medium of English teaching in schools. A reading of 'theory' which makes it accessible to students engaged on GCSE English courses can potentially save the power of theory from its almost hopeless obscurantism, its academic incarceration. This piece has attempted to show that it is possible.

final assessments at GCSE – were not entirely settling. We have since had the ‘structuralism scare’, the more general ‘poststructuralism scare’, the ‘feminist textual politics scare’ and others, none of which, thankfully, ever reached the intensity of the original phenomenological crisis. But what, precisely, was the nature of this parental, student, and later on, institutional anxiety?

The concern of all these bodies was not that phenomenology was being taught incorrectly, or that, for example, Husserl was being preferred above Hegel. The general approach that was taken towards phenomenology during the classes was one that emphasized subject/object relations, examined their possible dichotomy, and looked at the formulation of a perceived objective or external reality. No books or extracts from books on phenomenology were actually read; neither was this objected to. Students were given diagrams of sides of houses and other two-dimensional representations of single planes or three-dimensional objects, and were then asked to describe what they ‘perceived to be’. We looked up the words ‘perceive’ and ‘being’, and discussed whether ‘being’ was the same as ‘to be’; of course, different people came to different conclusions, but that hardly mattered since it was not our aim to teach Husserl or Merleau-Ponty or anyone else in an explicit and prescriptive manner. We were concerned that students should raise for themselves, as far as possible, themes and questions that phenomenology expresses. This was the position that we tried to maintain throughout the two weeks that we spent on this topic. During the initial period short pieces of writing, in response to a series of questions, were set, completed and discussed by the class as a whole. Questions such as:

‘How do you know what you are looking at?’

‘Can you tell what you are looking at is?’

‘If you looked at something differently, would it change?’

‘Is it entirely up to you how you look at things?’

‘Is the world as we know it made up of the description of how things look?’

‘Is how things look how things are?’

‘Texts, physical objects, general notions of culture and the self

## 6

### Never mind English: this is theory in the secondary school

#### Paul Moran and Nick Peim

‘Why are we doing this, Mr Moran?’ asks a 14 year old.

‘Well, we’re doing this because . . .’

‘My mum says that phenomenology isn’t English.’

‘Perhaps it isn’t.’

‘Why are we doing it then?’

‘We’re doing phenomenology now because later on it will help you with some work that we’re going to do on the material production of the meaning of texts.’

The 14 year old wasn’t convinced. For that matter, neither were her parents. Phenomenology, as far as all of them were concerned, was clearly not English. Its relevance to the subject was, to their very best knowledge, arbitrary and superficial. Why, then, was Patricia being made to do phenomenology, particularly when her own English teacher seemed uncertain about whether or not this obscure branch of speculative knowledge fell within the arena of either English Language or English Literature?

These questions, which we were faced with in the Spring term of 1987, are all important. Unfortunately, in what later became known as ‘the phenomenology scare’ in the school, a number of parents sought to remove their daughters and sons from the groups in which this kind of activity was taking place: our answers obviously proved to be insufficient to allay their anxieties about what was being taught. Assurances that any writing produced on phenomenology would be legitimate material to submit for their coursework folders – the form of their

were all used in different ways to confront and discuss these questions. Again, though we constantly made suggestions about how ideas might be examined or developed from different perspectives, we made no attempt to suggest that any ideas were right or wrong: we were keen to encourage students to extrapolate the implications of their own ideas to their fullest extent.

It was the implication of this last point, it seems, that was partly responsible for the collective phenomenological angst. In conjunction with the general bemusement as to why English teachers were inflicting arcane philosophy on their classes, there were complaints that little or no direction was being given as to whether a student's ideas were correct or otherwise; that pieces of work were steadfastly ungraded, despite the fact that the GCSE Literature and Language courses were entirely examined on a selection of two years' coursework; that comments which had been written on returned 'essays' offered no corrective guidance as to how the topic might be done properly; and that a number of 'essays' had been produced by student collaboration. All of the allegations, which were quite justifiable, implied the relinquishment of some kind of authority. But what, then, was this authority, we asked? How could it be identified, and was its relinquishment, perhaps more imaginary than real? We also suggested that students might like to include a discussion of this matter – of authority and the subject of English – in their own writing, and possibly explain how it might be linked to them doing phenomenology in the fourth year. There was a general reluctance to take up this suggestion because of the very grounds on which it was offered. It would clearly be impossible to grade such a piece of work, since grading, according to all of the antagonistic bodies, implied some kind of objective assessment. It would obviously not be possible to apply, in any meaningful way, objective assessment criteria to a piece of work whose significance was essentially its self-analytical quality. And anyway, it was argued; phenomenology, particularly with this additional discussion of teaching and learning practices in which the division between the two would tend to become indeterminate, was most definitely not English. Disaffected students and parents were especially anxious to make this point by alluding to cases where the subject appeared to be clearly identifiable; and it was the authority of this identity, which was

also the authority of English – including teaching practices and the application of an external and objective grading procedure – that was most important.

This point in the crisis illuminated most clearly the various positions which had been taken up. The greatest outrage that had been committed against the integrity of the subject during the entire phenomenological crisis, an outrage which launched some of the protagonists into a veritable apoplexy of existential bad faith, was our expression that, if students felt the need for grades to be awarded in respect to their pieces of work then this could be done by the students themselves, perhaps working with each other in groups. Written explanations would have to be provided about how and why students awarded grades as they did, as well as including in their own writing some description of whether or not there could be any justification for imposing their own self-determined grades on others who were perhaps unwilling to participate in, or disagreed with their established criteria. What we are interested in, we made obvious, is what a grade and a system of grading means in relation to the production and identity of any piece of work and, as a result of this, the meaning, position, and identity of the student in relation to the subject. Outright opposition followed (by some), and it was even suggested that a few students, in accordance with their own and their parents' wishes, be removed from the groups concerned.

When later ourselves and some of the classes that we taught became engaged in a piece of work about the determination of meaning in relation to the power of institutional structures, the kinds of questions that we were left with were as follows:

'What, now, as a result of this piece of work, is the subject?'

'Have we changed, through our discussion and our collective practices, what English means?'

'Is what we are doing still English, and if it isn't, to what extent does it still depend upon the notion of English and the practice of English in other places?'

These questions, however, did not arise out of a collective certainty that what we were doing was correct: even after the threatened exodus of some students, there remained some



uncertainty about the way that the subject was being treated, particularly in respect to the absence of grades. The issue of marking and grading and the authority which this seemed to express about the subject became a focal point for anxiety. Much of the work that followed was an attempt to analyse the meaning of English in this respect. In general terms, our intention was to make the subject of English the subject of analysis in order to reveal how its assumed integrity was 'made up' and held in place.

The work through which these questions evolved was relatively simple. We wanted to emphasize the importance of the reader in the production of textual meaning; we also wanted to demonstrate how an array of seemingly extra-textual forces intervened in this process, and also how these forces were dealt with and expressed by English in its institutional context. Everyone had to produce a piece of writing about a short story called 'The Rose'. It didn't matter how long or short their own piece of writing was, but it was important that they should think seriously about the short story and not be afraid to write down what they really thought. It was important, for our purposes, to prefigure in this process the eminence of the individual via the sovereignty of their genuine opinions, feelings, and experiences, since it was this very eminence, as we hoped to demonstrate in their own work, that was problematized by the material conditions of its production and was denied by the operations of the subject of English.

At first, writing paper and nothing else was handed out to the class. Students were asked to consider what would happen if we asked them to get on with the task of producing their own work about 'The Rose' which was to reflect, we emphasized, their most sincere thoughts and feelings about the short story, without them being given the chance to read it. A productive confusion followed: how would it be possible to produce a piece of writing which reflected the essential individuality of a reader's experience of a text if the text itself couldn't be read? What if, we asked, we allowed a few people to read the short story and then allowed these people to relay their reading of the text to the rest of the class. Would that be a satisfactory way of producing the requisite piece of work? Again, there was a degree of confusion and ambiguity about what was occurring: the

whole point of the exercise was to produce a piece of work which reflected their genuine feelings and ideas about 'The Rose'. The authenticity of these feelings and ideas as their own true reflections on the story was deeply jeopardized by the mediation of another (or others). Despite the initial uncertainties and the simplicity of the language which was being used, a series of complex and cogent philosophical themes were clearly starting to emerge from the ensuing debate. Firstly, the necessity of the activity of reading for the production of textual meaning, and the problem of the identity of the individual in relation to this activity; and secondly, the notion of the individual or pure self – in this case, as a reader – being impeded in its expression by that which is other to itself. During the very early stages of this work the class as a whole was generally very ardent in its contention that the entities of self and other-than-self were quite distinct. The fervency with which this point was made, that the difference between self and other-than-self should be maintained in order to preserve the authenticity of their own work as a reflection of their seemingly intact individual selves, suggested that we were dealing with urgent moral matters rather than abstract or philosophical issues. 'I might not agree with what they think the story is about'; 'They might have got it wrong'; 'But it won't be my feelings if someone else does it' were opinions which were commonly and forcefully expressed. In these circumstances, it was fairly easy to introduce and demonstrate the terms 'self' and 'other-than-self', which quickly became 'other'. And, if future work was to be done on post-structuralist themes, it was important that this should be so.

'The Rose' – a very simple and perhaps bizarre short story that we had devised produced a variety of different reactions.

#### The Rose

The old woman looked at the road which had been built across what used to be part of her garden. The enormous house where she used to live had also gone, and in its place stood the grim factory. She stood and watched in the cold of the morning as men and women marched along the road and in through the factory gates. 'I remember', she thought to herself, as she turned away from what used to be her home, 'that which used to be.'

Since we had taken pains beforehand to emphasize the importance of the carefully considered frankness of each student's response to the story, it was perhaps unsurprising that among the relatively detailed critical appraisals of 'The Rose' there were a number of pieces of work which were notable for their brief but nevertheless complete condemnation of the anonymous story as well as some that expressed a thorough indifference to it. Because of this degree of variation in response to the story, students, working in groups, found it exceptionally difficult to determine grades and criteria by which these responses might be objectively applied to their work. An expression of the difficulty of this task developed on the grounds that even though some pieces of work appeared to be more sophisticated, all of the work which had been produced was correct because it reflected the genuine belief of the person who expressed it. But how, we asked, was it possible to determine whether or not genuine beliefs were being reflected in any given piece of writing, regardless of how sophisticated this work might appear to be? Did this also mean that a text had a variety of meanings, all of which were equally correct? And where did all these meanings come from?

The main response to these questions were the assertions that the meaning of 'The Rose' was produced by the reader of 'The Rose'; the true meaning of 'The Rose' was lost forever since it only existed to the creator of the text – though it was difficult to determine who the creator of the text was – perhaps it was the reader, especially when it was remembered that originally no work could be produced since the text was not available to read; it was also asserted that the meaning of the short story could not be criticized by anyone other than the creator of the meaning. The manner of the expression of this last point especially seemed again to suggest that an urgent moral problem was being discussed rather than an abstruse and insignificant point of philosophy or literary theory.

Students were able to articulate their responses, particularly in relation to the last point about the creator of the meaning, by making use of the notions of self and other which had only recently been discussed. The moral vehemence with which they now defended the integrity of their expressions of self through their work about 'The Rose' against the incursion of the other was intensified when the cover sheets for their English Litera-

ture and English Language coursework folders were handed out, and the implications of the boxes on the cover sheets entitled 'Teacher's Grade', 'Sub-group Moderation Grade', and 'Final Grade' were explained to them. It became increasingly obvious that the other, which was now clearly represented by the intractable power of the institution of the school and the examination structure, would intrude very significantly upon anything in English which represented their individual self integrity. Was this, in effect, what English was – the intrusion of the other in the form of an examination structure and a set of grading criteria which were supported by a variety of institutional powers? It was with this discussion and students' own written work about what had taken place during these lessons that the questions we started with emerged.

In some subsequent lessons the issue about whether or not the self was autonomously constituted reappeared. While a significant proportion of students believed in the autonomy of the self, alternative arguments were developed and admitted by students which expressed the dialectic of self and other in the formation of the identity of any subject.

The explicitness with which the teaching described above confronts the subject of English is difficult to sustain. There are other activities which throw into question assumptions about the subject's integrity. This can equally be done by looking at some of its more commonly agreed – and less controversial – contents, by using the insights of the students while introducing some fresh terminology and ideas. In preparation for the students' so-called 'extended studies' – a compulsory component for their English Literature coursework folders which must be organized individually – we decided to attempt to produce a collective taxonomy of fiction. Fiction was to be the object of study for this work. Fifth-year students were invited to produce a 'taxonomy' of fiction and a list was written, compiled from their suggestions, on the board. As the list lengthened, the viability of organizing discrete and definite categories became increasingly tenuous. Types of fiction included a thematic breakdown: war fiction, romantic fiction, science fiction; or fiction designed for particular audiences: children's fiction,

women's fiction, men's fiction; as well as other, less easily identifiable forms of difference: realistic fiction and fantasy fiction, or popular fiction and classical fiction, fiction in written narrative form and TV fiction. Questions emerged: what did these differences mean and how were they held in place? How is it decided that some fiction is popular and some is classical? What is fiction, anyway? Is fiction simply not true? In what senses could fiction be true, or taken for truth? Is all writing which is not fiction simply true? Producing and confronting these questions and many others, students very quickly raised points that relate reading practices to social conventions, that recognize the arbitrariness of some of the distinctions made, that understand the constructedness of the category Literature and that identify the problem in maintaining a strict division between what is taken for truth and what is taken for fiction in a more general sense. If fiction is one of the objects of study in English, what becomes of English when the object proves so difficult to define?

Tackling the theme of the deconstructed subject of English, we have at times also attempted to involve classes as much as possible in discovering for themselves some of the themes which, for example, Derrida's work deals with: especially ways of looking at the ontology of meaning. We've tended to do this by asking questions in relation to specific (textual) examples, setting up practical activities about where meaning comes from, how it can or can't be decided, about where it varies, the extent to which it can vary, and so on. At times, terms such as '*différance*' or '*supplément*' have been introduced – terms certainly no more baffling than students are likely to encounter in maths or science lessons. Students at 15 can quite easily understand the kinds of questions which Derrida's work so very often deals with: What is textuality? What is a textual event? From where does textual meaning emanate? The variety of answers which often follow these kinds of questions can themselves be used to invite classes to think about and discuss the assumed unity of texts – and of the subject – they are examining. The implications of deconstructive thought about textual unities and integrities can then contribute towards, say, doing some theoretical work about the productions of meanings of texts in relation to culture, society, institutions, language.

An important element in work which is focused on how meanings operate, can be tackled, for instance, by an examination of ideas which tend to be called Lacanian but which are not necessarily dependent on Lacan's knottily obscure texts for their introduction. So, with simple diagrammatic representations the idea of the divided subject can be introduced. The difference between conscious and unconscious can be explored. The importance of repression, the operations of memory and censorship can be dealt with as part of a topic which is dealing with the theory of the subject according to Lacanian psychoanalysis, though it won't necessarily announce itself as that. The role of language in the splitting of the subject and the 'sliding of the signified under the signifier' can be introduced, too, so that the whole issue of meanings in relation to the individual and to culture can be understood in a more far-reaching and critical fashion. Simple word games, or very direct and simple explanations conducted in dialogue with the class can be used to convey these conventionally difficult points, to the extent that mixed-ability classes of 15 and 16 year olds can begin to use with confidence arcane terms such as 'imaginary', 'symbolic', and 'real'.

Despite phenomenology, despite the almost anti-textual work with texts, and a further year and a half of exploring English in relation to a wide variety of essentially poststructuralist themes, the original questions remain disturbingly unanswered for both ourselves and our students: what now, as a result of this work, is the subject? Have we changed, through our discussions and our collective practices, what English means? Is what we are doing still English, and if it isn't, to what extent does it still depend on the notion of English and the practice of English in other places? In the end, of course, teachers' grades, moderators' grades, and final grades, in the name of the subject, will be awarded, and on this basis subject positions will inevitably be effectively prescribed. It would, however, be too easy, and perhaps also self-indulgently nihilistic, to suggest that ultimately, for all concerned, our work must come to nothing in the face of the enormously powerful institutional, and other, structures which support the subject. What the questions require is at least some further consideration of some of the issues they involve.

If, according to Gramsci, 'everyone is a philosopher', not everyone enjoys the status of a philosopher nor equal opportunity to practice philosophy or theory. In the school context it is perfectly possible to accord Sanjay Patel (a student engaged in GCSE English and English Literature courses) the right to appropriate the privileged discourse of, say, deconstruction. And this need not simply be a matter of handing on Derrida's formulations, remade for accessibility, to the vacuum of Sanjay's imagined ignorance of these things, but can also be a matter of enabling Sanjay's own deconstructive drives a place in the formulation of teaching and learning. But the pedagogic practice which unorthodoxly grants this right of access to Sanjay and his contemporaries without distinction or exclusion remains embedded in the institutional functions that serve, quite crudely, to award grades, to establish distinctions, to define positively and negatively, opportunities as widely differentiated as YTS or Oxbridge. The principle of difference could hardly be more clearly illustrated. There is no immediately available position for the English teacher in the secondary comprehensive school which could dissolve the contradiction of this position. Any pedagogy, though, which doesn't in some critical way explicitly address the punitive element in the function of the reward system – and the ideology that disguises and 'naturalizes' it – is in danger of being politically impotent and gestural. For English teachers in schools, particularly, attempting to engage in alternative, politicized pedagogies, this must remain a difficult issue, because the subject is not compatible with its theorization. Any approach to this difficulty must – in the context of the comprehensive school, the very site of social reproduction – be related to ways in which teachers negotiate their own status as authorized purveyors of knowledge in institutions which, more blatantly than many others in state education, display the equation of knowledge with power. At the moment we are faced with English: realistically, we have to accommodate theory alongside/within/against English.

But what is the subject, English? – the question raised for us during the minor drama of the phenomenological crisis. A perplexed head struggled to understand the issues which were

involved. Clearly the notion of an established English was being alluded to by parents and students who worried for the sake of the subject's integrity. An earnest desire was expressed in letters to the perplexed head that the English offered by the institution should be 'based on our cultural heritage' and that a traditional English course with set texts reflecting 'the English literary cultural heritage' would be preferred to what was described as 'interesting and innovative efforts'. The traditional English that was being alluded to was conceived of as being a cohesive and uniform subject. Its existence in this sense was undoubted. Other than being a powerful allusion, however, the existence of this English is much more doubtful.

In secondary schools throughout the country there are many Englishes. It requires no detailed or extensive empirical research to verify this fact. Indeed, the history of English is undisputably a history of changes. Even within a single institution the subject can be fractured into different levels – GCSE and A level, for instance. Across institutional boundaries, syllabus requirements, and pedagogical practices, English is discontinuous to say the least.

Where, then, does the notion of a cohesive English come from, and how is it sustained? As the above comments from parents would seem to indicate, the subject of English pre-exists any analysis of what that subject might be. Its security is founded upon unchallenged notions of a common 'cultural heritage'. Any analysis of what this common cultural heritage is and how it is sustained through the teaching practices of English runs the risk of undermining the subject's integrity.

One way of examining how this subject is held in place is to consider some points about the production of the English teacher. Teacher-training courses, whether they are the Postgraduate Certificate of Education or the Bachelor of Education in English, seem, in our view, to have relatively little to do with the formulation of the English teacher's subject position; they are more likely, from our experiences as teacher tutors of student teachers, to be about modifying the prospective English teacher's subject position in relation to the new context involved in becoming a teacher. The PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate of Education) lasts for only one academic year, during which there is an approximately fourteen-week contact period with schools.

Whilst the B.Ed. takes four academic years to complete and a considerably longer time is spent actually teaching, the nature and length of the course, like the PGCE, is not to displace the already established subject within the institution of the school. The common feature of all PGCE and B.Ed. courses is that they approach English on the assumption that it is already there: whilst different strategies are adopted by different courses about how to gain proximity to the subject most effectively, it remains true that the teaching practices themselves are not seen as actually determining what the subject is. Indeed, the PGCE and the B.Ed. in English depend for their existence upon the identity of a subject that precedes its own formulation.

Again, from our own experience of PGCE students, teaching courses seem to be obsessively concerned with discussions about the accessibility of texts and ideas. The force of already existing assumptions about what is teachable and what it is desirable to teach inevitably constrains choices available to student teachers, whatever position they may be starting from. English – and in this case specifically English in schools – has already been written before the education student embarks upon the PGCE; since, while this course supports the subject in its a priori contingency of existence, the English of the PGCE is only meaningful in relation to the English of the institution of the school. The content of English must be redefined for a different audience. The teacher thus becomes an agent in the selection of what are deemed to be appropriate activities, topics, texts: the various aspects that constitute the specific kinds of learning their students will have access to. Even where PGCE courses enable theoretical or deconstructive approaches, student teachers meet, on teaching practice and during the probationary year, the institutional forces that place them, and the ideas about English teaching they may arrive with, in subordinate roles within a very hierarchical establishment. A process of integration occurs: the student or probationary teacher will be expected, in varying degrees, to endorse whatever values and ethos pertain within the school. Within departments the student's and probationary teacher's working horizons will be determined not only by their own already established subject position, but also by what texts are available, what practices are maintained, what exam syllabuses are followed, what reading

and writing practices prevail, what kind of student-teacher relationships are in order, and so on. These will, in one way or another, contextualize their efforts as teachers of English in production.

The importance of teaching courses, and of the probationary year, lies in the fact that they are processes by which the certification, that is to say the professionalization, of the English teacher is achieved. The ontological status of English is expressed by the existence and practices of a professional class. To interfere with that status is potentially, at least, to molest a professional class position – as one aspect of the phenomenological crisis demonstrated to us. One of the teachers involved critically in that crisis was, in fact, working through the probationary year. The situation was institutionally made more manageable by the fact that the other teacher involved was invested with the grander role of Head of Faculty. The professional and institutional investment in the bearer of the latter position was an important factor that enabled the crisis to be ridden. To promote a deconstructed English, it is important that institutional features – including, for example, exam syllabuses – are utilized opportunistically.

Mode 3 GCSE schemes can in effect offer limitless possibilities to put theory to work in the cooperative production of 'useful knowledges' for the subjects of certification. They cannot, of course, undo the grading system. That would require much greater general political will and initiative, and would constitute a much more revolutionary situation within the whole field of education that can at present be imagined. Nevertheless, the points of intervention have to be realistically identified and utilized. What we offer in our description is not an account of a course, still less an exemplary model or paradigm, but it does, we believe, go some way towards defining the possibilities of change in the nature of the subject. Pedagogical relations in the theorized classroom of 'English' must be founded on the notion of empowerment. The position of the teacher still depends more than in some liberal progressive practices on the urge to make the conditions for learning possible – that is, on the position of authority. To 'deconstruct' is not to get rid of. But this authority

is one which is founded upon the consciousness of what it means to be in control of a discourse; it sets the limits, defines the terms, enables or disables lines of pursuit – directs enquiry here or there. The very authority which has this function of control and surveillance can be used itself to enable examination of its own discursive inheritance, its own institutional position.

Also, and perhaps more significantly, the authority of the teacher is that which allows the unities of the discourse – in this case English – to be actively deconstructed – explicitly, in the very form and content of its practice. A substantial spate of work, for instance, on gender, beginning with an elementary introduction to Saussurian linguistics and semiotics, and going on to apply techniques to critical readings of various cultural forms and products – TV ads, soaps, magazines, children's stories, and canonical texts – which may not appear especially radical or innovative, may actually make clear the decentring potential of this kind of analysis and may extend 'beyond the text'(ual) to explore the relations between the textual and the forms of subjectivity being experienced by students. This may, for example, be explicitly related to the specificities of dialogue in 'daily' social discourse and its many, various contexts – a field not much examined by textualists and textualisms.

This kind of deconstruction is practical: it equates – by treating with equal seriousness or irreverence – TV ads with D. H. Lawrence, Dickens with Janet and John; gives credibility to – while questioning – the pleasures of texts as various as the 'Swan' kitchen appliance advert, *Jackie* magazine stories, and Chekhov stories. One of the major effects of working with gender in this intertextual way is to deconstruct canons, assumptions, and orders – practically, involving the active participation of the students in the whole process, not just in dialogic interchange, but also in the work of analysis and reconstruction of meanings and positions – in short, in textual relations.

The same kind of deconstructive effect is possible working within the field of so-called multiculturalism – where the unities of the discourse are differently undone. If the text in question is a product of Black South African theatre, or the Bengali novel, 'English' (its 'Englishness') is immediately, if not necessarily explicitly, called into question. The same kind of decentring

moves can be made with student's writings. The invitation, 'Compare your story with Chekhov's and with a friend's' can have the same kind of effect. This kind of offer can take many forms: 'Compare your representation of female identities with Lawrence's: which do you prefer and why?', and so on.

In the classroom it has been traditional that the teacher exerts some kind of control over the texts that are under scrutiny: whether the texts are *Jackie* magazines, classic realist novels, poems, or TV programmes, it is most often the teacher who authorizes them as appropriate objects for study, the teacher who claims to command the various strategies for reading them. One way of deconstructing this aspect of teacher authority and control in order to adjust the weighting of dialogic exchange (the dialogue always remaining, of course, within the institutional structuring of 'English') is to allow students to choose their own texts in free reading time, and for the teacher and student to keep reading records. The teacher in this way is not in control of the knowledge. The teacher in dialogue with the student thus enjoys a more genuine hermeneutic relationship while the student enjoys possession of the texts which come in time to constitute a personal reading biography. This biography, itself a flexible text, is available for exchange with other students, and this, too, can open possibilities for exchange and control.

We have argued that English is very firmly in place, ideologically and institutionally, and have attempted to describe some of the processes and forces that keep it so. We've also tried to describe some elements of a practice which utilizes institutional gaps in order to deconstruct, at the discursive level, what English is in its fundamental 'subject being'. We've attempted to utilize the very forms and contents of English itself, in conjunction with the kind of consciousness that theory has afforded us, in order to work both within and without English: to expose English and its complicity in the cultural and institutional powers that have sustained it. It is in this ceaseless interplay between what English is and is not – the dialectic between its self and its other, to put it phenomenologically – that we see the main thrust of our work.

# NATE and the politics of English

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This article was originally intended as a response to the NATE booklet *English A Level in Practice*, answering some critical comments there on an earlier piece by Nick Peim published in *The English Magazine*. The debate clearly raised wider issues, however, and we invited Nick to relate his argument to current thinking in general. He has risen to the occasion here, with a polemical attack on the complacency of liberal, progressive orthodoxies, pointing to the theoretical and political implications of the questions never asked.

It may seem banal, perhaps, to point out the cultural centrality of the three fundamental activities of English. Reading, writing and talking, attitudes towards them and practices associated with their educational determination and dissemination: a whole host of problematic cultural and political themes is announced by these apparently innocent terms. And yet little of the published material on English in schools reflects the problematic nature of the “content” of English. That reading, writing and talking are politically loaded activities is not a truth universally acknowledged — certainly not by NATE publications, except to purvey a liberal orthodoxy that is so deeply ingrained in habits of thought that its appearance has become invisible.

What is English for? What does English do to whom, and why? In the name of what values does English stand? What ideas dominate and organise this extensive field of education? What do these ideas tell us about institutional structures and practices — allied to other institutional structures and practices — that are the arena within which English is acted out? To put the questions in these terms is to raise the issue of the politics of ideas, the political theory of the subject. Discussion of theory and politics has in important ways been effectively excluded from NATE, subjected to a fairly strict discursive censorship.

NATE’s preferred version of English remains thoroughly liberal and stands for values that are culturally and theoretically highly questionable and politically conservative, excluding social, cultural, political implications, excluding other versions of the subject. Theoretical choices and exclusions operate in the comfortable assertions of what are presented as “truths” about the fundamental categories of English, and these accepted definitions deny alternatives and discount the institutional constructions of the subject.

In the Autumn 1988 edition of *English in Education*, a headteacher, in

a group discussion on the impact of the Kingman report, expresses clearly and unequivocally what English ought to be:

“I have an excellent English department who have for many years worked to the best model of English teaching as propounded in Bullock.”<sup>1</sup>

Here, the note of proprietorial pride is matched by the confident assertion of self-evident truth. There is no touch of ambiguity here. No sense is communicated of a problematic of identity. The excellence of the English department in question is, presumably, founded by its adoption of the best model of English — Bullock. Bullock, therefore represents excellence. In fact, Bullock is best. It must be the case, then, that anything which isn’t Bullock can’t attain the status of excellence, and must, therefore, be forever exiled from that exclusive category, the best. So confident is the reference to Bullock that nothing further needs to be said about what Bullock is, what position it represents. There is no hint that Bullock is anything other than a self-identifying unitary text of which the reading can only be singular. Bullock is Bullock. The idea that there may be several Bullocks and that there may be several ways of reading and interpreting Bullock isn’t even dismissed: it’s never entertained. A reading of Bullock which presents it as a government document of the mid-1970s, with all the restrictions that implies, which takes it to represent the narrow liberal model of school English at its most extensively stated, is not, we must assume, what is meant by Bullock. The success of Bullock in centralizing and promoting the most cherished features of liberal English could hardly be better illustrated. Nor could the failure of those engaged in debate about English to understand how the political dimension of the subject English is systematically denied by the unquestioned centrality of the liberal model expressed by Bullock.

Where does this confidence come from? It comes from holding a central and dominant position in ‘progressive’ accounts of the subject. It comes, also, from excluding serious alternatives and from the repeated invocation of a network of central tenets. Ideas about texts, about language and its uses, about subjects and their relations to texts and to language: all these are expressed in turn in relation to ideas about English, about its identity, its proper practices. Because of the absence of any well-developed tradition of theory and theorized political analysis, these ideas can be endlessly repeated and referred to without fear of interrogation, even though they may be highly contradictory, naive and poorly formulated. Consider the following statements, for instance, from the last edition of *English in Education*:

“What stood out above all, however, was the power of narratives to engage our imaginations, enlist our sympathy and our understanding as no analytic report could have done.”

and

“... telling the stories of our lives is always capable of conveying reality in way that no theoretical formulation could match”.<sup>2</sup>

In the first place, it will not seem odd that an idea such as “the power of narratives” can be invoked in an unproblematic way. Probably because it has become resoundingly familiar. The power of narratives as a subject for celebration has in NATE and in English generally been for some time an unchallenged truth. There are problems of a theoretical nature here, though. The difference, which was the basis for the entire

last issue of *English in Education*, between narrative and argument, and, in the article quoted above, between narrative or stories and ideas, is itself the product of ideas. The idea of "the power of narrative" is itself a theory, though in this case an unexplained one. Narratives don't themselves generate power, surely? Narratives don't even, surely, identify themselves as narratives. "Narratives" must always be construed as narratives and be granted power on the basis of a construction. Such constructions don't occur on their own, bringing themselves into being out of the ether. By what processes do these constructions and attributions occur? How do narratives engage imaginations? What is meant by that highly abstract theoretical concept – "imagination"? Isn't "imagination" connotative of a dangerously romantic idea about subjectivity, an idea which obliterates the political dimension from subjectivity? And what kind of engagement operates between narrative and imagination? Is this a "natural" process engendered genetically? Are these categories and this process bound to be given positive force and value?

What if we questioned the power of narrative? What if we said that in English its uses have been concerned with other kinds of power, involving less cosy concepts than imagination and sympathy? What if we proposed that engagement with narrative in English has been a highly dubious affair, bound up with reading practices that have been, in the end, exclusive, binding and negative? That narrative has been used to effectively close down, not just meanings of stories, but, more crucially, subject positions? Is "telling the stories of our lives" "always capable of conveying reality in a way that no theoretical formulation could match"? Is that statement itself a theoretical formulation, or another story? On what theoretical basis is the claim for the privileging of stories above the theoretical being made? For it is, again, a theoretical claim. It is also itself a kind of story and therefore fictional. It invokes, unproblematically, ideas that are highly problematic. How can stories convey reality? Each of those important terms – "stories", "convey", "reality" – carry tremendous weight and yet are, oddly, left to float in a completely unsupported vacuum of non-definition. "Stories convey" suggests that stories themselves are the bearers of their own meaning. It suggests that stories have an identity – that they are stories, that is – independently of the reading practices, definitions, categorizations, habits of thought and cultural practices that make them "stories": but there are no stories in themselves, and stories don't read themselves, either. The use of the term "reality" suggests that reality is something fixed and determinate which is beyond the reach of theoretical formulation, but accessible in some special way to stories. All of this is stated with no reference to the reading practices and no justification of the liberal humanist ideas that are its basis. But to recognize and expose those reading practices and theoretical assumptions would be to admit to the blindness necessary to the assertions.

Much of the tone, manner and direction of the writing in *English in Education* shares this kind of celebratory blindness and works to reassert the value and centrality of fundamental categories, such as stories. Another fundamental category is still literature. The Spring 1989 issue includes a prologue subtitled *The Value of Literature*. Cited as authorities that endorse the value of literature are Jane Austen, George

Eliot, D.H. Lawrence. It's been known for a long time, though, that literature is in trouble. It's no longer possible to assert with any confidence what it is, and it's more difficult, though perhaps no less frequent, to claim positive value for literature. In spite of the fact that canonical "Literature" has, quite properly, taken a beating from various quarters, the civilizing values it was held to represent – from Arnold to Leavis – have, however, in a large measure, still been ascribed to the more general, less defined category of "literature". The reading, as with the writing, of stories and poems, is still, rather peculiarly, held to be a valued activity of special status in which the participants come closer to their true and real selves and their world. The theory of this position is extremely fragile, though its discursive authority is not.

*Empathy, Wider Reading and Response*: the title of an article in the same edition of *English in Education*, announces themes that still dominate progressive, liberal English.<sup>3</sup> This article announces, and celebrates, the displacement of "the stylized literary form of the discursive essay", if not the canonical texts of English Literature: "Shakespeare is still there too. So are Hardy, Dickens and Wilfred Owen." This, we are informed has nothing to do with cultural domination, ethnocentricity or deep-seated prejudice, but is, simply, "as much to do with what's in the stock cupboard as anything else" (and what the "anything else" might be is simply not developed). Still, things are not what they used to be. And this is because "The major change has been in the way in which candidates have encountered these texts and the recorded their encounters in assignments." Fair enough. This could be interesting, but aren't we bound to be sceptical when we read "GCSE has reflected – and is contributing to – a radical re-appraisal of what is meant by 'appreciation' of literature"? On what grounds is this assumption made? And how radical is 'radical' here? The article goes on to develop the point. "They" (candidates of the GCSE exam which will soon sort them out from A down to G) "can now be frankly and expressively what literature requires them to be – readers." There it is! The liberation from the dead category of the discursive essay. A number of questions, though, again, propose themselves. How frankly are candidates allowed to be expressive? What kinds of limitations are there on this "frankness"? What understanding of the material conditions of writing, of schools, of English is at work – or, rather, not at work – in the use of the word "expressively"? What is being expressed – under what discursive and institutional constraints – and why? what for? How does literature "require"? On its own? Or perhaps as a constructed category within the constructed subject identity of English – and its various positionings of various subjects? What does it mean to be a "reader"? What special status is being accorded to this category? Does being a reader always have a positive value? Of the kind that is ascribed to it here? Were they not real readers before GCSE granted them the privilege? Are all readers equal? Or are some readers – according to the grading procedures of GCSE, for example – more equal than others? Are not most readers – however "frankly and expressively" they may engage with "literature" – doomed to be deemed to fall short of the ideal designated by grade A? Aren't both literature and GCSE crucially involved in this form of discrimination?

The eulogy of GCSE continues to assert, "They can represent the



results of their reading in their own voice" – a claim which many candidates would probably dispute. But anyway, what is their own "voice" in the context of GCSE English? Who's to decide what it is, how to recognize it within the school context? What notions of the relationship between writing, being, presence and authenticity are entangled in that powerfully metaphoric term, "voice"? Is "voice" something natural, personal, central to the core of their intrinsic being? Or is it – in the form of GCSE English Literature coursework assignments – something learned and constructed in the material processes of schooling and English?

Doesn't the discourse of "response" override your own "voice"? Aren't some voices better than others? Isn't it probably better not to speak with too much of your own accent or inflection, better not to be too terse, and better never to be succinctly dismissive of "literature" – not if you want to get a good grade, anyway? Literature, after all, according to this position, requires you to be other – to be expressive, responsive. The nature of this requiring must itself require examination, surely? With what kind of power is the requiring effected?

In the same article we come across further references to literature, making special claims for the category: "... the particular strengths which Literature can claim its own by drawing on the associative features of language" (note the switch to the upper case "L" here). So Literature, though no longer perhaps the canon, is a special category? Its specialness comes from its "drawing on the associative features of language." Well, what instances of language do not draw on its associative features? All language is necessarily associative and metaphoric.

The same claim could equally be made of tv adverts, jokes or articles in the *Sunday Sport*, though it's unlikely that any of these would compromise the central focus for a GCSE course. A student named Judith is cited, to authenticate the credentials of Literature: "There is one thing which film cannot do. That is to use language metaphorically..." Where has this idea come from? How can the language of film, whether visual or verbal, escape being metaphor? What theory of language is at work here? Judith, it seems, has been misled into believing that there is some superiority in terms of metaphorical expression in Literature over film. No informed form of cultural analysis could make this claim.

The article later affirms "the particular strengths which Literature can claim its own" – without, of course, having to or being able to say what "Literature" is, where it begins and where it ends, who decides what is and what isn't "Literature" and how that special category stands in relation to writing generally. The article advocates widening the scope, but doesn't say how wide it's possible to go, or whether, and how much, it's possible, or desirable, to jettison, because the only definition of literature on offer is the "what's the stock-cupboard" version. In the section which is to illustrate the widening scope of GCSE we find *An Enemy of the People* compared to *Jaws*, with the odd comment that *Jaws* is "clearly derivative", as though *An Enemy of the People* – and any other text you care to mention – were not equally derivative. There remains in this example, whether intentional or not, a need to retain not just the special category of literature, but also a category of special

literature – less derivative? more authentic? more original? frank? expressive? etc.

A particularly glaring example of the conservative implications of liberal humanism, and of its blindness to its own theoretical assumptions, prejudices and gaps is afforded by the NATE booklet *English A Level in Practice*<sup>4</sup>. The introduction states that "the booklet reflects discussions between all the members of the Post-14 Committee". It can, therefore, be assumed that the views expressed represent NATE positions and are published as NATE endorsed.

One chapter of the booklet, with the rather grandiose and aggressive title *The Tyranny of Tastes*,<sup>5</sup> is critical of an article which had appeared in *The English Magazine*,<sup>6</sup> proposing a redefinition of English in the light of recent developments in theory. This is described as an example of teacherly tyranny. Against the inaccessible and alienating kind of practice which is assumed to be involved, *The Tyranny of Tastes* proposes an "attempt to reunite the divide between critical and creative modes". This example is especially useful as, at times, it deals directly with theoretical ideas which it denigrates in favour of a liberal humanist position.

*The Tyranny of Tastes* is particularly illustrative of some of the assumptions contained in undirected, theoretically and politically uninformed, vacuously liberal versions of English, positions which, when critically examined, are flawed with contradictions, logical and theoretical absurdities, and, in the end, have political effects which are conservative, and politically Conservative. These liberal-but-conservative positions constitute the currently dominant mode of the discourses of English, a discursive establishment, an ideological orthodoxy, an unreflective politics of the subject.

*The Tyranny of Tastes* is symptomatic of the politics of NATE in its unquestioning espousal of an untheorised version of English based mainly on the central but undefined notions of creativity and of personal response, clichés of a liberal politics of the subject. Like much *laissez-faire* Conservative Party thinking, the language used is based on certain familiar and unquestioned notions – "making a text their own", "trusting to a personal response", "greater personal freedom" – notions that enjoy the status of commonsensical, incontrovertible truth. All of these phrases resonate with the expression of Conservative Party ideology. It is also a familiar Conservative Party rhetorical tactic to label opposing positions as "tyranny", especially when your own is absolutely exclusive. Liberal humanist orthodoxy is so deeply ingrained in so much English teaching, and in so much of English cultural life generally, however, that its formulations can be referred to as self-evident truths.

*The Tyranny of Tastes* endorses this ideological orthodoxy in its uses of, and in its failure to question, these highly questionable categories. The course it describes, we're told, is based on the innocent interchange between a reader and a text:

"I believe with Terry Eagleton and the "new" critics that the subject "English" is in a state of crisis. My response for sixth formers is not, however, to turn from literature to the meta-language of criticism, but to attempt to reunite the divide between the critical and creative modes."

Are we to assume here that "critical" is nasty, and that the "creative" is

good? Are we to assume that the present assumed divide between the two represents a fall from some pastorally idyllic time when there was no such alienating divide? When everyone everywhere was equally creative about literature, with literature, through literature? A time, perhaps, when literature was purely and simply there, when everyone knew what it was and enjoyed it, a time when there was no nasty "meta-language" to interfere with everyone's free and personal responses, to alienate them into uncreativity, to "swamp" them with "an overwhelming new critical vocabulary"? And what, we may ask, exactly is a "meta-language"? How is it different from language that is "unmeta"? Doesn't the ideology of personal response have its own special "meta" terms, like "personal" and "response", like "creative modes"? How can the very idea of "creativity" even exist without "meta" terms all of its own? Why is "the meta-language of criticism" deemed to be uncreative? Isn't it just differently (meta?) creative from the language of "creative modes"? Why is the language of "creative modes" to be privileged over any other? How is it to be distinguished? What does it mean? What use is it? You don't have to be Jacques Derrida to know that the language of everyday personal responses, the language of "common-sense" "experience", is itself an ideologically loaded "metalanguage" and that it is a characteristic of language itself to be always already "meta".

Are we to assume that English needs to be saved from the "crisis", to be restored to a former integrity? This implied nostalgia is evidently for a past that never was, and yet the myth is a very necessary postulate for the practice of English in the liberal humanist, politically conservative mode that is promoted by *The Tyranny of Tastes*. Literature, the point of studying it (or of putting down a deposit on some personal response to it), what English is institutionally within the education system, within the cultural context that frames it: none of these things is brought into examination. Is the assumption then, that there is no need to question them? Nor to define your attitude towards them? Nor to address issues concerning the politics of the positions you express? Theoretical blindness, although thoroughly representative, could hardly be more blundering.

In this account of English, in this response to the "crisis" in English, "personal response" is given a hieratically privileged status. The cult of the individual, the ideology of individualism – "There's no such thing as society", remember – still holds great political sway. It also, it seems, produces some curiously vacuous ideas in written accounts of English teaching. *The Tyranny of Tastes* includes a "personal response" to the article in *The English Magazine*. This is certainly "creative": it is a made-up fantasy, totally lacking in theoretical plausibility:

"... it is evident from the account that his effort to create a more relevant form of English study imposes even more teacher-led material, and appears to condition the students' responses as much as if not even more rigidly than more traditional approaches... it is the text that is given priority, not the reader, nor is much room allowed for the students' own writing. In fact, reading between the lines, the new approach involves a large proportion of transmitted knowledge..."

The structure of oppositions in this extract would seem to imply that it is possible to run a course in which the material is not teacher-led, though this is clearly another effect of the naive liberal position. The idea of students "making a text their own and trusting to a personal response"

is, with its Thatcherite resonances, an idea which is necessarily ignorant of the phenomenology, ontology and sociology of the subject in discourse. "Transmitted knowledge" is clearly not an acceptable element in the liberal version of English being propounded and is set against something which is valorized as "students' own writings". If "transmitted knowledge" is bad, though, what kind of knowledge is acceptable? How does it come into being? How does this untransmitted knowledge move about? How does it escape the institutional contexts in which it is formulated? Who controls it? Who decides whether it is "transmitted" or otherwise? Who recognizes it, authorizes it, assesses it? Where do alternatives come from? What impersonal processes are involved in the production of what appear to be "personal" responses? Once again, the idea of naked, individual, uncontaminated "responses", which escape their institutional, discursive, material contexts, seems to be evident. And at the heart of this description comes the curious phrase, taken from the language of everyday "personal response", which seems best to characterize the kind of interpretative mode we have here: "reading between the lines". What level of awareness of reading practices is at work in all of this? What model of textual and intertextual relations? What unthinkable philosophy of language is implied here? While *The Tyranny of Tastes* grants a special, privileged status to "personal response", it must be conceded that certain kinds of personal response are not counted as legitimate in English, that much terse, unconstrained and decisive personal response at GCSE, for example, is not permitted by English. But the very idea of unconstrained "personal response" is itself, of course, phenomenologically untenable, philosophically laughable.

The passage quoted above perhaps offers an example of the notion of creativity *The Tyranny of Tastes* has in mind as an alternative to the kind of "Critical Theory" which it dismisses as "taught on MA courses" and "difficult to assimilate". It may well be, of course that the stuff that is taught on MA courses is difficult to assimilate. I'm not in a position to comment on that, never having been near one. Critical theory taught on GCSE courses, though, certainly isn't difficult to assimilate any more than anything else that challenges prevailing reading practices is. *The Tyranny of Tastes* claims that it "employs a new critical vocabulary, even less accessible to new sixth formers". This is a time-honoured way of dismissing ideas in teaching, and especially in English teaching – to say that they are inaccessible, alienating and difficult. Ideas from "Critical Theory" may well be difficult for the kind of thinking evident in *The Tyranny of Tastes* to assimilate but that is obviously because to understand their implications, to assimilate them, is to accept that they have the potential to undermine the most cherished assumptions of liberal humanist version of English it expounds. In fact, to follow all the arguments through theoretically is to recognize that the assumptions on which the liberal humanist version of the subject are founded are philosophically and sociologically untenable. But *The Tyranny of Tastes* steadily avoids debate, relying on conveniently familiar clichés. It refuses always to present any argument with theory, simply dismissing it as alienating and inaccessible. This is done quite happily on behalf of the students for whom, no doubt, the teacher in question always already knows best.

Isn't this a rather illiberal denial of "personal response", to make a response which precedes "direct" textual experience, and to make it on everyone else's behalf? The ways in which the ideas of "theoretical input currently on offer in new MA courses in Critical Theory" are alienating is not described or explained but is merely asserted as a truth universally acknowledged. Further on another assertion about the course described in *The English Magazine* article is made: "It's terminology is likely to deter other members of English departments from trying this approach, however productive of new meanings." Why? Who says so? On what authority? This hasn't been my experience, nor the experience of hundreds of students and teachers doing GCSE and A level courses who, for various reasons and in various ways, have found theoretical terminology thoroughly congenial. The case in *The Tyranny of Tastes* must, then, like so much of what constitutes liberal orthodoxy, be self-explanatory. No explanation follows.

"Isabelle, despite her sociological background, would feel as shut out by the strategies of this 'politicised' criticism as she had by the older restrictive practices".

Well, would she? Once again an explanation is withheld. Presumably, Isabelle, with her sociological background might find herself completely at ease with phenomenological perspectives, with, say, Gramscian and Althusserian Marxism, may be familiar with the ideas and practices of ethnomethodology, may understand what functionalism is, may know about Durkheim and Weber, and even Foucault. If so, she will have been subjected to plenty of theory and "politicised" criticism - of wide-ranging social and cultural issues, not just the odd, selected social and cultural issues, not just the odd, selected "literary" text here and there. It is even conceivable that Isabelle will have come across Bourdieu's ideas about education, culture and the reproduction of class differences - which would, no doubt, be intensely critical of the patronizing attitude being expressed about her by an institutionally authorized purveyor of the academic subject "English". *The Tyranny of Tastes* defines "the strategies of this 'politicised' criticism" it criticizes as an "assault on the self", as an omission of "any feeling for the students making meaning as readers or writers in their own right". In what sense, though, except for a purely Thatcherite absence of the social, can readers and writers be said to exist "in their own right"? And how can there be a "criticism", or practice of English, even one based on "personal response" and "creativity", which is not already "politicised"? Once again we are confronted with an unexplained assumption and a philosophical vacuum.

*The Tyranny of Tastes* implies, completely groundlessly, that "Critical Theory" is something that gets taught only on new MA courses. It assumes that it is beyond the grasp of students in schools, and "alienatingly academic". For them, but not, apparently, for the teacher concerned? Well, I can just as breezily assert that colleagues I work with - and others that I meet with - find it perfectly possible to discuss ideas associated with Derrida, Foucault and Lacan with students in comprehensive school mixed ability classes on GCSE courses - with no apparent effect on levels of alienation. But then the people who find this possible don't share *The Tyranny of Tastes'* assumptions about what is assimilable and what is alienating for students on the courses they teach.

*The Tyranny of Tastes*, begins with a quotation from Frank Smith, cited, we can only assume, as being authenticating, authoritative, self-explanatory, self-justifying, a corroboration of the ideas and arguments about to follow. This is, then, the wisdom of Frank Smith, this essential fragment of Smithism (which is not Critical Theory?)

"Texts are more than data, they are events - to be lived not decoded"<sup>6</sup>

The unexplained use of this mysteriously assertive statement as an epigrammatic quotation to preface the text to follow is illuminating of the procedures that follow in the article. The assumptions at work here, in the quotation and in the use of the quotation, enable a procedure which is necessarily confused and confusing, but which retains its integrity so long as its premises and procedures remain unquestioned (or un"decoded", perhaps). In spite of the odd gobblet of quotation from Frank Smith there is no theorized or critically thought out position. This doesn't particularly matter because liberal humanist thinking, is quite happy for, is actually dependent upon, its favourite assumptions being unquestioned. It is therefore very important to keep certain kinds of question and certain kinds of thinking away, because these are the very questions and kinds of thinking that bring the whole liberal humanist mode of thought into embarrassing compromise.

The opposition, for example, between the "lived" and the "decoded" is simply asserted, not explained nor argued for. Indeed, the difference is asserted as categorical and as imperative with the heavy hint of a moral injunction reminiscent of Leavisism. A number of questions come to mind here. Is the claim meant to be true for all texts? Are some texts to be distinguished from others? Who or what might make such decisions, and who or what might determine when a text is an event, when an event is textual? How can a text be "lived", if it's not "decoded"? How can events themselves be purely and simply "lived" and not "decoded"? How can the distinction between the undecoded "lived" and the unlive "decoded" be sustained? Is Frank Smith, and is *The Tyranny of Tastes* in turn, not aware of the anthropological, linguistic, phenomenological impossibility of the quoted sentence? Or are we not allowed to ask questions like that, because that's the language of theory, a language which is assumed to be academic and alienating for students who can be left to autodidactically steer their way through guided by their own unerring personal responses.

*The Tyranny of Tastes* further indicates the uncertainty of its position, and its failure to have grasped the philosophical and political issues at stake, when it asks, in relation to a point in *The English Magazine* article about introducing students to post-structuralist ideas, "Have they already then assimilated structuralism and perhaps post-modernism?" There is, of course, no need to know anything about structuralism or post-modernism, to approach some of the most important aspects of post-structuralist thought. The ideas which are suggested as being worthy of introduction - "textuality and intertextuality, language, writing as difference, presence in absence, deferral of meaning" - have no need to be prefaced by reference to the intellectual history of post-war Europe. They are ideas that are easily accessible, readily assimilable, despite the blind prejudice of *The Tyranny of Tastes* to the contrary. Those ideas examine commonplace, commonsense, everyday assumptions about meaning and communication - and so, in

that sense at least, they are eminently accessible. They are only inaccessible if your liberal humanist habits of thought are so deeply entrenched, if your prejudices so firmly in place that you cannot accept the decisive challenge to them that these ideas might entail.

The position outlined in *The Tyranny of Tastes*, endorsed by NATE and representative of it, is a politically Conservative position, all the more Conservative for its being bent on failing to express its political and ideological foundations.

The dead hand of authority . . . prevents the candidates from making a text their own and trusting to a personal response.

Insert "local" before "authority", substitute "candidates" with "tenants", "text" with "house", and it is clear that the linguistic structures, the structures of thought are Tory. The ideology of personal ownership, in the free-market economy of unrestrained personal response, is no doubt what all right-thinking English teachers will concur with. Any position which threatens to take away your personal responses must therefore be a form of "tyranny". Call it orthodox English teaching or call it Thatcherism: ideologically, it amounts to the same thing.

A theoretical analysis, aware of the politics of discourses, is required to unmask the pretensions of the dominant liberal thinking in English teaching and its alliance with conservative politics. Institutionally, discursively, practically: what English teaching needs is to be challenged and drawn from the grip of liberal ideology, to be put radically into question.

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# Hanky-Panky

## Nick Peim

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Although it is commonplace to recommend the serious study of "media texts" alongside "literary" ones, it is usually assumed that traditional attitudes to the value and values of "literature" can remain largely unaffected by this. In this article, however, Nick Peim demonstrates that setting Marvell alongside Madonna actually raises some radical political and pedagogical implications.

It's difficult to see how Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*, a representative text of English Literature, can be read as anything other than brazenly phallogentric, intensely sexist. GCSE students even a little bit canny about issues of gender could hardly fail to see that, on these grounds alone, the text is objectionable (though it also happens to insinuate a Jewish joke). What kind of reading could deal with this text, taking its apparent sexism into account? Would the *laissez-faire* of "personal response" be adequate? What about "critical appreciation"? A number of issues and problems present themselves, at least partly because it's difficult, if not impossible, to imagine this text outside the context of English Literature and the institutions in which English Literature is, in one way or another, a going concern. Who else would bother to read it?

A reading might begin by questioning positions of address. Who is addressing whom? Is it Marvell? Or Marvell adopting the conventional position of the conventional male lover, trying to persuade his willing but unwilling "mistress" to have sex with him? In what sense, though, is this position conventional? Does conventionality just signify generally accepted but unacceptable attitudes? Within the context of English Literature, this kind of convention may be OK, but a reading of the text which questioned the conventions of English Literature may find that this one is merely a mask to conceal an unacceptable phallogentrism. English Literature will certainly provide you with plenty of other examples of the sexist position being expressed in *To His Coy Mistress*: students might be invited to consider, in the same vein, *The Flea* or *Goe Lovely Rose*.

The position apparently being addressed is signified by the phrase "coy mistress". It's worth considering what the components of this phrase might connote. What does "coyness" mean here? Is this not, itself, possibly a coy euphemism, used by the coy Marvell, for something else? Is it a term that might be used equally, and with equal inflection, in reference to masculine identities? As for the word "mistress", this obviously has several gender-specific connotations. In relation to this

generalised identity – hardly an identity at all except in the most stereotypical of senses – the word "his" clearly, of course, signifies ownership. But under what terms? Do we assume the ownership to be established, to be the case? What sense could it make to make that assumption, in relation to what the text gives in terms of information? It's perfectly possible, for example, that the text reflects nothing more than the conventional rehearsal of some stereotypical male fantasy, dressed up in rather archaic language and deploying some rather gauche attempts at metaphorical seduction. Or is the "mistress" – in the conventions of English Literature – always some unidentified female other, any unidentified female other, willing or unwilling but apparently saying no? The implications of this line of thought are hardly flattering either to Marvell or to English Literature in general.

Other indicators in the text as to the identity of the "coy mistress" in question refer to "thine eyes" as praiseworthy, "thy forehead" as gazeworthy, "each breast" as adorable. According to the conventional imagery of seduction "your heart" is referred to, as is "Thy beauty", language that, perhaps without the archaic "thy", might be found on a Valentine card in any newsagent. The apparent desire not to relinquish "virginity" to "him" is construed as "quaint honour". Stereotypical characterizations abound: "youthful hew", "like morning dew". The "thou" of the text is identified – like any desirable woman – in an exotic context, with "rubies" establishing a stereotypical identification of women with jewellery as their proper interest and pursuit.

Isn't it impossible not to find a troubling ambiguity about the relationship between addresser and addressee? The coyness in question is identified as a "crime". Coyness is here referred to with a kind of knowing and mocking superiority.

We might ask what seems to be the subject of the text? Is it the woman, or is it her unwillingness? Since we know nothing about "her", is it more generally about unwillingness of this nature? Or are we to suppose that "coyness" should be read as willingness, as suggested by "thy willing soul". Is the subject of the text, then, willingness posing as coyness? This is rather tricky territory, surely. Perhaps the subject of the poem is women in general and male responses to sexual frustration? Does this text, then, play textual games with sexual politics? Is that its subject, and is that how its deployment of the rhetoric of male definitions of female identity can be justified, or at least explained? Female identity is present here only as a stereotype, and only as a stereotype defined from a position of male power, unless you read it as the expression of nothing else than a lonely male fantasy, pathetic for its pretensions to knowledge or power.

Whichever way you choose to read it, the value and values of English Literature, expressed in this representative case, seem, to put it mildly, rather questionable. How can this text be regarded as worthy of "appreciation" or even "personal response", without the idea of English Literature to render it respectable and the established reading practices of Literature to mask its unacceptable ideology?

Since there is no-one "there" in any sense, neither Marvell nor woman, only structured positions of address; since Marvell's lust has long since turned to ashes and no-one is really speaking to anyone, perhaps the subject of the text is really the hopelessly anachronistic

sexism of some of the privileged texts of English Literature, or the absurd practices associated with them.

This is, of course, a period in which English Literature boasts absolutely no women "poets" at all. The idea of a women's writing from this period which gave comparable expression to sexual desire, and which belonged to English Literature, is unthinkable. But that's probably also true of English Literature in whatever period you look at it. It seems necessary to go elsewhere to try to find points of comparison.

*Justify My Love* is a text which does not fall within the category of English Literature. Popular music videos hardly ever do. It's not even likely to be shown on TV, due to the BBC ban imposed on it - presumably because it deals with sexuality and gender, and foregrounds of female sexuality far from stereotypically constructed. It certainly seems less offensive - less sexist, less phallogentric, less compromised with the values of patriarchal ideology - than *To His Coy Mistress* which, as far as I know, has never been banned by the BBC.

*Justify My Love* seems to involve a simulated sex scene, though it's difficult to say with any certainty what's going on. It begins with the Madonna figure alone in a corridor, apparently in a state of arousal, and moves through a series of quickly changing scenes. A mobile sequence of shots held together by fast-editing techniques show rapid changes in images of the bodies of interchanging participants. The video ends with the Madonna figure leaving the scene, looking directly at the camera, the point of the spectator's gaze, and laughing, perhaps to invite bemused reflection on the enigma, perhaps to confirm control, perhaps to confound stereotypical reading. The imagery that is used throughout "echoes" the imagery of pornography - but the positions of the participants in relation to one another seem not to. Other images are brought into play to complicate and disable the pornographic position. There are images of balletic dance movements, intertextual references to popular cinema iconography, fashion modelling. Female sexuality - as expressed in the Madonna figure - is certainly not rendered passive, nor, in its activity, as subservient to a male position, not in any obvious sense, anyway. The body of the Madonna figure is not offered as simply the fixed subject of a sexual gaze. The Madonna figure is seen in sexual embraces with a man and with a woman - though in both cases these are clearly simulated and subject to "play". The movement of the camera, shifting rapidly from shot to shot also enacts the idea of destabilizing fixed positions. The roles assigned to each of the main participants are never wholly clear. There is not one central and dominating position, certainly; and though, in one sense, a male fantasy may be being enacted, in another sense it is being "played with" - by the controlling presence of the Madonna figure - and is being incorporated into a schema which disables the kinds of fixed, singular positioned gaze that characterizes pornography - and *To His Coy Mistress*. On the contrary: Who's watching who? Who's persuading who? Who's controlling who? None of these things seem certain.

And yet some of the imagery is drawn pretty directly from pornography and some of its favourite icons are being used here, as they are also used in fashion magazines, in Sunday newspaper magazines, in avant-garde cinema, in Hollywood films, in TV adverts for women's lingerie, for cars, for almost anything you care to mention, and in English

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Literature. How is it possible to say, as many feminist commentators have said, that the Madonna figure in this video, or in any other "Madonna" text, is representing an alternative version of female sexuality, denying the fixing position of the male gaze which renders the female body merely a passive object of desire? How does that kind of reading address, for example, the significance of Madonna's adoption of Monroe-like image in terms of make-up, hair style, gestures? To what extent is the representation of alternative views of feminine sexuality possible at all?

It's certainly the case that Madonna's persona in *Justify My Love* isn't passive, coy or simpering. The impression, at least, is always one of being in control, of mobility, of positive action and positively varied. In this sense, the adoption of Monroe characteristics can be read as an intertextual parody of representations of feminine passivity. In other examples in Madonna texts issues of gender identity, especially in relation to power and control, seems to be brought explicitly into play. In the televised version of the *Blond Ambition* concert, the opening sequence shows representations of giant cogs moving in the background. In the foreground chained male figures move laboriously until the Madonna figure appears on stage in a male business style suit, over which is worn female underwear. Whatever else Madonna is, it is pretty clear that this is no coy mistress, simpering haplessly before the machinations of male desire, and no conventional vamp figure either: the lingerie, metonymic of certain definitions of female sexuality, is worn over a male business suit, subverting the stereotypical connotations of both, while bringing them both into play. The male dancers become adornments to the Madonna figure, as the first song, *Express Yourself*, directly addresses women ("Don't settle for second best..."). In the *Blond Ambition* version of *Cherish*, men decked out as mermen flop comically around the Madonna figure as she dances among them. The comedy in this case is characteristic of much of Madonna's parodic style of representation; there are countless instances of it, in videos, interviews, films, documentaries. In the *Blond Ambition* version of *Like a Virgin*, the sexual imagery is both obvious and at its most unconventional, as Madonna expresses herself on a bed surrounded by men wearing pointed breasts that are an exaggerated form of the conventional sexual icon. As is characteristically the case, sexuality is being signified, but not simply to enable readily attributable meanings. The original video version of *Like a Virgin*, for example, utilizes the conventional iconography of the white wedding to explicitly voice sexuality from a feminine point of view. What, precisely, the effects of this combination are is difficult to say.

In virtually all the Madonna videos, images and icons are put together, often using fast-editing techniques, to represent a mobility of positions and to draw on a range of intertextual references, structured to move in and out of narrative form. *Like a Prayer*, from *The Immaculate Collection* deploys a complex range of images and contexts, moving between the conventions of television "realism" and an imaginary order where diverse images are brought together. Here sexual desire is represented in a context that brings into play religious symbols and icons of ethnic difference, another motif in much of Madonna's oeuvre. Sexual desire here seems to be equated with other forms of desire and

bonding. In *Papa Don't Preach*, the video imagery and the song are very obviously anti-patriarchal. And in all these texts, it's evident throughout that the Madonna figure, in every gesture and movement is simulating, acting out, or putting into some kind of "play" images and identities. This is most explicitly evident in the *Vogue* video where the whole business of fashion, gender and dress codes are characterized by the repeated phrase, "Strike a pose", where physical pleasures of dancing and cultural pleasures of dress are celebrated as releases from the limitations of everyday identities. An extreme form of the fast-edited video sequence, the text is crowded with images of bodies dancing, posing, adopting and shifting identities.

In all the Madonna texts, intertextual parody, posing and play are very much the order of the day. The form of representation is most often the fast-edited video, where images switch suddenly and metonymic sequences move rapidly before the spectator. Identities seem frequently to be shifting and the representation of gender takes familiar iconography to transmute its context and its range of possible meanings. In all of this it could be said that Madonna does what Marvell cannot: that is to make direct and indirect statements that have the effect of deconstructing the categories of a patriarchal order. Of course, that doesn't mean that the terms of that patriarchal order can simply be done away with; they are brought into play, but not simply and definitively as markers of fixed positions and stable identities. In this sense, then, Madonna's text can hardly be claimed to be less complex, less interesting, less rewarding than *To His Coy Mistress*.

It would seem an inevitable conclusion that Madonna is preferable to Marvell - unless, of course, you find the sexist values of patriarchy congenial. Is it possible, though, to make these kinds of comparisons? There is a philosophical error in believing that this kind of qualitative distinction can be maintained, though it might be a useful kind of error to fall into strategically. To claim specific meanings for texts *in themselves*, independently of the perspectives from which they're seen, independently of the cultural conditions in which they are produced and reproduced and made sense of; to claim that texts can mean particular things universally, or externally, or intrinsically; to claim that reading can ever be anything other than a social process taking place within institutional sites of production, can only be the consequence of a philosophically naive essentialism.

English Literature has, of course, always found this kind of naivety very convenient, claiming natural sovereignty over inferior kinds of texts reviled diagnostically as ephemeral, degraded and banal, symptomatic of general cultural malaise and of the spiritual ill-health of the benighted majority.

It probably isn't, then, strictly possible to claim that Madonna is superior to Marvell; but the texts "themselves" are not, in the end, what is critically in question. What is in question is the identity of the texts established by particular readings.

It is perfectly possible to construct a reading of *To His Coy Mistress* that clearly exposes the sexist assumptions that underlie its pretensions to the greatness of Literature, just as it is also perfectly possible to propose a reading which explicitly challenges its status as Literature; it may be read as a self-parody deconstructing its own status as classic text

issuing from classic author. Both kinds of readings are perfectly possible because the text in itself can mean nothing in any absolute way autonomous from the contexts of its readings. What's critical is to address the institutional context in which meanings are granted, in which identity is conferred, to examine the specific institutional processes that organize meanings and identities. With *To His Coy Mistress*, for example, it would be important to explore the institutional context that might make a claim for its authority as Literature.

But, although anti-patriarchal readings can be constructed, that is not, of course, how English Literature has ever sought to define *To His Coy Mistress*. The phenomenon of Marvell is symptomatic. The values of English Literature are maintained not simply by the single case – nor by the accumulation of similar single cases – but by the well-established institutionalized reading practices that determine, in the first place, what kind of writing you're dealing with and what you do with it. "Personal response" to "the author's intentions and purposes", as certain A level syllabuses would have it, is unlikely to give rise to readings alert to the political determinations of texts and how they are read, how they are given certain kinds of status and what the ideological and institutional functions of this process of differentiation might be.

The point of doing this kind of work with GCSE students in the end is not simply to choose between Madonna and Marvell, but to examine social values as they are borne by texts of different identities and status. Marvell can be parodied, inverted, deconstructed. Madonna, similarly, cannot be read as simply consistently representing one position. The "meaning" of Madonna can't be confined to a single reading which says – once and for all – this represents liberation, difference, challenge, because that way of looking at things denies the contexts of production and reception that generate meanings. Madonna is also framed by different contexts, and belongs to orders of representation that have determinate bearing on meaning.

Madonna inhabits, and is constituted by, the public arena of popular culture, and as such is signified by various different representations in newspaper articles, magazine features and interviews, TV news items, radio programmes, videos on TV, and so on – and so can never really be author of herself, can never really define for herself the position she occupies, the meanings she comes to represent. Madonna's identity is not produced purely within those discrete texts, the videos of her songs. Madonna is produced and reproduced, defined and redefined in countless accounts within the processes of marketing and consumption by audiences which themselves are diverse and multiple.

It can really be of only strategic value to end up substituting one form of canonized literature for another. Madonna is just one aspect of the everyday stuff of popular culture, produced at least as much as producing. It would not really make much sense to claim that she means something specific and independent of context and determines the meanings of the texts associated with her name, author of all she signifies. If Marvell is metonymic of English Literature, so Madonna is metonymic of popular culture, and the difference between them is metonymic of the ordering which distinguishes hierarchically between texts but ascribes those distinctions to something intrinsic to the texts "themselves". A teaching which made its business language and

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textuality would need to address all of this.

The whole business of looking at individual texts taken out of their specific social context is highly questionable. The idea of Literature, "personal response" and all its associated practices actually depends on the suppression of the social. This is a direct consequence of the ideology of "liberal" individualism – the consequences of which are far from liberal. The marginalisation of critical issues of race, class and gender means that conservative values dominate the subject's ideological constitution and its practice. An English which doesn't recognise its specific social functions within its institutional context is always subject to determination by conservative forces, even when they are masked by liberal ideology.

It's not enough to say that English Literature needs some theory to be brought to bear upon it or added to it. Theory is useful in so far as it can illuminate how the social, the political and the cultural are brought together in a linguistic network. Theory may enable a re-examination of narrow ideas about Literature; enable English to address much wider issues of language, textuality and subjectivity. This means not only changing the content of the subject, but also foregrounding the institutional context of all its operations. To go beyond the privileged notion of discrete texts, to address language, textuality and subjectivity within the nexus of the social, the political and the cultural, may well mean changing the subject beyond recognition.

# Reading and the World of LINC

Nick Peim

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The circumstances surrounding the non-publication of the LINC material, and the commentaries that have followed, raise some crucial points about the identity of English as a subject. Different kinds of rhetoric have been generated – from the gaping ignorance of government education officials to the outrage of liberals robbed of their myth of progress. What is at stake, or so it seems, is nothing less than the identity of the subject, the core of the National Curriculum.

Putting aside the farcical nature of the government's position, DES statements and national press reports, it's as well to look warily and critically at the claims being made, on the other hand, on behalf of the LINC venture. Ridiculous statements suggesting the seditious nature of the LINC material have been answered by grandiose counter-claims that it represents a real and proper redefinition of the study of language and text as we know it, theoretically informed, wide-ranging and transformative, in line with the views of practising English teachers. It's a neat irony, symptomatic of the inglorious fate of the liberal position, that the very people who once cried out against Kingman are now equally vociferous in their support of LINC – which is based on the Kingman model of the English language.

Looking at the LINC folder and reflecting on the current state of English, it's clear that the LINC material is in fact fundamentally – and probably necessarily – blind to some central issues; and the commentaries on LINC, too, have either rejected or applauded the material on thoroughly questionable grounds. The supporters of LINC no doubt outshine their opponents greatly in the sophistication of their ideas – though being more intellectually advanced than *Guardian* education reporting and DES official comment is not in itself positive commendation. Even so, it is clearly the case that LINC and its champions have not identified the real political issues at stake in relation to what English is or isn't going to be.

Some commentators writing in defence of the LINC material, claiming that it was somehow democratically produced, compete strongly with their blimpish counterparts for the brazen absurdity of their claims. After all, whatever their merits or demerits, there's nothing democratic about the production of the LINC material. At the level of ideas, in the model of language adopted in the appointment of 'expert trainers', in the manner of its production – there was never any danger of democratic processes being involved. How could they be – without some considerable shift in the order of things both in and outside education? The model of language was already superimposed, the cultural and educational assumptions clearly well-established. Who knows whether or not the LINC material represents the positions held by English teachers? There's no existing mechanism for finding out. English teachers constitute a fractured group, and any inconsistency in English teaching is held together by the thoroughly

anti-democratic institutions, practices and ideas that give the subject form, content, context and bearing. Whatever the attitude of the generality of English teachers to the LINC materials may now be, however, the LINC project was always to be tied to the National Curriculum, set up to echo the Kingman model of language, with a bit of one version of a grammar thrown in. All those points, I reckon, are about as far as you might get from an auspicious start for a serious re-reading of English.

It isn't enough, either, to suggest that these things can be realigned somehow to suit other purposes. They are too structured by established ideas and practices to offer opportunities for significant redefinition.

In the end it's in political terms that the meaning of LINC may be brought into question – for the political is the critical gap in English that has been highlighted for a long time now by the sociology of education and by sociolinguistics. The LINC material, though it deals with language and the social at one level, has been structurally designed not to address the politics of English in relation to the big questions about language, literacy and culture. Issues like these can't be dealt with under the old models of a simply progressive pedagogy, not if you want to change things, anyway. The tricky matter of the relative autonomy of the practice of the subject must be addressed. What LINC called 'reading the world' can't simply be taught by handing over some ideas for analysing an assortment of texts. The world is always already being read all the time. Existing practice must be challenged and done away with before other practices can be instituted. If, under present circumstances, there's no visible horizon beyond which such a 'world-reading' shift could be implemented, then it's more productive to try to change these conditions than to pretend that present forms will allow for transformation.

These, what might be called structural political issues, are avoided by LINC. The sociology of education, applied to English via sociolinguistics, presents a devastatingly critical case yet to be addressed, let alone answered, by any of the more vocal forces in English teaching, including the authors of LINC. A serious attempt to redefine and reorientate English would need to deal with such fundamental issues in the field of language, literacy and culture as these:

1. Assessment in schooling needs to be seriously questioned and radically reformulated to counter the existing practices of social selection based on acceptable notions of progress related to discriminatory ideas about language, literacy and culture.
2. Language practices in educational contexts need to be thoroughly reviewed and reformulated to ensure that forms of language are not allowed to discriminate and exclude, and that students are not denigrated on linguistic grounds.
3. Institutional definitions of literacy need to be seriously reconstructed, redefined or de-defined so that one limited notion of literacy can no longer serve as a mark of social superiority.
4. In the field of culture, ideas hitherto associated with English need radical overhauling, deep-seated anti-democratic prejudices need to be swept away; forms of cultural experience other than the limited range traditionally associated with English need to be reorganised, validated and, somehow, addressed in their own relatively autonomous styles.

5. In general, the institutional and ideological power of established dominant models in the everyday discourses of educational practices needs to be subjected to critique and alternative models developed.

These issues are largely ignored by LINC. This means that the LINC material is unlikely ever to be more than an optional addition to the present constitution of the subject, different in style and content, perhaps, but used for the same old purposes. 'Reading the world' must begin from a theorisation and definition of your own context, the conditions under which the reading is being done. One very obvious place to start – not touched by LINC – would be to question the construction of GCSE/Key Stage 4 criteria. What particular notions of language do they assume? Who devises, operates and monitors them, with what prejudices and positions to maintain, in what institutional contexts, by what procedures? How has it been possible to pass these specific criteria off as English itself, when clearly they must reflect only one notion of what English is, one (lamentably limited, poorly informed) model of language against which all performances must be judged? If assessment in English gives unequal recognition to the language, experience and cultural values of its students, what is its function in a democratic society? All these points are crucial to any consideration of English and central to how it may be contested in the future.

Instead of proposing a single, restricted model of language, as LINC seems to do, why not ask what would become of English given a central role for sociolinguistics? What would have to happen to notions of assessment, notions of progress and development? If English adopts a sociolinguistic perspective on language, how can it ever claim to deal in universal truths? Or make judgements? Questions must follow about the idea of progression and how it might be measured, how standards might be set and how they might be implemented. What would be the consequences of applying sociolinguistic criteria to the untenable category of literature and its exclusions, and the thoroughly questionable ideological baggage it drags around with it?

The history of English might be rewritten as a history of this particular form of domination in which English literature might be seen as a kind of textual extremism, powerfully and ideologically exclusive, and remarkably restricting – but espoused for specific social purposes, including the negation of the ideological and political dimensions of language and culture. The values of one specific social and ethnic group thus dominate others. Let's not forget that multicultural literature is still *literature*, and its inflated value still marks the operation of a form of cultural domination. Toni Morrison and Shakespeare belong now to the same textual order; for the majority they mean the same thing, the same cultural exclusion – a kind of cultural apartheid – working against the interests and real cultural experiences of ethnic minority groups of various different kinds. A different view of ethnicity is demanded, taking into account the way that dominant cultural forms – including those of schooling – fail to acknowledge cultural differences of many kinds. It remains a problem for progressive versions of English to unravel: the best way to ditch the embarrassing notion of literature, the prejudices and purblind reading habits that go with it, without admitting to the murky processes of social discrimination it has been, and remains, linked with. And then isn't it still a scandalous fact that generations of students in state education have

been taught to believe themselves to be inadequate in relation to literacy, because the operative model of literacy was, and largely remains punitive and exclusive? It's perhaps strange, then, that there is no public outcry, no protest, no political lobbying, no articles in the journals and newspapers against this scandal.

An important, and perhaps necessary, myth about English is that its history is a history of progress. Bullock, Kingman and Cox, the National Writing Project, the National Oracy Project and LINC, have all been seen as steps toward a vaguely liberal, non-political ideal. Recent government moves, of which the LINC affair is typical, have left this view no longer tenable. Where does liberal English go now? The official NATE position, claiming that all is well – the National Curriculum coming along nicely, plenty of Shakespeare being taught – in the hope of staving off further setbacks, is frankly embarrassing. But what, really, has been lost? Only a misplaced faith in the history of progress could give cause for mourning. Recent events have had the positive effect of clearing away misguided liberalism, demanding a sharper, more theoretically and politically charged awareness of issues; giving something to struggle for rather than weakly defending already lost position that weren't, probably, worth defending anyway.

The problems facing English are not to be minimised. It would obviously be too much to expect that one set of INSET material could transform deeply entrenched practices and habits of thought, but the LINC material does not even begin to address the issues. The real scandal of LINC is not all the misspent money, not the government's crass and misguided handling of the affair, nor the remarkably low level of press reporting. These things pale into insignificance against the deeply scandalous fact that the constitution of English, the core of the National Curriculum, remains structured to maintain inequality. The very function of the LINC affair, like that of the current debates about English, has been to mask the real political issue, the scandal of anti-democratic schooling based on linguistic, cultural and social discrimination and domination.

# Critical theory and the English teacher

The English teacher must be aware that the very identity of English as a subject for study in secondary schools is open to doubt. It is becoming increasingly clear that the values and beliefs which have formed traditional English tend to devalue or at least exclude the experience of most students. At the same time, the tools of critical theory have been used in higher education to make the subject still more rarefied and distant from everyday experience.

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**Nick Peim is Head of English at Beauchamp College, Leicester**

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## General Editor's preface

The imposition of a National Curriculum in English at secondary level has forced into the open opposing forces striving to gain power over the curriculum. Without going into any of the political, ideological or educational arguments which have erupted onto the English curriculum landscape through the push of these forces, it is necessary to stress that far from providing the definitive answer to the question 'What is English?', the National Curriculum has made the question even more insistent. The anger over the 1992 review of the English National Curriculum and the furore over the SATs debacle have only fuelled a debate which cannot in the least be said to be theoretical as it underpins (or undermines) the pedagogical ground on which every English teacher stands.

Harrassed English teachers might be forgiven in 1992 for crying, 'a pox on both your houses', in the face of ignorant interference from politicians on the one hand, and on the other the continuing demand for a reworking of English as a kind of cultural studies from the literary radicals within some university departments and parts of the National Association of Teachers of English. They can be forgiven, but nevertheless they must be urged not to give in to the temptation to curse both sides and turn away to seek some imagined peaceful place of straightforward teaching. For there is no such place. The most practical matters of our teaching strategy and pupils' learning experiences depends upon our view of the nature of our subject, its content and its processes. This is why in this book Nick Peim addresses both theory and practice together.

This is not a book to be dismissed as of value only to those English teachers who are already sympathetic to the ascendancy of literary theory in English study over the last fifteen years. Those whose view is that English at school level should have nothing to do with literary theory will find this a book as informed by practical thinking about

teaching and learning as they would hope to see. Nick Peim is not just asking questions about the nature of English; he is actually showing how the answers to these questions lead to particular classroom strategies. It is a practical book arising from the work of a practising teacher. It is practice that is yet not pragmatism, but rather action born of reflection upon the content and processes of the subject.

It is seductively easy at the present time for an English teacher to take the view that her job is just to teach the kids and to come to terms with the confusing demands of a National Curriculum and steer through the chaos of its implementation. And of course, this latter is something that must be done. However, it is dangerous at times of crisis to believe that the immediate struggle is all that can take your attention if you are to survive. Frequently, the means to survive are available only to those who can fight with a mind cleared by grasping a principled, conceptually organized position. There are many political forces currently at work which appear to wish to de-skill the teaching profession, to reduce the teacher to a technician carrying out the commands of those who determine what is to be taught. Teachers who refuse to think about the nature of their subject will make it easy for such forces to overcome the profession. This book can help any English teacher to fight back.

What Nick Peim does in this book is to provide such a means for survival by looking at the central core of the English curriculum and vigorously questioning such matters as: the concept of reading and the definition of literacy; the nature of the secondary canon; categories of writing; speech and identity. He opens up the nature of the discourse within which we express what English is and through which we do what English we do. In asking his questions he finds means to answer them through employing some of the insights provided by advances in recent literary theory (which have themselves led to a changing view of the nature of literature as a study) to change our view of what secondary English can do. The continuum between literary theory within higher education and the secondary English curriculum is not a matter of teaching new knowledge in school (it is not akin to new discoveries in science being so important that they have to be prescribed in the school curriculum), but of reviewing our very concept of English and the relationship between English as a study and the social context out of which it comes.

This book is part of the Teaching Secondary English series published originally by Methuen and now by Routledge. The books in this series are intended to give practical guidance in the various areas of the English curriculum. Each area is treated in a separate volume in order to

gain the necessary space in which to discuss it at some length. The aim of the series is twofold: to describe good practice by exploring the approaches and activities reflected in the daily work of an English teacher in the comprehensive school; and to give a practical lead to teachers who wish to try out for themselves a wider repertoire of teaching skills and ways of organizing syllabuses and lessons. Taken as a whole, the series does not press upon the reader a ready-made philosophy, but attempts to provide a map of the English teaching landscape in which the separate volumes highlight individual features of the terrain.

At first glance it may seem that this particular book is at odds with this description of the series in that it does press upon the reader a particular philosophy. And it is true that this volume is explicit and insistent about its particular approach to English. However, it does share with the other volumes a concern for how English shall be taught in the classroom, and Nick Peim presents his philosophy in pertinently practical terms. The philosophy Peim advocates does not lie behind other volumes in this series, although the practical approaches described in other volumes would not be outlawed in Nick Peim's kind of classroom, but it seems fitting that a series which has been published over the last decade should end with a volume that exhibits some of the radical thinking of that decade and which provides the possible basis for good practice in the next ten years.

In the last decade, particularly since the publication of Peter Widdowson's *Re-reading English* (Methuen, 1982), we have become familiar with the cry of 'crisis in English!' headlines in the quality newspapers towards the end of the 1980s. We have had stories attacking changes in the content of English degrees, with claims that students are required to read works of literary theory at the expense of novels and poetry. From the McCabe affair at Cambridge in the late 1970s to the fuss in some quarters of the press concerning the appointment of Terry Eagleton, a known Marxist and literary theorist, to one of the most highly regarded professorships in English at Oxford, these stories have frequently been told as dramas about the supposed dark influences of radically motivated literary theorists strangling the old literary canons in a deadly grip. Similarly, in the last two years some of the press have spotted similar sinister forces of radical influence behind the way in which those who have wished to preserve the broad approach to secondary English in the 1970s and 1980s, have fought off attempts to reinterpret the English National Curriculum in the narrowest definitions of literacy and literature. Setting such journalistic simplifications aside, it is true that what has emerged is a wider fight for influence and power over the

whole English curriculum, and in such a fight the secondary teachers themselves must be armed with the ability to analyse conceptually their subject and to understand the nature of the discourse in which the subject is argued over. Nick Peim's book enables all English teachers to understand their position in that fight and the importance of the battle. It helps give them the power to contribute to changing their subject, not by indulging in polemic, but by reasoned action within their own classroom practices.

• Peter King  
Series Editor  
March 1993.

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*The End of Something* (from *The Essential Hemingway*, 1977) is reproduced with the permission of HarperCollins.

# Introduction

This book seeks to ask questions – and to make some proposals – about the identity and functioning of English in the secondary school curriculum. This interrogation is conducted from a point of view informed by what has been called theory. The kind of theory advocated here, though, is not simply literary; it seeks also to address the social, the cultural and the institutional being of English, aiming to establish a critique founded on the idea of an alternative practice. The project I've attempted is to re-examine the fundamental practices of English: to re-examine the practices of reading, writing and oracy in schooling – in the light of a theoretically informed rereading of what they are and how they work in existing, routine and institutionalized practices. Proposing different activities and a different orientation in classroom practice, the aim is also to examine some of the issues concerning the institutional identity of the subject.

The particular model of theory I've adopted is generally, if loosely, referred to as post-structuralism. Post-structuralism here is conceived of as a body of theory addressing textual and linguistic cultural practices in a completely decentring, and deconstructive manner. Post-structuralist theory renders it impossible to claim that any signifying events, texts or practices can guarantee or fix their own meanings on their own. Post-structuralism is not, though, just a nihilistic theory of the absolute relativity of meaning. Post-structuralist theory also indicates how signifying events, texts and practices do get given fixed meanings within social practices and contexts; these contexts being institutions of reading and meaning. Post-structuralism, as construed here, addresses aspects of language and textuality as they inhere in particular social forms, refusing to address some mythical, essential, textual being that might be referred to as the spirit, or the value or quality of the text. There are no doubt other kinds of theory that will make similar points about language, texts, meanings and contexts. And

there are, no doubt, other ways of using – or of not using – post-structuralist theory that would contest my readings of the various aspects of theory and the theoretical issues I've dealt with here.

Post-structuralist theory may be used to question all the familiar and habitual assumptions of English, everything that has been taken for granted as the general currency of the institutional being of English. This includes ideas – like author, response, meaning and creativity, for example – that attribute specific, limited meaning and value to particular texts. It also demands examination of institutionalized practices of teaching and assessment – all the beliefs in practice of the subject, the different perspectives and terms it puts to work, effectively deconstructing, problematizing the ready-made assumptions and practices that give the subject its recognizable, characteristic content.

Post-structuralism demands an awareness of the social, cultural conditions of meaning, of the dynamic interactions between texts and their contexts, the cultural practices and habits that determine the nature and directions of the process of meaning. Institutions – as organizing contexts – are centrally significant in terms of holding meanings in place, promoting specific meanings, enabling and disqualifying meanings. Institutions here include institutionalized reading practices, for example. Post-structuralist theory, then, enables analysis to go beyond the immediate encounter of reader and text to examine the institutional practices that position readers and texts, and to come to an awareness of the culturally powerful, readily available systems and possibilities of meaning. Post-structuralism also has the most powerful available descriptions of the individual subject of language and meaning – as a mobile entity enmeshed in cultural formations. This radically changes our understanding of reading and meaning processes: it also has implications for our understanding of cultural processes more generally.

In general, post-structuralism is likely to be sceptical of the claim of any single system of knowledge – like literature, for example – to comprehensive explanatory power, universal value or truth. Post-structuralism would insist on the necessary recognition that our knowledge and understanding of *anything* is inseparable from the business of representation (language – signs, texts, discourses, institutions). Post-structuralism would tend to insist that knowledge and understanding are always *positioned* – and that the identity and meaning of things shifts radically given different perspectives and cultural contexts. Post-structuralism is a multi-directional thing, a mobile theory of texts, language, the subject, subjectivity. It draws on different kinds of knowledge: for example, linguistics, philosophy and psychoanalysis.

Post-structuralism has, in turn, been influential in the fields of feminism, political and social theory, history and archaeology, as well as geography, art theory and many other forms of knowledge.

Post-structuralist theory isn't a singular and strictly delimited thing, of course. What's offered as 'theory' in this book is *one* version of post-structuralist theory that I've attempted at times to link with sociological and comparative sociolinguistic perspectives. What post-structuralism is is necessarily difficult to define and is likely to refer to different things in different contexts. In certain contexts post-structuralism would be closely associated with or even equated with post-modernism, post-colonialism. The terms post-modern and post-colonial are used variously to describe a way of seeing things and/or a particular state of things in the contemporary world. There are some who might say that post-structuralism really begins with Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Others might say that Heidegger is really the source. Some might describe post-structuralism as the culmination of a counter-trend running through the history of western thought, whereas others might well dismiss the whole matter as a faddish distraction. Some would attach great, global importance to it, others pointing out its particular Frenchness, indicating the greater significance of the German tradition. What post-structuralism means, then, is subject to different interpretations and different uses. Post-structuralism may, for example, be used to find new ways of reading the canonical texts of English literature; it may also be used to call into question the whole idea of the authority of the canon of English literature, looking rather at how it has been constructed as a specific discourse within specific institutional contexts and for specific institutional purposes. In the present context, I've chosen to direct a certain limited reading of post-structuralist theory to the identity of subject English.

The principal names classically associated with post-structuralism are – arguably – Derrida, Foucault, Lacan and Lyotard, though there are a host of subsidiary writers that might be cited. There are problems, however, with any attempt to insist on attribution to singularly identified names or positions. Although associated with certain names, the ideas generated by post-structuralism can be found in many different aspects and accounts of the theory. These accounts may be considered as strictly secondary, but only on a reading ascribing original meaning to the original texts and their authors. This would be a thoroughly un-post-structuralist procedure, though no doubt it has become a norm in certain academic contexts. The very idea that there could be a singular and generally known version of the post-structuralist theory would run counter to all the implications of the theory itself. It would, in effect,

be impossible also to attribute these ideas and the uses they've been put to here, to particular and specifically traceable sources. Post-structuralism tends to operate against totalizing theories of meaning or knowledge. Although specific aspects of it have been associated with certain proper names, the bearers of those names can't be held to account for all its many manifestations. Nor can the various things post-structuralism has become be traced back to specific and single sources. To refer to those names is to acknowledge the idea of the author as authority: to engage in a specific academic language game that demands these rules of reference be obeyed. In academic discourses there is a vested interest in maintaining these established forms of reference, with their connotations of an initiate, exclusive knowledge. Indeed, academic professional identity may depend on it. However, deconstruction, for example, may exist – may even thrive – completely independently of the name of Derrida.

None of these kinds of theory are of any particular value in themselves. In the context of the teaching of English they are worth pursuing in so far as they offer a way of looking again at the familiar forms of things, at the habits of practice, at assumptions. Theory can give a new hold on old practices and can make the established and familiar appear not quite so acceptable and proper. As part of the same movement away from established prejudices of thinking, theory can open up new spaces for new practices and directions. The theory I've adopted is useful to the extent that it makes the connections between language practices, educational practices and social forms inescapable. In other words, useful in that it addresses the politics of the subject – power and ideology at work in specific ideas and institutional practices.

The elements of theory I've proposed are certainly not essential. There may well be other ways of unhinging the established identity of the subject and of proposing different models and practices by doing so. No doubt there are. Deconstruction is not the exclusive property of post-structuralism. This might be expressed another way, by saying that the meaning of theory is changed by the uses it is put to and the contexts it works in, just as much as the kind of theory at work may determine practices. An important point to make here is that the very meaning of theory is changed by the uses you put it to. Theory itself doesn't necessarily guarantee a position dedicated to some kind of radical shift in the order of things.

The position expressed here claims that the identity of English has been and is founded on premises and practices that are no longer really viable. My argument is against English – against its current practices

and the values they represent – proposing a newly defined field of ideas and activities.

Even though it may continue, doggedly, to make special claims for itself – special claims about its unique role in education – English takes up its place in the curriculum, being continuous with the systematic discrimination that is most crudely realized in exam procedures. It works against the majority of its students. English does this while proposing quite specific values and beliefs – about literacy, about the individual and about the world. These values and beliefs tend in general to devalue, or at least to exclude, the cultural experiences of most of its subjects, or students. Although often representing itself either as dealing in universal truths, or as being liberally open to all, English in schools as we know it is an ideologically loaded business. There is no English – no real, essential English – outside of its institutional practice. The institutions of English are many and varied and include, for example, the institution of the school, the institution of the teaching profession, the institution of examination processes, as well as institutionalized ideas about literacy and learning.

It is the contention of this book, then, that certain philosophical and sociological knowledges make it impossible to avoid confronting the ideologically loaded nature of English. Just as the philosophical critique of the founding ideas of the subject exposes its ideological inflection, so the sociology of the subject deconstructs the pretensions of English to independent existence. The very being of English is defined by the general institutional functions of education. It does not reside in some ethereal, in some mythical space uncontaminated by the material conditions of its world. The content and the style of English are vulnerable to a drastically deconstructive, philosophical and sociological analysis – an analysis deconstructive of any pretensions English may have to simplicity, to being objective or neutral or natural, or to having anything beyond a strictly institutional existence.

The general critique of educational practice as naturalized systematic discrimination – offered by what might be referred to as a deconstructive sociology – has fatal implications for the special claims English has made for itself in terms of models of cultural heritage and personal growth, and those other institutional practices of correction and discrimination that have more silently dominated it – versions of language and culture as proper heritage. These accounts of English – along with some of their more recently proposed potential successors – have lacked the terms of reference to address, on the one hand, the consistent history of English as 'reproduction', and the fractured and contradictory operations of the subject in practice. Liberal ideas held by

the advocates of creativity have never been interested in situating the subject within the context of its history as institutionalized discourse. That is what has made them completely consistent with conservative ideology.

Looking critically at the theoretical base of English, subjecting the subject's institutional practices to sociological knowledge, deconstructing the rhetoric of the subject's official and established identity, it is impossible to avoid confronting the politics of the subject and the subject as a kind of politics: involving a politics of culture and a politics of institutional educational practice. Politics here refers to material and ideological effects. Theory may offer a kind of thinking enabling the institutional identity of the subject and its ideological inflection to be probed. The point here is not to do away with ideology nor to escape the confines of the institution – neither would be possible – but to address both: to continue to address both in all the discourses and practices of all aspects of the subject. Subject English has always tended to deny – in its beliefs and rhetorics – that it has any relation to the political. Theory promises the possibility of opening the subject to its political being. The introduction of the question of theory is a necessary condition for political change.

Theory of whatever kind, though, is not necessarily and unambiguously a force for positive change, nor for change at all. It is perfectly possible to use post-structuralist theory simply to add new perspectives to old practices and positions: in higher education this is evidently the way that theory has worked: effectively to rejuvenate a flagging subject, tired of its own forms of thought, its uncertain field of knowledge and its worn out debates. If academic theory has purveyed itself to English teachers – among many others – as abstruse and irrelevant, then that's academic theory for you, and is not the condition for the existence of theory itself. Phenomenologically speaking, there is no theory-in-itself. Theory, though, may be simply construed – or constructed – to mean the process of questioning and making explicit fundamental principles and may be the condition for a more consciously and self-consciously aware practice. Theory in this sense may still appear difficult and alienating because it addresses what common-sense, routine habits of thought in English (in this case) would otherwise pass over in silence. To go beyond common sense may mean, for example, overreaching the bounds of common sense habits of expression – common sense being the mute acceptance of the routine assumptions that keep things safe from the mobility of critical thought.

It's certainly conceivable that in the rigorous context of schooling, theory – as interrogative critique – is much more likely to diagnose the

subject's complicity with modes of thinking and institutional practices that are based on social discrimination. English in schooling represents a significant social practice, on a mass scale. It is also more likely to provide a new idea altogether of a 'foundation' from which to produce the conditions for a completely different basis for the subject's operation. The dual movement of critique and reformulation – as a continuous process – is the potentiality that theory offers to English in schools as a means of dealing with its present, compromised position. A project of redefinition answering to this description would be very different from academic theory in higher education.

The kind of cultural analysis – a thoroughly critical analysis – of English that a theoretically informed reading of the politics of the subject enables, renders English as we know it unviable, except as it can be practised in thoroughly bad faith. The implications of post-structuralist, sociological and sociolinguistic theory throw into doubt all the language practices of English, including all those practices associated with creativity, with self-expression, as well as those that emphasise social aspects of language, like correctness or appropriateness, for example. Comparative sociolinguistics problematizes the assessment of language and constitutes an aspect of theory making, for example, assessment criteria unable to conceal their political function. Any comparative theory of culture also means that literature – an idea that has been important in English in various forms – is not at all a sustainable category. Among the problems of literature highlighted by this kind of theory, it should only be necessary to mention that no one really knows what it is – the problem of definition, in the first place, and, secondly, the problem of value – no one really knows what it stands for. A culturally critical analysis of the idea of literature – and its associated ideas – will find that it has stood for a kind of discourse which is more suited to some people than others; that it is really an empty category that's been used to further the processes of social distinction as they operate in education.

The position of English in relation to language and literature is thoroughly anomalous. English has saddled itself with ideas and practices that are very strictly limited and limiting. The thoroughly negative direction of this critique could, however, become positive. The realization of a general field of language and textuality systematically excluded from English represents greatly extended possibilities. I'm proposing here – albeit partially – that this more inclusive field be addressed, a field of language and textuality in which questions of power and ideology, for example, could not be ignored.



The practices of a subject addressing language and textuality in a far more broad sense than any ever dreamed of by English would necessarily address the textual politics of subjects and institutions. It's difficult to see how these political issues could be anything other than central and explicit. To reconfigure English so that it addresses language and textual practices in general – in the media, in institutions, in everyday social exchanges – to do all this seems to me essential to rescue the subject from the hollowness of its fundamental founding categories – stories, poems, Shakespeare, personal response or themes – and from the narrow range of concerns they imply. Unfortunately, this doesn't mean that the grading system will go away. The general case made by the sociology of education remains to be answered. But the sociology of subject identities – unmasking the pretensions of English to be based on some natural order of things – may be confronted by a different definition of the field of literacy than has been occupied by English. This may mean teaching explicitly and sociologically against the institutional operations of inequality; to show how forms, categories and processes of schooling, for example, are loaded in favour of dominant power groups; to show how identities are inscribed according to these forms, categories and processes, as well as refusing to pretend that matters of language and literacy can be taught without reference to social forms. To reconstruct English in this way, means addressing issues of inequality and cultural identity: it also means addressing more fully and more centrally issues of race, class and gender, issues in relation to culture and democracy, concerning, among other things, language differences and power, what it means to be literate – for while these issues are excluded from the central pre-occupations of the subject, they must remain marginalized and the learning of language and literacy must therefore be distorted.

What you've then got may no longer be English as we know it; but then again, who cares? In other words, in whose interests is English – in its present forms – maintained?

In certain contexts, in recent times, recognition that English is political has become something of a truism. What this means precisely in terms of the will to change the definition and practice of the subject is a difficult and complex issue. These complexities can only be dealt with bluntly here, based on the following line of argument. The subject English has historically been implicated in models of practice based on ideas of cultural heritage, on a culture of correction, on a liberal culture of individual creativity, on a model of multiculturalism or on a model of the transmission of cultural capital. All of these models are rendered

clearly untenable by post-modern conditions – as well as by post-structuralist descriptions – of cultural exchange. Under these conditions, transnational cultural products, produced and distributed in transnational institutional conditions, come into reading contexts that are very specifically local. These conditions bear no relation to the models that structure English. These conditions make necessary a rethinking of how the political is tied in with the processes and effects of change. In terms of an address of the established forms of knowledge known as subjects, this means that specifically educational questions merge into considerations of political, economic and social systems. An important issue here would be the very nature of ethnicity and how it relates to powerful meaning systems. The school, and how it mediates forms of knowledge, would be one point from which to begin such an analysis.

The practice and the meaning of the subject in the arena of state education is a significant issue. At least the explicit emergence of the question of theory has offered the possibility of breaking out of the historic limits of the subject. This brings within the horizon not only a perception of the material and ideological conditions of its being: it also makes possible the conditions for change.

The problems of definition facing any cultural politics in relation to the idea of literacy are issues that are only touched on here. What's offered is a position taken and the beginnings of an attempt to institute a deconstructive practice of a subject dealing with language and literacy within the arena of state education. The project touches upon – without extensively dealing with – important matters arising from any engagement with signifying systems. The relations between institutions and audiences; questions about ethnicity – local, national and transnational; official, dominant, subordinate and all sorts of popular cultures, as well as matters of a more explicitly political slant: questions about all these issues are certainly raised by the kind of project for deconstructing English I've proposed here. In the end questions are also raised about what might be meant by key terms such as democracy and equality, and how these terms might be conceived of as quite different from their present general uses.

# 1 The habits of English

the richer for the encounter. In its idealized and conventional description the reading of stories is often represented as just such an uncomplicated and essentially self-contained process. There is – in a very important sense – no need to justify the activity. Its value is held to be self-evident – a truth universally acknowledged. It just seems to be obvious, common sense that stories should be central to the English curriculum, that their reading should produce positive, enriching effects and that stories constitute an essential stage on the royal road to literacy – as well as promoting the humanly desirable qualities of empathy, awareness, and knowledge of the world beyond.

An interrogative approach to the business of reading stories in English might aim to examine critically the common-sense and commonly held assumptions that sustain the perceived meaning and value of stories in English, and that inform attitudes to reading and textual communication generally. The idea is to question the centrality of stories, to enquire into what stories are and how they function, and – in doing so – to begin to challenge assumptions about what English is: why it takes the particular forms it does, why it promotes certain ideas and activities; also to begin to propose that there may be alternatives to current practices, and that there may be very good reasons why alternatives should be considered.

The approach offered here uses ideas from 'theory' to question the common-sense assumptions that tend to operate in the uses of stories in education and in the reading of stories more generally. The intention, though, is to avoid the – often alienating – language of high-level theory and to borrow terms and procedures from 'common sense' in order to exercise a critique of established reading practices. Starting from a single example it is possible to begin to approach the well-established, common-sense position on stories. The kind of questioning procedure used in what follows is perfectly plausible in classroom practice. Carefully prepared questions themselves, asked with sufficient persistence, can be enough to begin the process of unmasking the theories of English and constructing new ideas, new models.

## QUESTIONS: STORIES IN EDUCATION?

Some form of critical analysis of dominant practices might begin by asking a few questions to raise and identify issues – in this case about the role of stories in education. It is important to establish, one way or another, that common-sense readings and common-sense versions of the business of reading are bound up with an ideology of knowledge – a system of ideas, often explicit or unspoken, but regulating what can

## AN EVERYDAY TALE OF ENGLISH FOLK

Reading stories in the name of English is routine in many senses. In schools it happens every day. In thousands of classrooms in schools across the nation, teachers – English teachers, teachers of English – read stories to their classes. So commonplace an activity forms an apparently natural part of what has been called 'bread and butter English' to the point where English might well seem unimaginable without it. Whatever the brand of English being espoused (and it has recently been officially conceded that there are many brands of English), reading stories constitutes something central, essential – even quint-essential – about English. The central place accorded to this activity in the universal education system could be expressed as the core of the core – often conceived of as a kind of spiritual essence at the heart of English, itself at the heart of, even *the* heart itself – of the national curriculum. Reading stories is one of the great universal activities of English, and English is one of the core subjects, if not the core subject, of national education. Reading is obviously and explicitly at the centre of practical, theoretical and ideological concerns in education. Questions about reading, differences in relation to reading, engage significant cultural and political tensions. Reading stories must be caught up in this arena of differences.

Throughout the primary and secondary school, the essential features of the scene may be envisaged. In its ideal form we may imagine the teacher giving an engaging – but not actively or overtly leading – rendering of the story in fine, modulating tones. The class listens or follows attentively as the story works its magic on the uniformly enchanted group. Somehow the students' responses begin to stir. A discussion or writing may follow. Issues will have been raised, responses formulated and developed. At the end of the process everyone will be

and should be thought. The apparently simple, innocent, everyday event of reading stories carries with it, in fact, powerful ideas and assumptions, in the first place, about the nature of the text, the communication process, appropriate responses to the text, to this kind of text. Beyond this, reading stories also will tend to reinforce certain kinds of culturally stereotypical ideas about identity, about reality, about meaning – fundamental issues of social life. And the more sophisticated the text, very often, the more sophisticated will be the means of reinforcing these stereotypes or myths. That this should be done – via reading stories – on the mass scale of public education seems to be a phenomenon worth exploring.

Some preparatory exploration of ideas and assumptions about reading stories may be gleaned readily and quickly by asking for some five-minute written responses to three questions asked of the class – in this case a group of year ten students (secondary fourth years). These questions may be used to provide a context for work on stories to take place. In most practices of English it's likely that the questions asked here will not be asked and the issues they might raise will be excluded from the daily working of the curriculum. The questions below are merely brief examples of what could be a more extended group project to examine beliefs and attitudes about stories.

- 1 What are stories?
- 2 What are stories for?
- 3 What is the place of stories in education?

Responses to question 1 have included the following:

- ‘Stories are tales that have happened or are made up for people’s benefit and enjoyment.’
- ‘Stories are telling something. Getting a message across about something.’
- ‘Stories are a way of putting down events on paper. They can be fictional or non-fiction. They can be an account of what’s happened or just from the imagination.’
- ‘Stories are pieces of communication which relate a situation, sometimes fiction, sometimes true.’

Some representative responses to question 2:

- ‘Stories help people to find out and learn new things.’
- ‘Stories are for anyone. They give people ideas about things that could happen or instances that will come about in the future.’

‘Stories can be used for many things – to put a point across, to educate, to provide enjoyment and to set you thinking in a different way.’

Responses to question 3:

‘Stories are a way of learning things and help you to understand things.’

‘Stories are very educational and tell people what could happen, ways of speech, how to act. People learn from them.’

‘Stories can be used in education in many ways. I think they are useful for expanding the way you think (in older children) and for learning (in young children).’

It is evident that, although not always coherent and consistent, these responses indicate that stories have certain effects or properties relevant to the purposes of education: stories are informative, mind-expanding, an aid to understanding. Stories convey meanings, they communicate, they convey messages – for benefit and/or enjoyment. This brief survey can do no more than identify views already held by the group. These may simply be identified at first – perhaps by listing some of them anonymously on a printed sheet or on the board – and then perhaps put to the test in the reading of the story and what follows.

### WHY CHANGE STORIES?

Why interfere with an already established practice that seems to offer so many beneficial effects? It seems brutal to attack so innocent an activity as reading stories with a heavy bombardment of theoretical questions. Brutal and futile, perhaps. Why attempt to disrupt what’s now apparently firmly in place? If stories are somewhere at the foundation of English, doesn’t their ‘deconstruction’ somehow imply the destruction of English itself? And why should anyone want to contemplate that apparently anarchistic prospect? Why bother? What’s the point? What’s at stake? These are big and important questions, essential to the present project. They can only be answered by careful examination and argument.

It’s part of the argument of this book to assert that using ideas gleaned from theory with students is, in practice, a potentially very positive move. Even if this means no more than giving students access to certain kinds of questioning processes, it will be a development beyond what’s conventionally and commonly held to be English. A whole new field of study may, in fact, be opened up: a field of study concerned with texts and meanings more generally, for example,

locating stories within a wider cultural context or seeking to understand how ideas like 'fiction', 'story', 'truth', 'reality' and 'history' operate in the general circulation of meanings constituting our cultural life in all its aspects. Perhaps this kind of project might appear too ambitiously grandiose – especially in the context of the secondary comprehensive school. But simply beginning with any of the most cherished practices of English in a questioning, probing – or theoretical – way may yield endlessly productive results.

#### *The End of Something*

In the old days Hortons Bay was a lumbering town. No one who lived in it was out of sound of the big saws in the mill by the lake. Then one year there were no more logs to make lumber. The lumber schooners came into the bay and were loaded with the cut of the mill that stood stacked in the yard. All the piles of lumber were carried away. The big mill building had all its machinery that was removable taken out and hoisted on board one of the schooners by the men who had worked in the mill. The schooner moved out of the bay towards the open lake carrying the two great saws, the travelling carriage that hurled the logs against the revolving, circular saws and all the rollers, wheels, belts, and iron pile on a hull-deep load of lumber. Its open hold covered with canvas and lashed tight, the sails of the schooner filled and it moved out into the open lake, carrying with it everything that had made the mill a mill and Hortons Bay, a town.

The one-story bunk-house, the eating-house, the company store, the mill office, the big mill itself stood deserted in the acres of sawdust that covered the swampy meadow by the shore of the bay.

Then years later there was nothing left of the mill except the broken white limestone of its foundations showing through the swampy second growth as Nick and Marjorie rowed along the shore. They were trolling along the edge of the channel-bank where the bottom dropped off suddenly from sandy shallows to twelve feet of dark water. They were trolling on their way to the point to set night lines for rainbow trout.

'There's our old ruin, Nick,' Marjorie said.

Nick, rowing, looked at the white stone in the green trees.

'There it is,' he said. 'Can you remember when it was a mill?' Marjorie asked.

'I can just remember,' Nick said. 'It seems more like a castle,' Marjorie said.

...

'You don't have to talk silly,' Marjorie said; 'what's really the matter?'

'I don't know.'

'Of course you know.'

'No I don't.'

'Go on and say it.'

Nick looked at the moon, coming up over the hills.

'It isn't fun any more.'

He was afraid to look at Marjorie. Then he looked at her. She sat there with her back towards him. He looked at her back. 'It isn't fun any more. Not any of it.'

She didn't say anything. He went on. 'I feel as though everything was gone to hell inside of me. I don't know, Marge. I don't know what to say.'

He looked at her back.

'Isn't love any fun?' Marjorie said.

'No,' Nick said. Marjorie stood up. Nick stood there, his head in his hands.

'I'm going to take the boat,' Marjorie called to him. 'You can walk back around the point.'

'All right,' Nick said. 'I'll push the boat off for you.'

'You don't need to,' she said. She was afloat in the boat on the water with the moonlight on it. Nick went back and lay down with his face in the blanket by the fire. He could hear Marjorie rowing on the water.

He lay there for a long time. He lay there while he heard Bill coming into the clearing, walking around through the woods. He felt Bill coming up to the fire. Bill didn't touch him, either.

'Did she go all right?' Bill said. 'Oh, yes,' Nick said, lying, his face on the blankets.

'Have a scene?'

'No, there wasn't any scene.'

'How do you feel?'

'Oh, go away, Bill! Go away for a while.'

Bill selected a sandwich from the lunch basket and walked over to have a look at the rods.

(Hemingway 1977)

In the imaginary everyday English classroom, what kinds of activities might follow from the reading of this story? An enlightened teacher might simply give the story time to settle in, as it were, and, after due pause, might ask the great open question: What did you make of that? There's nothing, apparently, leading in this, nothing directing anyone's responses, nothing inhibiting any particular reactions. This kind of

open question, inviting open responses is central to what might be called liberal humanist practice. It imagines each student as an autonomous 'subject', bearing valued personal opinions, each with unique, individual responses ready to hatch from its open encounter with the story. The question is a mere prompting, a formality designating an open invitation to express yourself, even to find and to know yourself through and in the story. It closes nothing off and asks with perfect openness for no particular kind of reaction. It neither guides nor inhibits. And yet we know in relation to this question that certain kinds of response will either not be proffered or, if proffered, will not be allowed. We know the limits and the constraints that operate. And we know that these limits and constraints exist independently of the teacher, the story, the class; even, to some extent, of the question. So, for example, the simple response: 'It's boring' – which may very well be quite appropriate – would be a response as difficult to manoeuvre as, for example: 'It's stupid' or 'It doesn't make sense' or other responses of an equally curt but more trenchant nature that would require the intrusion of teacher's authority into the reading and responding situation. These kinds of response are all in effect discounted. But it isn't just these – perhaps disreputable – responses; a whole host of other responses, entire ways of looking at the story or of reading it are very likely to be discounted, too, by the already established procedures of reading and responding at work. If these procedures, for some reason or other, are not at work, they must be taught.

#### THE ESTABLISHED CATEGORIES OF RESPONSE

An obliging, well-read-to, well-trained class, though, might begin to proffer a whole range of immediate responses to the original open question: What did you make of that? Theory might suggest that these responses will be expressed around a group of familiar categories, all of them, theory would also suggest, constructed completely independently of the text itself. These categories, or ideas, would be, for instance:

character	plot/development
place	time
theme	coherence
meaning	author
reader	personal response
presence	reality
significance	life
empathy	

Why are these particular ideas dominant over others? Working with students on stories and ideas about stories it's perfectly possible to pursue this enquiry further and to interrogate each of these categories and their interdependence. Take, for example, the idea of coherence. The idea of coherence assumes that the text is completely (or at least largely) coherent – that all the bits are connected in some necessary way with one another, that there is a logical sequence, from the beginning, through the middle bits, to the end, and that at the end the story is complete: so that in the case of *The End of Something* it is important that Hortons Bay is 'described' at the beginning, and there must be some essential and unifying connection between Hortons Bay, Marjorie's silence and the sandwich at the end. Some kind of development will be assumed to have taken place, perhaps consisting of events and changes of some significance. Indeed, the events and/or changes would have to be of some significance, because to concede that they might be of no significance, or of indeterminate significance, would tend to render the whole exercise – story reading, that is – meaningless or incoherent. The idea of meaning itself is pretty essential, also, to a conventional approach to story reading.

#### THE IDEA OF MEANING

It takes no intimidating theoretical vocabulary to begin to ask awkward questions about meaning in relation to *The End of Something* (or any other story or text). A few well aimed questions, formulated without recourse to arcane terminology will do.

Is the text identical with its meaning?

Where is the meaning of the text?

Where does the meaning of the text come from?

Is there more than one meaning to the text?

The pursuit of these questions can easily lead to intense difficulties with conventional ways of reading stories. The idea of meaning does seem – somehow – to be essential. To do without it would seem to suggest a fall into abysmal nihilism, incoherence and meaninglessness. And of course this applies to most social and cultural activities, not just to reading stories. So how can this heavy investment in meaning be squared with its apparently fragile being. Where is the meaning of *The End of Something*? A conventional reading might define the meaning as not necessarily being specific, as a moral to a fable would be – something like, 'Girls, don't go fishing at night with taciturn boys.' A conventional reading might refer instead to the subtle interplay of

themes, like: things coming to an end, communication problems, adolescent love, male and female friendship and love, and so on. According to this kind of reading, meaning hovers playfully in and through all of these. But the conventional reading can't deny that the themes it identifies as significant – as giving meaning to the text – are themes the *reading* decides are significant. The text doesn't announce its own themes.

It's easy to subvert the theme-identifying business in this case by proposing an alternative set of themes, absurd perhaps, but equally conjoined (or not) to the text as the others. It's possible to imagine readings of this story identifying themes such as night fishing technique, old style lumber mills, ecology, human disregard for the rights and feelings of animals (fish), the end of the world, and so on. It's also possible to imagine readings informed from completely different, and perhaps more seriously subversive, perspectives – so that themes could be identified as homosexual identity and love (what do we assume about the sexual orientations of the 'characters?'), the industrial revolution, monopoly capitalism and the end of community, and so on. Whatever theme or set of themes is chosen, it is not, to repeat, chosen by the text itself. So what determines the choice? An act of decision must be taken, and yet that is not at all how conventional reading practices assume the process works. And, it has to be conceded, conscious decision-making is unlikely to occur in the imaginary, everyday English classroom. The reason for this is simple: the decisions have already been made; they have been long established as an orthodoxy, a very powerful orthodoxy extending well beyond the walls of that classroom. It is, in fact, an ideological orthodoxy at work – an orthodoxy that informs ideas about character, identity, meaning, reality and other very important issues central to the cultural politics of the era.

The most apparently obvious categories are, at times, the ones that can seem most bizarre. Take, for instance, the idea of place. Simple questions can make this category seem quite problematical, if we grant the reading the kind of status given to conventional reading practices. This may begin with: Where is Hortons Bay? Is it in the story? Or is the story in it? Or just near it? What kind of place is it? Is it a fictional place with only fictional identity granted to it by this story? – in which case the only existence it has is as determined by what's given in and by the story. Or is it a real place that has been put into a fictional context? Well, what kind of place is it? The story tells us something about what was once there but is there no more, but does little to inform us about what is there now. And for the moment, we only have the story to go on. What can 'there now' mean, though, since we're reading a story and the

everyday operations of time don't apply? 'Now' doesn't simply mean now, for we are in the realms of story time. Hortons Bay, the starting point of the story, seems to be curiously absent from it, and is certainly not present (now) in it in any clearly comprehensible way – unless, that is, these kinds of textual questions are refused, suppressed, or completely banished through long years of reading training.

The idea of character – so familiar and so deeply entrenched – is similarly bizarre. The character of Nick, for instance, must be singularly elusive. What qualities and actions are ascribed to Nick in order to make up a definition of character? He knows about fishing? He knows Marjorie and Bill? He 'is' (strange word here) in Hortons Bay, wherever that 'is' or isn't? He seems upset? It seems as though he and Marjorie had a (kind of?) relationship, somehow, but not clearly, connected with love – well, she seemed to think there was love in it? It also seems as though he wants to end this relationship. For reasons unknown. He seems upset. He has a friend called Bill. He doesn't seem to like Bill, or does he? Maybe he likes Bill more than he likes Marjorie. Maybe that's how it is with boys and girls, if that's what they are. The idea of character, though, will discount that kind of procedure and invite us to make assumptions that will render the story coherent and sensible (even if it isn't). The idea of character will define Nick more lucidly and will be at pains to make sense of his enigma and, ironically, will then turn around and insist to us that stories are for making sense of experience. The idea of character will tell us things we could otherwise never know, will encourage us to imagine Nick in other settings – perhaps looking back as an older man on the end of his relationship with Marjorie – in short, it will furnish an identity, or possible identities, for Nick out of the small change of cultural signs. So many uncertainties, half-hints and uncorroborated clues have to be pieced together. The idea of character will also propose that there is a limit on the possibilities of identities for Nick, though it will never, ever demonstrate what that limit is.

The character of Nick? What does the idea mean, though? The word character implies personhood – identity which is complex, full and present in the story; but this idea of character, in this case to begin with, must be a falsehood. There are so many things we know nothing about. These gaps in the text are as vital to its ideological workings as the signs and clues we are given. (But this is as true of Heathcliff, Hamlet or Hercule Poirot; and is, incidentally, also true of the Royal Family, Marilyn Monroe or Kylie Minogue). For these gaps are the very places where cultural assumptions, checks, definitions, prejudices, forms of knowledge and so on reign supreme. It's these – assumptions, checks,

definitions – that construct identity, rather than anything belonging to or intrinsic in either the name of that identity (as in the case of Nick) or even the bearer of the name of that identity (as in the case of Marilyn Monroe).

Consider just a few of the (important) things we don't know about Nick. We don't know his age. We don't know his state of physical or mental health. We don't know his race (though it will be most frequently assumed – entirely without justification – that he is 'white Caucasian'). We know nothing about his background, his class, his parents' occupations, whether or not he has brothers or sisters. We don't know what he does for a living. We don't know what kinds of clothes he wears, or wants to wear, what kind of music he likes, television programmes he watches, era he lives in. We don't know about his sexual orientation either, and though it might perhaps be thought strange to consider it, how can the ending avert this question.

As for Bill? Bill's no more than the ghost of a shadow, a presence dismissed as soon as summoned, banished into the darkness which gives no features, makes all assumption. Yet his sudden appearance and disappearance at the end seems to promise so many interpretative possibilities. The name, 'Bill', appears in the text. According to the ideas of meaning and coherence, it must be significant. Reading practices will rescue Bill from the vacuous limbo he inhabits and will flesh him out with a function, a meaning, a contrasting position, even, perhaps, with the fullness of a character.

The idea of character and personhood – an idea hardly ever challenged by reading practices – is highly questionable. What is a name, though? Theoretically speaking, writing – whether the name of an object or a person – represents the person's presence. The person isn't present in the name, clearly. So the name stands in the place of the person or the object. The name is like a metaphor, a substitute term for someone or something. The name – any name – is, in fact, a metaphor because, of course, it can't be the thing itself, but can only refer to it or point to it or stand in its place by being different from it. Our thinking about subjectivity, however, is strictly constrained to identify very closely the name and the thing (the person, the subject). A rose by any other name might well smell as sweet; but try to think of Hamlet or a close relative by any other name and the trick's not quite so easy to pull off. In stories name itself tends to imply character even where – as with Nick, and more extremely with Bill, in *The End of Something* – there's precious little defined character to go on. It's important to remember in this context that, when invited to experience or express 'empathy' for a fictional name or identity, empathy is likely to be visited upon just such

metaphors of possibilities, filled in by cultural stereotypes, promoted by certain kinds of limited reading practices. The invitation to express empathy with a character, with the name in a book, with a textual function, is quite as sensible, in this sense, as the invitation to express empathy for Bill's sandwich in *The End of Something*. What can be the meaning and value of this kind of exercise?

To begin to conclude this brief exploration of perhaps 'other' ways of looking at this tiny fragment of what constitutes English – *The End of Something* and the forms of reading it's likely to be subject to – there might be some point in examining briefly the remaining ideas on stories identified earlier, ideas that are very important in the thought of English as a whole: presence, author, reader, meaning, reality. It might be objected, of course, that at least some of these are not ideas at all; they are palpable things. Authors and readers really do exist. And of course this is true; but they don't exist independently of the ideas that identify them, give them shape and form in the discourses of English and in other discourses.

Presence might seem an odd idea to pick out in relation to a critique of the dominant forms of reading practices. And yet presence is an essential element in a complex of ideas, including ideas about the author, the meaning, and ideas about the fundamental nature and status of the text generally. This kind of presence allows the text to have a stable status: there are, it's assumed, things that are actually and simply in it, including, very often, the mind of the author. The presence of this mind is asserted in phrases formulated along the following lines: 'In Hamlet's soliloquies Shakespeare asserts the existential crisis . . .' or 'Through Pip's progress Dickens exposes the social values of his own times . . .' These kinds of statement establish the idea of the author's consciousness permeating the text, so that the reader may believe s/he has direct access – via the text – to that consciousness or mind. So in this sense at least, the idea of presence, not always explicitly, but quite persistently, asserts the idea of a controlling, guiding, though perhaps hidden, presence of mind – an intelligence that guarantees the coherence of the text as well as an acting as a kind of authenticating stamp that guarantees the worth of the text. So use of the term 'Dickens' as an author's name in relation to a text would, perhaps, grant the text certain particular Dickensian qualities that would be bound to be there.

But the idea of presence isn't only important to the idea of the author. It is significant in relation to the whole notion of how the text is read, how it holds meaning and what kind of thing it is. Certain things will be held to be present in the text, even though, as explained above, they may only be referred to through use of signs in language, and in that

sense cannot be present, but must logically be absent, though referred to. The signifier in no way guarantees the presence of the signified. So what does that do for Bill's sandwich, for instance, in *The End of Something*. Is the sandwich *in* the text? If it is, it's not really a real sandwich but a word that signifies a sandwich, whether there's a real sandwich or not. So it's not a sandwich, but the representation of a sandwich. But which sandwich is it a representation of? Bill's sandwich? But, it's a text, a fiction: there may be no Bill, no 'real' sandwich. So, the sandwich is just the *idea* of a sandwich? What kind of a sandwich is that, though? Clearly, we'd have to rely on our own perspective on sandwiches to help us to solve that question, and there can be no chance that we can produce a correct reading of the sandwich – since the sandwich remains no more than the idea of the sandwich. The sandwich in this story remains trapped in the ethereal realm of the signifier. It's an *empty* sandwich and can only be filled by an endless attempt to define it substantively – something the text doesn't do, can't do. No process of detection could recover its true identity.

Of course, the sandwich is a trivial example, but the same kind of 'deconstructive' thinking can be applied to any of the things that are thought to be present in the text. All the things in the text, according to conventional reading practices, are there in an uncomplicated kind of way, and even though the text may be given the status of fiction, their presence will be represented as unproblematic. It might be difficult, though, to decide what things actually are in the text. In what sense is Hortons Bay in the text? What about Nick and Marjorie's 'relationship'? Is that in the text? What about Nick's relationship with Bill? It seems to be implied by the text, but there again, on what the text gives, its flowering seems perhaps imminent with the demise of Nick and Marjorie's, if that's what it is. But we can't be sure. All these things that we might take innocently as features of the text that are in the text, are clearly *ideas*. These ideas have to be produced in and by the reading of the text. The reading of the text itself is determined by the reading practices which promote that kind of reading and inform that particular reading. According to this kind of thinking, reading texts is a more ideologically loaded business than may previously have been considered, not so much in terms of the texts that are being read, but in terms of the reading practices that are used to read them. Because if the things we thought were present in the text, to give meaning to the text are not necessarily or simply present in the text, then the status of the text as an ordering of things, as a stable entity, as a representation of things that are, must be at least reconsidered, if not relinquished. It's here that we touch upon some of the most complex and far-reaching

implications of bringing theory to bear on common-sense, conventional habits of thought concerning language, meaning, texts and all of the fundamental, founding ideas of English and its activities.

To return: What, then, is the meaning of the text – in this case, of *The End of Something*? Where does it reside and how can it be decided? If you ask this kind of question of a class of secondary fourth years, one common response you are likely to get is that the author knows the meaning and that the meaning of the text lies with the author. This clearly poses problems, though, if the author happens to be dead – and unfortunately, so many of them are. Well, even then, the author knew what the meaning was when s/he wrote it. That's the real meaning. But the idea of the authenticating author as spirit controlling the meaning of the text fails in so many ways, as indicated above. It fails to take into account the effects of writing; it fails to understand the intertextual nature of texts and it supposes that there is some kind of correct, or accurate, reading possible – a reading encompassing some core of meaning, some essential message, often conceived of as a kind of ineffable spirit hovering through, behind, around the text. On the other hand, given the evaporation of the author in the text as writing, it might be asserted that the meaning is given in the words on the page, and that, given sufficient time and the right kind of reader(s), a reading could be produced which would be generally acceptable as something approximating to the meaning of the text. We could agree, it's thought, on reasonable interpretations and discount the outlandish and freakish.

#### REFLECTIONS ON MEANINGS AND TEXTS

None of these positions, though, can take into account the full range of possible variant readings, readings that may vary according to the cultural experience, class, gender, race, age, beliefs and so on of the readers, their particular contextual siting and the institutional conditions of the reading in question – as well as the historical moment of the reading. There was relatively recently a great deal of debate, especially among feminist and black writers in the USA, about the 'meaning' of the film and the book of *The Color Purple*; for example, accounts varying from those valorizing them as liberating to others going so far as to condemn them as neo-Nazi. It's difficult to see how the author could resolve the issue in this case (since we assume the author would be party to the dispute), and also difficult to see how a consensus might emerge from two such mutually exclusive readings. One approach though, frequently used and very handy in dissolving such issues is to appeal to the reader as absolute arbiter of meaning. The



reader decides the meaning. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Everyone is an individual. Everyone is free to choose how to respond to, how to judge and what to think of a book, film or story. This is the individualist position and is at the heart of what gets called liberal humanism. It celebrates the freedom and individuality of the free individual. It is the kind of thinking expressed in the idea of the open question. In terms of reading practices, it intends to mean that every one is free to respond how they want. But, perhaps sadly, things aren't quite as easy as that. The analysis at the beginning of this section intended to show that readings are always already constrained by dominant reading practices. The individual's responses don't come from some inner, private, strictly personal core, but are programmed in advance by a whole range of cultural practices that enmesh reading. And we know also that powerful institutions are also constantly, if sometimes silently, at work to establish what are proper responses, what are not, what can be said, what can't, and what should be said. One of the most powerful of these institutions is the school.

There's always been general agreement that meaning is a pretty slippery business, so that a multitude of interpretations of Hamlet and his antics has been seen most frequently as a sign of the text's complex richness and as confirmation of Shakespeare's genius. It would be less acceptable, though, to propose a reading of *Hamlet* denying the prince his individual character, his personhood or his right to act, react and develop through the progress of the play. To propose that Hamlet is merely a signifier in a mobile chain of signifiers, a cultural sign, promoted by an industry, seems to be a violation, an attack on the established truth of the prince, the real and complex Hamlet who lurks within the words of the text. To propose that Heathcliff, to take another example, is at times represented in *Wuthering Heights*, the novel, as black and sometimes not, similarly seems to violate the integrity of the text. There's textual evidence to support this contradiction, but conventional reading practices, addicted to the idea of consistent representation of developing characters, cannot manage it, and so, of course, suppress it. While variations in meaning have been allowed, variations in ideas about what constitutes textual values and identities have not. And the same kind of limitation applies generally to a conventional 'liberal humanist', common-sense understanding of the relation between stories and reality.

#### QUESTIONS: THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH

Stories must, it seems, have some relation to the real, otherwise they'd be no more than a load of empty – stories! So some stories will tend to

be classified simply as realist – as might *The End of Something*. Other stories may not be realist, but may be realistic – in that they deal with certain important, real truths about the real world. Some stories might be blatantly unreal, but may then be symbolically real and deal with a different level of reality. And so on, all conforming to the tune that there is a knowable 'real' existing unambiguously and independently of the texts, forms of writing and knowledge that describe it. This 'real' can be known, tested and perceived in relation to these texts. Again, with these points we come upon some of the most significant issues in theory, issues tending always to get suppressed in common-sense readings. And this isn't because common sense knows best, intuitively, experientially, but because common sense denies, suppresses, discounts the kind of questioning that would open these issues out for scrutiny. Common sense, being powerfully pervasive and ideologically dominant, can afford not to engage in any argument with alternatives.

We're still left with the question that the year ten students at the beginning tried to answer: What are stories? To pursue that question is to begin to theorize the story. A beginning could be made with a reading of *The End of Something* based on the kind of questioning I've tried to propose here, centred on some of the more familiar ideas brought to bear upon the reading of stories in English and more generally in cultural practices. Another sequence of questions could be addressed to the identity of this story in relation to its place in the limitless network of stories we are caught up in: What kind of story is it? What different kinds of story are there? and so on, so that the reading of the story could be put into the context of an examination of the ways we commonly categorize, define and delimit stories and their meanings. This would open out onto a vast field of enquiry encompassing ideas about different discourses, assumptions that are made about their different statuses and their different functions. A whole new line of questioning could thus begin, none of it beyond the scope of fourth and fifth year secondary students to explore. The development of this questioning would tend to advance critical understanding of important issues concerning literacy, writing and meaning.

The questions I've attempted so sketchily to explore throughout this introduction are questions that open out onto the whole discourse within which the practices of English reside. Many of these questions are theoretical, that is to say, philosophical. They usually begin from the question of identity, the initial question of philosophical investigation: What is . . . ? This question may introduce critical enquiry

discontented with the unexamined certainties of 'common sense', probing beyond the apparently simple and obvious. It's a critical way of thinking about issues and topics that are often taken for granted.

### THEORY AND STORIES

To 'theorize' English means to make clear the theories – or models – that are already at work in the existing practices of the subject. It will seem an oddity of theory, perhaps, to insist that stories do not speak for themselves. It goes against the grain of common sense to claim that stories, in general, are already 'read' before they get read. Or to claim that what a story has to say is decided more by the theories and practices of reading it is embedded in, than by the story itself or even by the reader. This oddness, however, is quite simply a product of the power of the theories about stories that are already at work in English and elsewhere. These theories are so well established that they appear to have the clear and uncomplicated status of truth. They are the ruling theories of reading practices in and across many media. So secure is their domination of the business of reading that other theories, other approaches are experienced as alien and, in their alien languages, an affront to common sense, to its clear truth and self-evident naturalness. It seems obvious, for example, that stories are about characters, events, objects, places, and set in particular times – and that they mean something.

What theory aims to do is to challenge the self-evidence of these terms, of this thinking: to make explicit the fact that they themselves constitute but one theory of reading, a theory which, quite strictly, controls ideas, responses and habits of thought. The kind of theory I want to advocate, and want to attempt to demonstrate in practice, aims to both expose the theories that are latent in common-sense practices of English and to suggest other theoretical perspectives offering a more critical questioning of the ideas in English and, by doing so to open new fields of study. This involves an intensive questioning of English and its most cherished assumptions. The interrogation, though, is not merely iconoclastic, not purely destructive, but seeks to explore the cultural, social and political network of the subject. Although such an approach works, initially, by exposure, it also proposes new models, new modes of thinking and produces a new field of knowledge that encompasses the cultural, social and political practices of the many manifestations of reading, writing and talking – the field of language and textuality.

It is the case that literary theory has got itself a bad name through its academic haughtiness and its modish, coterie status. It's also clearly

paradoxical that for all its claims to be 'radical', it has been hopelessly aligned with academic elitism and exclusivity. No doubt it has thus succeeded in alienating much of the English teaching profession. But this needn't be the case. I hope to demonstrate how the kind of work with narrative described above can provide the basis for interesting work with any aspect of literature. And I hope to go beyond that to explain how 'deconstructive' thinking about stories can extend into a more ambitious project. This project will entail an extension of what has been English into a kind of cultural studies – a broader, more properly relevant field of study, dealing with issues in the whole, complex, intertextual network of discourses that enmesh any given text, whether it's *The End of Something*, a pair of Levis, *Othello* or 'Neighbours'.

### QUESTIONING ASPECTS OF THE IDENTITY OF THE SUBJECT

To reappraise the body of practices and thought that encompasses English in its present form in schools entails interrogating much that's taken for granted. Exam syllabus contents, criteria of assessment, marking procedures: why do these take the forms that they do? What institutional attitudes determine the limits of this subject? How is it decided what English is and what isn't English? What is good English? What is poor English? Why are certain things – texts, activities, ideas, attitudes, habits of thought – held to be central to the proper purposes of English, and why are others held to be marginal? Why are some ideas and practices systematically excluded or degraded?

### Reading and the idea of literacy

All of the time-honoured practices of English perhaps stand in need of having their assumptions violated. What thinking, what theories, are at work in the choice of time-honoured texts, in the established approaches, in the criteria that operate in judging appropriate responses to texts? How does English define literacy? What measures are taken in English towards the promotion of reading in schools? What positive attitudes are propounded and what constraints are imposed on the reading of students in secondary schools? What status is granted to the idea of fiction, what ideas prevail about the significance of books; what ideas are there at work about authors, readers and authority? How can we account for the absence of certain kinds of text from the discourse of English? How far is it possible to determine the boundaries of the subject, even according to its currently dominant forms in schools?

**Writing**

These questions do not need to simply constitute a critical study of existing English. They are bound to produce new material: new texts for study, new combinations of texts, new attitudes towards textuality and its significance in the cultural forms of our times. To put the subject radically into question, to refuse its conventional identity, is bound to involve producing other forms and ideas and practices. Writing, for example, would no longer necessarily be limited to written exercises done in the classroom. Writing could be put under scrutiny while it is being done in some new ways on new topics in the classroom. What is writing? What would a taxonomy of writing look like? What different kinds of writing are there in different contexts? How does writing work? What kind of sign system is it? What is a message in writing? What is ordering? What is syntax, structure? To what extent is writing creative, and to what extent is writing an external technology? Why is the idea of creative writing important in conventional English? What is the elusive connection between writing and meaning? To examine written texts, to produce written texts in relation to thinking about the idea of the integrity of the written text, the limits of the written text: why have these activities not been part of English? Why has the central role of metaphor in writing been neglected, so that metaphor has become a kind of special effect of specific kinds of writing? What does rhetoric mean, and why has its importance not been acknowledged in English? Why have these aspects of language and writing in the cultural practices of communication been neglected by English?

**Oral English**

Why is oral work conceived of and constrained in its present forms? Why not explore more systematically the operations of institutional talk? Why not do some theoretical work with talk? What kinds of knowledge might be involved in a teaching involving oracy? Why not examine the powerful idea of talking as a kind of writing – scripted speech – analysing the forms and conventions of daily dialogue? Why not examine the relations between speech, discourse and power? Oral work in English might very productively move beyond its present restrictive limits. Why are students not involved more in questioning the assumptions involved in social and educational assessments made on speech? How can there be oral English grades? What are the political implications of this? Is English still systematically complicit with unacceptable forms of social distinction, social denigration and exclusion?

The present forms of English cannot encompass the range of these questions. To meet them effectively, and to reappraise the grounds of current practices in English, entails a twofold process: first, analysing assumptions at work in current practice, and second, producing new forms of practice to displace the current. To embark on this process means to engage positively in changing the subject.

## 2 Theory and the politics of English

within the context of English in education – as well as the political implications of examining and grading.

All of the various beliefs expressed in public documents and the practices that go with them – as well as any other versions and practices of English – entail models, or theories, of language. These models or theories might not always be explicitly formulated, and may well be, philosophically, contradictory. They may to varying degrees express the main concerns of practising English teachers, but within the arena of English generally they operate with binding force and enjoy the status of commonly accepted truth.

Ideals of correctness, for example, ideas of accuracy, or ideas of appropriateness, are still powerful in English teaching – even though liberal models of English might feel embarrassed about enforcing them. Standard English remains the dominant and dominating model of the English language – as though all other variants, of writing and speaking, were aberrations or deviancies. These ideas might be inimical to the English teacher who wants to linguistically empower all her students, who wants to recognize the validity of the cultural diversity of the English languages in written and spoken form of all her students, and who wants to cultivate the unconstrained development of all her students' various language competences. But when it comes to examining students' performances in an official context and making formal assessments of language competence, ideas of correctness and appropriateness, the valorization of a certain mode of speaking and writing, cannot – in present conditions – be evaded. Liberal and progressive versions of English, though they may represent themselves as distinct from official definitions, have failed to address the politics of grading and assessment in English, just as they have largely failed to address the politics of language and textuality – preferring to allow certain assumptions about how these things work in the field of English in education to rest untroubled by theoretical analysis. There remains in liberal ideas and practices of English an adherence to the idea of the creative subject, for example: an idea belonging to an essentially conservative mode of thinking, a mode of thinking giving precedence to the individual and (necessarily) lacking a theory of the discursive, the social and the political. Belief in English or aspects of English as creativity must necessarily be ignorant of, or ignore, the sociolinguistic analysis of the positioning of the language of the subject within the institution of English.

The positions expressed in public documents representing institutional authority are eminently 'deconstructable'. Take for example this reference (from the GCSE assessment criteria for English for 1994) to

It's obvious perhaps but always worth reiterating that English has been structured by various beliefs embedded in practice throughout its history. In this sense there is always theory at work in the subject. Official ideas – official theory – in relation to what English is and what its practice should be are explicitly expressed in public documents like examination criteria, *The Kingman Inquiry* (1988), 'The Cox Report' (1988 and 1989), *English 5-16* (DES 1985), and so on. Not that these documents necessarily represent the beliefs or reflect the practice of all English teachers, or of all forms of English teaching; rather they represent the authorized version of the subject, produced by various institutions that have some stake in its constitution. The beliefs of practising teachers of the subject may constitute a different body of theory – one that accords to varying degrees with official theory.

Indeed, some of the content of official documents has been opposed by representatives of the more progressive versions of English – versions that might be said to represent a dominant definition of the subject as expressed, for example, in NATE (The National Association for the Teaching of English) publications and in various forms of the practice of English. Arguments between representatives of the more conservative models of the subject and the more liberal versions tend to be expressed around issues like grammar versus use and expression, around ideas about language development, sometimes about Literature versus literature (or stories and poems), about correctness versus creativity, and about the best forms for deciding grades. All of these issues, and the arguments conducted around them, tend to neglect the problem of the identity of the subject, English, and tend also to neglect the politics of literacy – of reading, writing and speaking practices

the role of some pre-twentieth century works of literature 'whose influence in shaping and refining the English language and its literature is recognized'. It can be seen that a number of assumptions are at work in this statement. For instance, it is assumed that the works in question – though never specified – will be universally recognized. But that is not, of course, necessarily the case. What are those 'works'? Are they listed somewhere? Do all English teachers know what they are? It is unlikely, even if the general truth of the statement were granted, that all English teachers would agree on what those pre-twentieth century works would be. But the statement does not specify at all *who* would agree, or would be in a position to agree or to make judgements about the development and refinement of the English language. We assume that it does not refer to the general populace, or does it? How can the confident assertion be made that these things are agreed – whether universally or by the appropriate professional body or in some other way – without the implication that it refers to some simple and universal truth?

And yet if we examine the idea, can it be asserted that some pre-twentieth century 'works' have 'shaped' and 'refined' the English language and its literature? It's difficult to imagine what evidence could be cited to substantiate the claim. But even if some kind of ethnographic, historical, statistical, sociological research *were* to be undertaken to test the proposition, its verification or falsification would still depend on the acceptance of the implications of its key terms. The term 'the English language', for example, could be taken – utterly against the grain of any sociolinguistic description – to refer to something we all know and recognize as a unitary whole with a clearly defined identity. Alternatively, however, we could claim that there is no such thing as *the* English language, that it is simply an idea used to impose one version of the language in a position of power over other versions. We could claim that there are many different kinds of language spoken in English and we could also claim that their differences are closely related to cultural and social differences, that the English language is plural and divided. We could further claim that the development of the English language has been thoroughly diverse and uneven. On what basis, then, could it be claimed that the development of the English language, this changing plurality, has been a process of refinement? Is the English language more refined now, because of the works that have shaped and refined it? More refined now than it was when those works were produced? More refined now than the language used in the works themselves? Are the early works, then, less refined than the later ones – which would use an English language refined by the earlier ones? And

what does this word 'refined' mean? Less gritty? Less crude? More pure (in what sense, though)? More abstract? More elegant? More expressive? More socially refined? What? The claim is clearly untenable – an established, officially sanctioned kind of nonsense.

It's evident that the assumptions contained in the statement quoted above are ideological. Asserted as self-evident truth, they take their force on the understanding that the ideas will receive 'universal' acknowledgement. They also take their force from the fact that they are stated from a position of institutional power *and* ideological power. The document the statement is taken from is produced by SEAC (Schools Examinations and Assessment Council), the body invested in the UK with the power of surveillance to supervise and control what kind of English is examined. Here, in this merely fragmentary but thoroughly representative instance, ideology and institutional power can be seen hand in hand, defining the material authority of the subject.

The GCSE criteria for English (1990) – for example – would actually tell an uninitiated observer very little about how English works in practice. It would tell very little about the different kinds of activities and approaches there are at work in the everyday business of English. It seems to take for granted that the variations will not be significant, that certain universals will be accepted by all and that everyone to whom the document is addressed will recognize what it means in terms of a practice of English teaching. This cannot be done simply by exerting institutional power, but depends on the understanding that the established discourse of English at a certain level will prevail, and that this discourse will be acceptable in all the many and various thousands of institutions it inhabits. It is clear that the document illustrates an important point about language and its relations to politics, ideology and institutions.

The example above illustrates a number of points about how discourses operate in relation to ideology and institutional politics. The writing of the document belongs to a particular type of discourse: say, the discourse of educational management and control. It makes assumptions and leaves enormous gaps because it knows that the assumptions will be recognized and the gaps filled in. In order to do that it must assume that there is an audience ready to make the appropriate and necessary responses to make sense of the document and to carry out its implications in the context of practice. It addresses a knowing subject. The knowing subject is tied, in this instance, to the institution of English teaching, and tied in turn to the institution of the school. It is part of that knowing subject's professional identity to recognize the terms of the discourse operated within the various institutional contexts

it inhabits. And professional identity – impersonal and public – in our culture, at least, is linked closely to personal identity.

The practices of English, though, may – and evidently do – exceed the restricted definitions of the subject as stated, for example, in official documents defining GCSE assessment criteria or in syllabuses. The ‘unofficial’ practices may involve notions of English that contest the assumptions made by official documents and syllabuses, while they remain within the specific institutional contexts of English. To effectively – and thoroughly – contest the assumptions and practices of English would necessarily involve contesting its language and its ideological structure in a theoretically informed and coherent way. But it would also entail contesting the way in which the language of English positions and defines its various subjects – in order to maintain its present forms and effects. If we accept for the sake of argument the notion that there are many different forms of the English language, and if we entertain the idea that institutionalized English marking is largely determined by the criteria of a particular and dominant model, then we may go on to question the identities ascribed by grading procedures defining some of the subjects of the discourse as ranging from A to G on the basis of written samples of their languages.

A dual-certification English and English Literature syllabus makes reference to a number of key points that may be taken as representative of a line of thinking – involving a model, or a theory, of language and of textuality – installed in established practices of English. (Please note that these key points draw upon the now fully installed National Curriculum criteria). Among other things, references include:

- candidate’s ability to understand and convey information;
- understand, order and present facts, ideas and opinions;
- articulate experience and express what is felt and what is imagined;
- recognize implicit meaning and attitudes;
- show a sense of audience and an awareness of style in both formal and informal situations;
- the detailed study of some texts and wider reading;
- acquire a first hand knowledge of the content of literary texts;
- understand literary texts, in ways which may range from a grasp of their superficial meaning to a deeper awareness of their themes and attitudes;
- a sensitive and informed personal response to what is read;
- opportunities must be provided for students to read for various

purposes both literary texts (e.g. short stories, novels, autobiographies, poetry, plays) and non-literary material (e.g. newspaper articles and advertisements) and respond in a variety of ways to what is read. These must include detailed study of literary texts in all three forms (drama, prose, poetry);

opportunities must be provided for candidates to develop a variety of styles of writing in what may be termed ‘closed’ situations (e.g. the writing of letters, reports and instructions) where the subject matter, form, audience and purpose are largely ‘given’ and in what may be termed ‘open’ situations (e.g. narrative writing and imaginative/personal response to a range of stimuli and experience) where such factors are largely determined by the writer. Response to reading may include the opportunity to explore themes, ideas and the ways in which writers achieve their effects.

(NEA 1990)

All of these snippets have the status of injunctions and determine the criteria by which students’ work – the expression of their being within the arena of English – is to be judged. They are the requirements of the syllabus, of the publicly authorized version of the subject at a certain level. Many assumptions are made – about the difference between the ‘literary’ and the ‘non-literary’, for example: that language articulates experience; that ‘literary texts’ have ‘content’; that there is such a thing, unproblematically, as ‘informed personal response’; that there are ‘three forms’ of ‘literary texts’ that ‘facts’ are different from ‘ideas’; that in ‘literary texts’ there is a difference between ‘surface meanings’ and ‘themes and attitudes’ which require ‘deeper awareness’.

All of these assumptions rely on their acceptance being taken for granted, as if there was never the remotest possibility that any of them could be contentious or problematic. Their expression constitutes a particular model, or theory, of language and textuality. There is the assumption too that what is expressed throughout the document in question refers to central and essential aspects of language and textuality.

To theorize language and textuality means to examine the assumptions contained in dominant models, or theories, in the first place. It also means to propose alternative ways of looking at language and textuality. Theorizing in this sense doesn’t mean the displacement of one theory by another, but entails putting theory into play explicitly in relation to the identity and construction of the subject. Asking questions about the terms the subject is set in and its institutional being, examining alternative models from the dominant, promoting consciousness about

the practices and ideas of the subject, its particular frames of reference and its assumed difference from other subjects, its place in the whole curriculum and the meaning of how that place is construed: all of these are aspects of theorizing tending to promote a reflexive position, a position that may address the institutional identity and being of the subject. It seems to be clearly the case that to 'deconstruct' the restricted categories of established English can engender a whole range of new practices likely to engage students in more varied and more interrogative approaches to the field of 'literacy'.

For teachers of English, the theorizing of language and textuality – entailing a sustained questioning of the fundamental categories of the subject – is much more likely to render them powerful in the face of public and institutional forces that may appear at times to threaten their domain with intrusive edicts, pseudo-debates that falsely polarize subject terminology, and trivializing misrepresentations of attitudes and practices. A self-conscious and self-reflexive practice is always more powerful, being forearmed in the face of external attack. Liberal models at present have no theory of how English positions its various subjects, for example, within its various institutional contexts. Liberal models have no understanding of how English works as a kind of technology of the subject, producing, or at least reinforcing, certain dominant notions about individuals and individuality. Liberal models have therefore never made a fundamental issue out of grading procedures, procedures discriminating between different kinds of language use, different kinds of response under the guise of universal criteria of value. To introduce theory into this context, to question the fundamental assumptions of grading in English, is not necessarily going to make it immediately go away. But it is likely to provide the grounds for a reappraisal of how grading works, and is likely to 'de-naturalize' grading. Theory, in this context, might conceivably produce the grounds for change in institutional conditions.

### THEORY AND THEORIES: SOME ISSUES

In what follows I've chosen to elaborate certain theories that have a bearing on language and textuality – theories, I believe, offering possibilities of re-orienting the subject, addressing its relations to political aspects of 'literacy', and of resolving issues that currently polarize differences about the nature and function of English in schools. These are theories, not *theory*: theory is everywhere, all the time, whether made explicit or embedded in attitudes, practices and assumptions.

I've chosen these particular theories because they represent a power of ideas capable of addressing the fundamental issues at stake in English teaching. They can be used to make necessary connections between language, textuality and social practices. They have no value, I believe, on their own, nor for their own sakes. They make problematic cherished assumptions and open the ground for new practices – and that is their value. They have the capacity to foreground questions about values. They stand against the values of grammar, detached literary criticism, standard English and correctness, as well as against the values of self-expression, of creative writing, of personal response. They are anti-common-sense, and may be used to expose the various ideological underpinnings of what gets taken for granted as significant. They enable the subjects of English – its teachers and its students – to come to grips with its relations with sociology, with history and with politics. For in the field of language and textuality, all these things, which have persistently been seen to be outside of the domain of English, in conservative and in liberal models of the subject, are always in play.

I've tried in all of this to avoid making reference to the proper names that are associated with some of the theories I've elaborated and attempted to demonstrate in use. I've done this not to claim these ideas as my own: for – as I've often felt obliged to tell students I've been teaching – these ideas are not mine, nor anyone else's, really; they circulate among many different people working for different purposes within different institutions. I don't believe it's necessary – in the context of English in schooling – to cite names to establish credentials for ideas. And I think it's generally agreed to be an irony of the way theory in higher education has operated that the so-called 'death of the author' has resulted in one pantheon of great writers being substituted by another.

### A MODEL OF THEORY

The model of theory I've tried to describe in the following sections, might be diagrammatically illustrated as in Table 2.1

#### Discourses

Linguistic activity, linguistic life, can be divided into different types of discourse. A discourse might be characterized as being a specific kind of language, or 'language game' – a language form associated with a particular activity, a particular kind of knowledge, a particular group of people or a particular institution.

Table 2.1 Aspects of theory – language and textuality

discourses: a general theory of particular language practices and their institutional contexts – how they organize statements, define texts, promote meanings, construct fields of knowledge and position subjects.	<b>Deconstruction:</b> a general theory of language and textuality, sceptical of identities, meaning-in-itself – and critical of ethnocentric positioning of subjects – where ethnicity may be considered to vary according to class, race, gender and other (cultural) differences.
semiotics: a theory of the structure of signs and sign systems, and of the movement of meanings in specific cultural practices and contexts.	
phenomenology: a theory of subject/object relations; about how we know what we know; a critical theory of identities, including ideas of <i>perspective, position, aspect, idea</i> and questioning the notion of the <i>object-in-itself</i> .	
psychoanalysis: a theory of the relations between the individual subject and language, texts and discourses; a theory of identifications – proposing a subject divided by different orders of being: the <i>real, the symbolic</i> and the <i>imaginary</i> .	

A discourse will have its own terminology and its own rules of expression, including, in some cases, a special type of grammar, and will have rules about what kind of statements are appropriate, as well as rules about who may speak when and who may say what to whom and in what circumstances. In any discourse, there will be differences in the distribution of linguistic power. Within the general discourse of schooling, in a classroom, for example, students are permitted to say certain things, write certain things, and not others. Teachers generally have more flexibility in what they may say in this context, and have more power in determining the boundaries of the discourse and the limits of the discursive positions taken by different members of the group. Also, in different types of classroom – distinguished by different subject identities – in the formal discourses of learning, different ways of making statements, as well as different kinds of statement, will be deemed to be appropriate. The people involved – in this case teachers and students – don't necessarily make the rules, though they can, to a degree and within limits, alter them. The rules of the discourse are often unstated, though they may at critical points be made explicit, may even be contended. The discourse is dependent, for its proper maintenance, on the often concealed presence or exertion of power. The people involved in the discourse can be characterized as the 'subjects' of discourse – and they will take up particular positions in relation to its power.

Discourses have powerful determining force – and exert powerful influence in determining what kinds of linguistic exchanges take place. This applies to all kinds of language situations. The power of discourses exerts control over oral statements, over what gets written, how it gets written, and, equally, over what and how things get read and interpreted. All language is discourse and is variously bounded by discursive controls.

English in schooling as an examination subject is a discourse with considerable institutional power. Although the activities of examination English may appear to be quite liberally open, very strict constraints operate over how, for example, students' writing gets judged. These constraints are expressed most explicitly in assessment criteria, but are also expressed in the processes of assessment which are not inscribed in documents – the kinds of assumptions, comments and judgements that examining teachers make when examining. The criteria and the processes of assessment have considerable controlling power in determining how students are positioned in the examining process; a process having important effects in defining students' opportunities within the education system. The criteria and the ways they are applied are powerfully discriminatory – as markers of qualitative difference. Nevertheless, much of their power depends upon the willing acceptance of their authority by their subjects, in this case students and teachers of English. This is a crucial point about the idea of discourses – in the way it highlights how discourses produce, not just statements, grammars, forms of exchange, but also *positions* for their 'subjects'. These positions are always more or less hierarchically structured, though they tend to enjoy a kind of 'naturalized' status, being assumed to belong to the order of things, to the way things are.

Teaching students themselves about discourses might begin by an invitation to consider different types of discourse; their special vocabularies, grammars, their rules of exchange – and their likely ideological inflections. How different discourses operate can be quite straightforwardly demonstrated by identifying and analysing particular – and divergent – cases such as football, geography, business, playground, religion, romance and so on. Students may then be asked to consider the various contexts and institutions of the discourses they've identified – and also how they position their various subjects. This can be done by asking about the places or contexts, the groups of people, the kinds of exchanges, the organizations of the identified discourses.

Of course, discourses don't always fall into these rather neatly bounded categories, and may not have such easily definable institutional contexts. For example, the discourse of 'romance' might be understood



as the discourse of being in love. As such it may refer to the kinds of things people say, think and write when they are in love. Or it may refer to romantic feelings as expressed in novels, in popular magazines, in songs, and so on. It may also be said that there are less easily placeable discourses, like male discourses about women, discourses of family life, discourses of pleasure, for example.

By considering these kinds of example, it may be pointed out that discourses are not necessarily uniform in all contexts. The discourse of football, for example, inhabits many different contexts – and may take on a different form in each context. Football played on the street may employ different terminology and different forms of expression from football that is presented on 'Match Of The Day'. It may also be pointed out that any discourse can be divided by different ideas about how to operate it and attitudes towards its ways of positioning its subjects. So the discourse of religion, of religious experience, may be defined as divided, contested and plural. This plurality could refer to divergent attitudes about the way a discourse positions its subjects, or could refer to fundamental aspects of its contents – as might be said to be the case with religion.

This last point leads to a consideration of the how discourses may be involved in struggles, and in changes, and of how the power of discourses may be contested. To change the way that English works by challenging its assumptions and practices, and by offering alternative ideas and practices, would be one example of contesting the established power of a particular discourse. The challenge, to be effective, would, of course, have to address not just the language of English – its established terminology and forms of expression – but its positioning of its various subjects, and would have to contest its institutional position and power, too.

With students, the challenge to the discourse of English – its ideological and institutional power – may be initiated by a consideration and analysis of discourses, introducing a theory of discourses and some of its terminology, in dialogue with what the students already know, probably inexplicitly. The particular line of development taken by this analysis may be very varied. Examining how a particular discourse works and attempting to formulate, with the students, alternative ideas and practices of the discourse can be productive in a general sense relating to the general topic of discourses. For instance, fairy tales may be taken as an example of a specific type of discourse, particularly related to issues of reading and writing. An examination of fairy tales – their general structures, the kinds of stereotypes they employ, the types of closure they work towards – may lead into ideas

about transformation. Students may engage in proposing alternative forms; they may put forward a critique of fairy tales which involves producing new forms to contest the dominant forms of the discourse. Implications concerning contexts and institutions can also be explored in relation to the specific example of fairy tales. The kind of writing which may be produced, and which may be eligible for coursework examination, could include analytic writing, critique and story writing, and would, at least implicitly, by being contained within a single piece, challenge the categorization of different types of writing established in English syllabuses. This writing could be used in turn for the beginnings of an explicit critique of the fundamental categories and practices of the discourse of English.

### Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs, and deals with the theory of signs in general, examining how signs work, what sign systems there are and how they work as systems, also examining the relationship between signs, sign systems and the social contexts they belong to. As a general theory, semiotics addresses all kinds of signs and sign systems – and so might range from road signs, to signs used in maps, to signs as they operate in TV adverts and signs in written and spoken language. Semiotics would tend to regard sign systems as operating according to common fundamental principles, or, at least, as being subject to certain fundamental questions and forms of analysis. So semiotics would tend to propose that all signs systems are a kind of language and that language is a sign system – and would also tend to see the world as saturated with signs, organized by sign systems actively constructing the world, rather than simply reflecting what's in it.

In dealing with language, semiotics has been particularly concerned with naming – examining how the process of naming in language operates to produce different identities for the different things named. The kind of analysis of naming undertaken by semiotics may be used as a simple and direct way of challenging common-sense assumptions about language and the way it works, as well as common-sense notions about the relationship between language and what it is supposed to represent. Semiotics can therefore offer an immediate departure from ideas about language which see the correspondence between words and things as simple and direct, also failing to acknowledge the ideological inflection of all language practices.

Teaching semiotics can be a simple matter of introducing a few terms with explanation and discussion, and then applying this theorizing to

specific texts and the signs used by particular cultural practices. This kind of exercise could begin with familiar examples of signs – traffic lights perhaps – and then consider simple single words. The terms initially introduced would be the signifier, the signified and the referent – where the signifier would be the material component of the sign (in traffic lights the colours red, green, amber), the signified would be the idea or concept conveyed by the sign (in the case of traffic lights stop, go and the third more ambiguous, uncertain idea), and the referent would be what the sign refers to (the actions of stopping, going or whatever happens when the lights are on amber).

A number of important and fundamental issues may be drawn out from this particular description of the sign, using these particular terms. It's evident and easy to see or indicate that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. There is no necessary connection between the colour red and the idea of stopping, just as there is no necessary connection between the colour green and the idea of going. The sign system operates by establishing differences between signifiers. Anyone unfamiliar with the system would be unable to make sense of it, if confronted by the sign system alone – without the particular practices that go with it. The terms within the system are empty in themselves. They only carry meanings within a system of differences that is established and that operates according to social conventions. Once the social conventions of behaviour at traffic lights is known, then the meanings are evident. When the workings of the sign system become familiar and everyday, they may appear to be natural and inevitable: of course, red means stop and green means go (although the meaning of the term amber is likely to be taken to mean a number of different things – remain stationary, go, get ready to go).

The analysis of language as a sign system might begin with consideration of single words, words obviously operating according to the description implied in the signifier/signified/referent terminology. The word 'dog', for example, is a material signifier – a sound or written image. To define the signified conveyed by the signifier 'dog', though, is no easy matter. It might, for example, be defined as the concept 'dog', but this concept in itself is no more definitive than the signifier. Or the signified might be defined as Alsatian, dachshund, Pekinese and so on, but it is evident that these definitions are themselves other signifiers referring directly to no particular dog, and themselves requiring further elaboration in order to be defined. The referent of the word 'dog' would then be dispersed along an endless chain of signifiers and would be defined only as a dispersal of possibilities. For the word 'dog' to have any kind of meaning, then, it must refer to what is

conventionally understood by the term in the social practice which names and distinguishes dogs – or, strictly speaking, ideas of dogs. It must also be placed within a specific language context in which the term – 'dog' – is distinguished from other terms in a 'chain' of meaning, but a chain that operates according to a principle of difference, above all.

This leads to another important idea generated by a semiotic analysis of the sign in language: meanings are always contained in syntax, that the meaning of a sign in language (the signified of a signifier) is contained in a movement, in a sequence in time; so that signifiers are set in a structured relationship of positioning – and part of their capacity to mean is determined by this contextual positioning. Signifiers convey meanings that are conventional and established in the cultural practices of language, as elements in a system of differences that defines different identities for different terms, like the difference between 'dog' and 'cat', and like the difference between 'Alsatian', 'dachshund' and 'Pekinese'. These words have established, conventional connotations; but they also bear meanings dependent on their position in a specific context. In the sentence, 'the Alsatian chased the dachshund down the road', the signifiers are assigned roles determined in the movement of the statement. These roles are not necessarily conveyed by the conventional, established connotations of the signifiers 'Alsatian' and 'dachshund', though they may, in this case, be associated with them. If the sentence were changed to read, 'the dachshund chased the Alsatian down the road', the roles would have been changed, the meaning of the terms would have been changed, though the established, conventional connotations of the signifiers would have remained the same. Although, of course, they do not always remain the same. The plurality of the meaning of the word 'dog' does not simply begin and end with the classifications of a certain kind of animal. The word 'dog' can convey quite other meanings, too, and the meaning of the word 'dog', whether in relation to a certain kind of animal or to other things, is subject to changes in time and in social context.

This in turn leads to a consideration of the difference between language as a system and the particular utterances or statements that the system as a whole gives rise to – another important distinction established by semiotics. The meanings of words are structural: they take up a position in a system of differences. And particular statements are ordered according to rules of grammar and syntax; words are set against each other in particular forms of ordering determined by the rules of language. The meanings of words are not simply present when the words are used; they are not explicitly defined in each statement

they find themselves in. Nor are the rules of grammar and syntax which generate the patterns of statements all present in each particular usage of language. The whole of language, all the meanings it contains and the rules that govern its orderings, can never be present; language in this sense, as a totality, can only be apprehended from particular occasions of its use. This means in effect that any particular statement depends upon the items present and their orderings referring to a whole system which can never be made present. Meanings are always caught up, then, in an endless interplay of presence and absence. (This theme of presence and absence in relation to language and meaning is developed radically by deconstruction – and is also a theme with important implications for a psychoanalytic perspective on language and meaning.)

Neither the words themselves nor the rules are what they are by necessity – which is why different languages can have different words and different rules of grammar and syntax. Language is a system, a structure, a self-regulating form, not directly connected to anything beyond itself. According to the implications of a semiotic interpretation of language, language does not reflect or represent the identities of things in the world, but creates them. Language does not refer to 'reality' so much as construct it. And this construction always takes place within specific social contexts within specific cultural practices.

The issues that can be pursued with students from a consideration of these relatively simple examples could be summarized as follows:

The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.

A language is a system of differences.

The signified is, in effect, a series of other signifiers.

Signifiers and signs are always substitutes or metaphors for the things they signify.

The meanings of signs are always established in particular contexts in particular cultural practices.

The world of words creates the world of things.

As well as considering some of these theoretical points – and as a development and exploration of them – students could also be invited to engage in active use of semiotic terms and analysis in relation to specific texts and specific cultural practices. An obvious and productive example to take would be to examine two powerful signifiers – 'man' and 'woman' – and to relate an analysis of these to some texts: for example, popular magazines, children's stories and TV adverts. This can be done simply, in the first instance, by asking students to write down signifiers relating to the signifier 'woman' and signifiers relating

to the signifier 'man' – and this could take the simple form of a pair of lists drawn up side by side on a sheet of paper. The associations of the words on these lists could then be explored and questions asked about how each list differs in the sets of associations it constructs. Further questions could then be asked about how these signifiers relate to the identities of men and women, and whether the associations they produce are to do with anything essential or whether they are culturally generated. Moving on from there to examine how signs of gender operate in particular cultural practices could involve students identifying signs of 'woman' and signs of 'man' in children's fictions, in popular magazines of various kinds and in TV adverts and soap operas, for example. The point of all this would be to develop the theory of semiotics with students in relation to a particular aspect of the creation and recreation of meanings within sign systems, meanings embedded in cultural attitudes and cultural practices, rather than necessarily out there in 'the real world'.

### Phenomenology

Phenomenology is concerned with the appearance and knowledge of things – in any kind of context. The main importance of phenomenology is deconstructive, in so far as it uses quite common-sense ideas in order to 'deconstruct' common-sense notions about how we know what we know, and about the identities of the things we know. Deconstruction in this sense doesn't simply mean taking apart, or demolishing, but implies review, revision, critique and re-ordering. Phenomenology has radical implications for considering how language can represent things, how objects and texts get read and interpreted and what they can mean. It provides a theory for understanding how everyday objects in everyday life are always given identity in relation to ideas about what they are – rather than being simply there in themselves.

The topic of phenomenology is very easy to teach to students, since it uses ready-to-hand terms. All the main issues at stake in phenomenology can be activated by using a few simple terms, a simple diagram and a number of questions or points. The terms are given below.

object (the thing itself),  
subject (viewer/spectator),  
perspective (point of view/position),  
aspect,  
idea.

As shown in Figure 2.1, the spectator, or subject, according to this

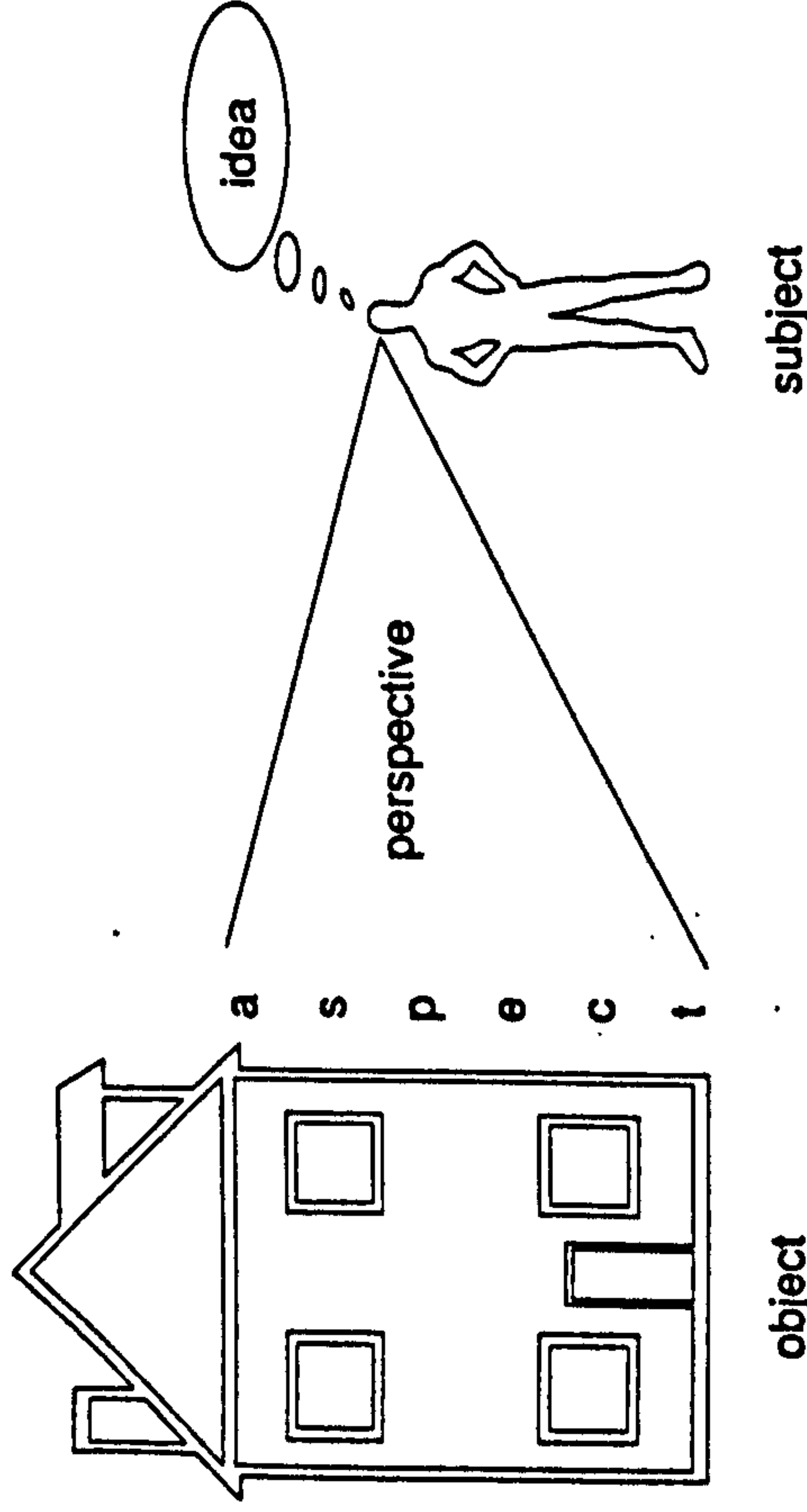


Figure 2.1 A simple diagram of phenomenology

model, stands in a particular position in relation to the object in view. In any 'viewing' situation, then, it is clear that the subject is positioned. This positioning determines the perspective that the subject will have on the object. The positioning of the subject will also be an element in determining what aspect of the object is revealed to the spectator or subject – for the object cannot reveal all its various aspects to the positioned subject, though they can be construed by the subject from the already existing knowledge – or assumptions – of the subject.

The subject recognizes what it sees, not in relation to the object in itself, because what the subject sees – how the subject identifies the object – will be determined by the idea of the object. This idea can be the subject's own idea derived from its perception or perceptions of the object, but this is unlikely to be the case very often, and gives no guarantee that the object is what the subject defines it as. The identity of the object is determined by the idea of the object logically preceding its perception by the subject and allowing its identity to be recognized by the subject. The object itself is never knowable by the subject, because the idea of the object determines what it is for the subject, and because all possible aspects of the object cannot be revealed simultaneously to the subject, and because the subject is always positioned in a way that determines what the subject's idea of the object is.

The subject is positioned culturally – in a number of ways. Ideas about what objects are must be culturally determined through language and sign systems that give objects identities. And just as there are no objects in themselves, there can be no subjects in themselves either. For

every subject is also an object for other subjects, and every subject is an object for itself, its understanding of itself equally determined by ideas, perspectives, positioning and aspects.

With students, the topic of phenomenology – initiated by introducing the diagram and the terms, and developed through explanation and discussion – can be summarized by using the following questions, questions perhaps forming the basis for discussion or written work:

How is perspective determined? What different factors might be involved?

How do we know what objects are?

Can we know objects in themselves?

How do we discover aspects?

Are the object and the idea of the object identical? How can we know?

Phenomenologically can we ever know anything?

Can we ever know anything except aspects of ourselves?

Are the aspects of ourselves that we are aware of our entire selves?

Can there be an entire self?

Can we know all of a text (a textual object)?

What is all of a text?

Phenomenology offers a way of thinking through issues of the relations between subjects, ideas and the way that objects in the world are perceived. In granting importance to perspectives, aspects, ideas and the positioning of subjects an understanding of phenomenology may engender important shifts in the ways we understand language and texts. Phenomenology also has important implications for the ways we may understand our own subjectivity, our own cultural positioning and our own perception of ourselves and our identities.

### Psychoanalysis

Descriptions of language activity in English – in so far as they belong to its dominant modes, or its more progressive modes – tend to emphasize language as self-expression. The language used by anyone is an expression of their essential self – a self that may grow and develop as it is nourished by engaging in developing activities with language or as it comes into contact with texts that open horizons and that allow the individual self to extend, to encounter other worlds, to experience other lives, other ways of seeing, and so on. This might be described as the positive aspect of a dominant model of language in general currency in English teaching. On the other hand, and less explicitly, there is the

negative aspect, the implication that restricted language – such as a student gaining a grade F or someone who has been excluded from the enhancing activities of a progressive or developmental model of English might display – implies a restricted person, someone who is less fully alive, less fully competent, less aware. This would be a highly dubious notion in a number of ways, but would be consonant with a liberal model of language in education, proposing a sense of generalized, individual development. Much of the use of so-called ‘creative writing’ in English has been justified by the idea that certain forms of writing are liberating, in so far as they may unlock possibilities for the individual self concerned. Much teaching of literature has been justified on similar, ‘personal growth’ focused grounds. Countless examples of this kind of thinking could be cited.

There are fundamental problems, though, with this position. Firstly, the valorization of certain kinds or forms of writing above others is likely to indicate that other forms are being excluded or devalued. The grounds of inclusion are hardly ever likely to be very explicit – and are almost never likely to be open to challenge. The idea of language in the classroom as a form of self-expression denies the importance of the institutional context of writing. The emphasis on individual self-expression obscures how what might be termed sociological factors play a determining role in this writing scene. Secondly, the theory of writing in English as self-expression offers no adequately formulated ideas about the relations of the subject – the writing/reading/speaking individual – to language, and in failing to do so leaves unanswered some fundamental questions about language, the individual self and the relations of these to culture, cultural forms and institutional practices. This failure is not only a failure of omission, not a purely innocent oversight; it is also, and crucially, a distortion of a strictly ideological nature.

Psychoanalysis addresses the important issues of the effects on the subject of the acquisition of language and of the effects on the subject of being, not simply a language user, but a *subject* of language. What this might mean and how this particular theory of the relations between the individual – the subject – and language might operate can be introduced to a class by considering the division between the conscious and the unconscious. This can perhaps most easily be done by presenting a representation or model of the mind, which will give space to indicate the contents of the conscious and the contents of the unconscious, making clear the division between the two, as shown in Figure 2.2.

This may form the introduction to a number of questions. The introduction may be done with a whole class using a board to fill in the

Conscious (ego)

‘Bar’

Unconscious (id)

Figure 2.2 A representation of the mind: division between the conscious and unconscious

details, or using the kind of representation shown above produced on a printed duplicated sheet, or both. The point is to invite students to consider what goes into the unconscious and what is in the conscious and to begin, thereby, to define the relations between the two. This process needn’t be lengthy nor very complicated. For example, it may be decided that memories, dreams, fears, and so on will go into the unconscious, while knowledge, ideas, sense of self, awareness of the world, and so on might go into the conscious. These issues can be explored through discussion in a number of ways and following a number of different tracks of thought. A series of questions could accompany the filled in version of the above representation in order to prompt discussion, such as:

How do memories get remembered?

Are all memories always remembered?

What happens to everything you’ve forgotten?

Why are some important memories forgotten?

Do memories change?

How can you tell if your memories are ‘true’?

Does the contents of the unconscious change?

What happens to dreams? Do they get remembered?

How are dreams constructed? What forms do they take? How are they experienced?

Do dreams have meanings? If so, how can you know what they mean? If not, what are they?

Where does language go? Vocabulary (think of all the words you know)? Rules (think of how you know how to put words together to make statements, and so on)?

How do you know what words or statements mean when you see or hear them?

How do you know what to say before you've said it – or even thought it out?  
 How do you know when to say things in specific situations (and when not to say things), and how do you know what specific things to say (and not to say)?

Can you ever think without using language?

Who decides what words mean? Who made the rules of language?

A host of issues can be made explicit following the implications of these questions through exploring and creating a workable theory based on a relatively simple (though perhaps the most fundamental) point – the difference between conscious and unconscious – from psychoanalytic theory.

It's evident, anyway, that language must go into the contents of the unconscious. It can easily be demonstrated that language cannot be adequately explained without some reference to the unconscious. Where is language when it's not in use? The unconscious component of language might be characterized, then, perhaps using the ideas below, or something similar, as pointers.

Language – words and meanings – cannot be present to consciousness all at once.

The meanings of words – even when in use – remain, except when consciously explained, unconscious.

The rules of language – how to put words together: syntax and grammar – are also largely unconscious.

Language in action is also largely unconscious: you don't necessarily rehearse each statement you make before you make it.

Simple exercises can be devised to demonstrate these points. Evidence for the existence of the unconscious can be found in the way that language works, as well as in other phenomena classically associated with the idea of the unconscious, such as dreams and memories which will have an important bearing on a development of ideas about the relations of the subject with language.

The question: 'What form do dreams take?' can lead into a general discussion about the signifying qualities of dreams, covering questions such as those given below.

What is striking about dreams and about the way that they work?

What different kinds of dreams are there?

Are dreams ever stories? Always stories?

Who writes – or composes – your dreams?

Do you always/ever understand your dreams?

What are dreams most likely to be about?

What do dreams mean? Are dreams ever meaningless? Are meaningful dreams experienced as meaningless? Who can decide – and how – what (your) dreams mean?

It's clear that dreams – if you accept that they are meaningful, or are experienced by the dreamer as meaningful – operate according to some kind of logic, ordering or rules. It's also clear that they utilize a kind of language in some way connected with the language of everyday, waking conscious experience. But it's also clear – from people's experiences of dreams – that they are often mystifying, difficult to understand, and that their meanings are elusive. In other words, dreams operate according to a different set or sets of rules, although they utilize the same signs and symbols. If these rules are not conscious then they are not dissimilar in that from the rules of conscious language use, and if the meanings of the signs and symbols deployed in dreams are not conscious, or under conscious control, then they must operate independently of the dreaming subject. The same kind of consideration, about rules and about the meanings of signs and symbols, applies equally to the speaking, writing and reading subject – the subject who does not consciously deploy the rules of language in every utterance, and the subject who cannot determine all the possible meanings of the signs and symbols inhabiting the subject's relations with language.

In dreams, the subject confronts most obviously an alien and often disconcerting discourse. Something is at work which is not under conscious control. The dreaming subject and the waking subject, then, may be said to be fundamentally and radically alienated. The subject is split; the conscious and the unconscious may speak to one another, but in ways neither will fully comprehend.

Memories, like dreams, can be characterized as symbolic representations, using signs and symbols in accordance with rules of organization. Memories, too, are a kind of language, and are most commonly recounted in verbal form. This also has implications for a theory of the relations between the subject and language. For it is clear that memories are a kind of mental writing or reconstruction: past experience becomes transmuted in memory into linguistic and symbolic form, and memories become a kind of cataloguing of past experience. Memories frequently take a narrative form which shapes their meanings, enclosing them within a specific form of discourse. The speaking, writing subject does not necessarily control these forms. Nor does the speaking subject control the meanings of its own memories, which may shift and change with time and may be 'rewritten' in the light of a changing, shifting

identity. Memories, then, can be seen to form, for the subject, a mobile and dynamic 'intertext' – a way the subject may represent its past experience to its present identity in a more or less constant movement of replay and revision.

This is not just to say that memory is unreliable – though that in itself has important implications for the subject's relation to ideas connected with 'truth', for example. Conscious memories, and their meanings, are unstable, not fixed, and reveal that the subject's relation to memory, as a linguistic phenomenon, is complex – and is essentially a textual relationship. The contents of conscious memory may, to a degree, be under the subject's conscious control (though this is certainly not predominantly the case), but the forms of memory are not. The subject is subjected to these forms in its relation of its memories to itself.

It is also – and perhaps obviously – the case that memory is a selective procedure and that the selection of memories is not under the conscious control of the subject. Remembering particular events or experiences, their details, and specific contexts also involves, necessarily, the forgetting of other events or experiences. What kinds of things get forgotten? How do things forgotten sometimes get remembered? Are all memories lodged in the unconscious? If so, what does the unconscious do with them? Or are some, important, memories kept in the unconscious, and kept from the conscious? However this process of selection and censorship, of remembering and forgetting works, it is clear that it is not under the control of the subject. The story or the history of the subject's life – like other stories and other histories – is a story and history of gaps, exclusions and repressions.

Psychoanalysis proposes a critical importance for language in the construction of the individual subject. The subject is, according to this theory, actually constructed and positioned by language. The subject is always a divided subject, divided between conscious and unconscious. A large part of the knowledge and experience of the subject belongs to the unconscious. The conscious subject does not know itself; its identity is split, as illustrated by the strange quality of dreams, by the absence of control in remembering and forgetting, in the ways the operations of language work – and in the different ways the subject may identify itself – as separate from itself – as 'I' or 'me' or a proper name, all of which are signifiers, substitutions, metaphors taking up positions within the orderings of language in its systematic organization of differences.

The subject in psychoanalytic theory is divided between conscious and unconscious, but according to some versions is also divided by different orders of experience or of 'being'. The orders are a) the imaginary, b) the symbolic and c) the real.

- a) In the order of the imaginary the subject identifies itself with its mirror image as whole and complete, denying the fact that it is divided and subject to the incompleteness experienced as desire. In the imaginary the subject may also identify with others and see its own self reflected in them, thus confirming its own sense of its identity and, at the same time, temporarily borrowing the identity of the other. In imaginary identification, according to the theory, the subject may break down the difference between self and other and take pleasure in its release from subjection to a particular form of identity, from subjection to feelings of dividedness and separation. This can be demonstrated in relation to a spectator watching a film and identifying with an identity in the film. But there are complications involved in this, since the spectator might identify with different identities or positions the film uses. The film may invite the spectator to identify with a hero, but what happens if the spectator is a woman and the hero is a man? The imaginary identification involved might cut across the symbolic ordering of things determining more or less set identities according to gender.
- b) The symbolic order is the order of things in the social world, established and maintained by the organization of identities in language and in sign systems. The symbolic order keeps things in place, grants identities and confers meanings. The subject is subordinated to the symbolic order most significantly with the acquisition of language to which the subject must submit its individual will or desire. With the internalization of language the subject is divided into conscious and unconscious and is 'inhabited' by the symbolic order. There is no escape from the symbolic order as it overwrites the imaginary without doing away with it, suppressing its wayward tendencies.
- c) The order of the real is, simply, what it would seem to be, but is also, rather mysteriously perhaps, never knowable or reachable by the subject, since the subject lives in the imaginary and the symbolic. The symbolic and the imaginary are like ever present filters through which the real is perceived, barring the subject from the real. It's not that the real isn't there; but the subject can never make direct contact with it. The difference between the real and the symbolic is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the subject's experience of another's death, where the other vanishes from the real but remains to inhabit the symbolic. The real is vague and disorganized, a totality without differences unorganized by the symbolic, impenetrable and totally alien from the imaginary.

The ideas suggested by the orders of the subject's experience of the world have implications for a theory of language and of textuality seeming far distant from ideas about language as enabling direct expression of the self, ideas often central to much thinking in general currency in English.

### Deconstruction

Deconstruction is more of an attitude, an activity – or set of activities – addressing texts, writing and signs systems, initially in a sceptical manner; it's an orientation deploying a range of terms and concepts rather than a fixed, established position. Deconstruction draws upon and develops all of the strands of theory mentioned so far, but denies all fixed stances, either for its own positions and practices or for the positions and practices it addresses, preferring the mobile idea of things in play to the more static ideas of fixed structures and orders. And deconstruction may address any field of knowledge, any system of belief and any kind of writing – anything, in short, that may be described as textual, within which category it would claim all forms of language.

The procedures of deconstruction are generally based on a kind of radical semiotics. According to semiotics, the signifier (for example, a word in written or spoken form) and the signified (for example, the meaning of the word) are not attached by any necessary connection. The signifier, in effect, signifies – or brings into play – many other signifiers. Words may mean things, none of them contained in the words themselves without reference to other words – other chains of meaning. According to the logic of this position all meanings are always deferred: that is, they are not present in the statements that produce them, but are generated by a movement or 'play' – an interplay between the present word(s) and the absent, but invoked, 'meanings'. In this interplay of presence and absence, traces of meanings are mobilized in endless networks. Any resting point for meaning is always subject to movement and deferral. The idea of 'play' is a very important element in deconstruction's mode of critique. This means, though, that unless deconstruction is to be anything more than an academic textual game it must address *how* texts are given specific kinds of meanings. What forces are at work in producing and stabilizing meanings? For it might well be the case that, in some absolute and theoretical sense, meanings are always subject to movement and play. This doesn't mean, though, that statements and texts don't get given meanings that are fixed. It means that meanings, in so far as they are fixed, are located not

in the statements or texts themselves, but in their specific, social, institutional contexts. Meanings are framed and determined by social, discursive, institutional contexts – and the codes and conventions they operate. ('Keeping it tight at the back', for example, might well mean any number of things, but within the context of football commentary, it will make a certain kind of determinate sense.)

According to the idea of the deferral of meaning in language, meanings can only achieve any stability within the contexts of specific practices, social forms and systems of ideas that stabilize them. These specific practices, forms and systems must always be located within history, or rather histories, and deconstruction – as a general mode of critique – addresses not just common-sense versions of language, textuality and meaning, but a whole set of concepts that have been operative in the history of western thought. Deconstruction, then, provides a way of examining ideology in its relation with, for example, reading and writing practices. It aims to expose the particular systems of thought at work in language practices, to indicate their relative and always provisional status. It aims to expose the rhetoric of texts as undermining any fixed centre, any determined meaning, any claim to be grounded in some kind of 'truth'. Clearly this must shift the question of meaning, value and significance from texts (or language practices) themselves; the logic of the deconstructive position would therefore locate any determinate meaning granted to texts within the contexts of their readings, within the established reading practices that grant them meaning, value, significance – and practice of deconstruction would also, therefore, need to address these institutionalized reading practices and their contexts. And, of course, these things don't get established by themselves. They are produced, develop, become powerful in particular historical circumstances. The implications of a deconstructive position would suggest that these histories of meaning might be addressed and analysed.

Deconstruction celebrates the semiotic principle of difference. Meanings in language, in texts, in systems of thought are produced by the interplay of differences, where positive terms, or identities, can only be established by being set, negatively, against what they are not. The tendency of all language and all texts is to establish systems of difference based on more-or-less paired sets of oppositions. Many of these 'binary oppositions' have general cultural currency and may act as nodal points holding together the slippery structures of meaning. The deployment of oppositions in texts will tend to have a 'normative' direction, with one of a pair of opposed terms being privileged over the other. In other cases, the interplay between paired terms may be more



openly structured, though the pairings will still structure meaning. The pairings or oppositions – and the play of meanings they generate – are not necessarily under the conscious control of the particular language user that brings them into play. They already operate in what deconstruction might refer to as the 'general text' of language. The meaning of the interplay will be already partly determined by the possibilities of meaning granted to it in general cultural usage; again, this will always be located within a particular discursive framework. Examples of culturally loaded oppositions might be:

reason/madness	first world/third world
real/symbolic	representation/reality
fiction/reality	doing/thinking
material/immaterial	theory/practice
literature/popular culture	masculine/feminine
freedom/state control	nature/culture

One of the most important procedures of deconstruction is to examine these kinds of opposition in order to reveal that the paired terms cannot stand in a relationship of absolute difference to one another – in order to indicate that their difference is always a constructed one, maintained against the possible threat of their collapse, in order to sustain the symbolic ordering of things in language and within discursive formations. For these oppositions cannot, in any case, represent an absolute difference from one another. It can be shown, for example, that the difference between reality and representation is not really tenable, that reality is always produced in relation to forms of representation, is always represented, and is always subject to representation. Reality is always permeated by ideas, and is itself the product of an idea of itself – an idea that must be set against something other; unreality, fantasy, myth. The idea of a real reality, out there, unplicated by a subject's perception of it, must always remain an idea, given, for example, the specific position of any subject – what the subject 'sees' directly cannot be taken absolutely for reality. Reality is always caught up in subjectivity – and is always an idea produced in specific discursive contexts. That's not to say that everything is unreal, that the reality everyone experiences as reality is only a 'ghostly paradigm of things'. It means, rather, that there can be no free, direct, subjectless, extra-discursive access to the material reality of things.

Deconstruction doesn't have to deal solely with abstruse philosophical questions about reality, though these are, ideologically speaking, of great potential importance – in English, for example, where according to much conventional reading practice the idea of reality is

used as a criterion of value. Deconstruction may equally address oppositions of more immediate political significance (though its academic practice has tended to neglect this potentiality). Take, for example, the difference between the third world and the first world, where it is often assumed that the two terms represent completely distinct realms of operation and of being. And yet we know that both worlds are very much inter-related and any attempt to represent them as different, as specific to themselves, is bound to be an effect of particular ideological positions.

The deconstruction of the 'masculine/feminine' opposition has been undertaken and articulated in recent times by feminism, with far-reaching effects on the way that these terms are understood in the sphere of the personal and in the sphere of the political, though again the popular feminist slogan, 'the personal is the political', signifies the deconstruction of that opposition, too. This particular piece of deconstructive work, undoing the assumptions contained in the man/woman opposition continues against the current of what might be called dominant ideology. This particular deconstructive move is perfectly easy to undertake – and to explain in these terms – with students, and may take the form of textual analysis and/or pieces of writing.

The idea of general writing and the idea of general textuality indicate ways that boundaries demarcating specific textual identities for forms of language can always be deconstructed. All textual productions and all statements in language always refer to other texts and other statements. This is a condition of their existence and of their meaning. It is not possible, for example, to make sense of a novel without already knowing how to read a novel, how novels operate, how they structure different identities and how they address a reading subject. A novel doesn't simply speak for itself – establish its own form of representation, its own terms of reference, its own characteristic features, its own structures and conditions of response – but must, always, refer to other novels, other forms of fiction – films, stories, soap operas – and other kinds of text, too. It always 'speaks' within a general network of writing or texts – or textuality. It's within a network of writing and meanings that a novel takes up its specific textual identity. It's always within such a network that its meaning is determined. Intertextual relations can be clearly demonstrated by examining, for example, the openings of novels; looking at how chains of meaning are brought into play with very little 'work' having to be done by the 'text itself'.

He rode into our town in the summer of '88...

(Schaefer 1957)

From this scant beginning a fairly detailed scenario may be quite fully elaborated – indicating innumerable details concerning the kind of hero, his physical attributes, the community he's about to enter, his past (or lack of it), his role in the drama about to unfold, the other main protagonists, the nature of the heroine (and his relationship with her), what he's riding, what he's carrying with him, the landscape, the time of day, the atmosphere and even the kind of closure we might expect from this text which is not yet a text, but the promise of a text that already deploys a host of intertextual references. A host of uncertainties and ambiguities is thus given definition by these intertextual references, though their meaning may radically alter depending on what genre is assumed for the text. And genre – where the text is placed within an ordering of categories – cannot be determined by the text itself. Of course, texts may confirm or disconfirm the expectations they generate, but they can never escape the intertextual network they are always already caught in. The same principle of dependency is equally the case for other kinds of text – news reports, science textbooks, fire drill notices.

Genre, then, is one of the discursive forces holding the text in some kind of order against its radical potential to deny identity and to disseminate itself into the order of general writing. Textual identities are always mobile and can only be held in place by conventions and established ordering within discursive frameworks. No text can establish its own identity; the boundaries of any text spill over – according to the principles of intertextuality and dissemination – and cannot be contained or controlled by the material covers of a book.

The idea of literature, for example, was an attempt to establish a fixed identity for a body of texts otherwise disjointed and disparate. The category of literature is impossible to maintain, though, because its limits cannot be set – and also because the values it has come to represent cannot, according to a deconstructive reading, be held to be inherent in the texts of literature. Literary values can only be a product of certain, limited, kinds of reading practices, and a limiting determination of textual identities dependent on the maintenance of the opposition literature/non-literature – a difference constantly breaking down. One way the special identity of literature has been, and to some extent remains, maintained is by the special significance attached to the idea of the author. The author has been used – in relation to literature – as a kind of guarantor of a unique quality seen as the expression of the author's special sensibility in textual form. The author is used as a point of origin – a point fixing the meaning, or potential meanings, of texts, determining also the *value* of particular texts in an order of relative

greatness. Other texts, not written by an author in the sense of a canonical figure, may be deemed to display similar qualities, but these qualities will still be valued for their author-like properties, and still may be traced back to an originary source fixing their identity and their possible meanings. The author in this sense is no more than a set of assumptions holding together a limited category or type of text. To the identity of the author will attach certain notions, assumptions activating ready-made sets of meanings. The author, in this sense, is simply another element in the determining of genre. And always before the 'author', the individual language user, comes the technology of writing, the technology of syntax, of the ordering, spacing, punctuation, semantic relations and structuring which is the condition of the use of language. In this sense the very idea of 'use of' language is highly deconstructable. Language can be seen, alternatively, as 'the machine of writing', a ready-made and mobile structure which itself determines and uses.

Deconstruction is suspicious of any attempt to trace back meaning to any originary source. Any attempt to recover the meaning of a text by referring back to an original intention, for example, must be deluded. For where can this intention be expressed, if it's not realized by the text itself? Would the meaning and identity of *Hamlet* be secured if only we knew what Shakespeare intended? There is no way an intention can illuminate or verify a reading, or ways of reading, a text; for *Hamlet* partakes of the order of general textuality, the order of general writing, and is a complex intertext, enmeshed in an ordering, in a complex network of references, cross-references and identities it cannot now be extricated from. To attempt to recover a meaning for *Hamlet* depending on the assumption of a particular intention, or attempting to locate its meaning in reference to its relations with its contemporary texts or ideas would have to attempt to negate the way that *Hamlet* is located within a network of intertextual references that make its reading possible. The meaning of *Hamlet* can no more be grounded in the original moment of its production than it can be grounded by referring to its author's intention.

In deconstructive terms *Hamlet* is perhaps an obvious example of the principle of the 'intertext' deploying, in an ever active movement, the play of presence and absence. This theme can be easily demonstrated with students in relation to the importance of Hamlet's father in the text, a father whose presence is made significant by its absence, and who, when present, hovers in the ghostly realm of being/not being between the two. But it can be shown that similar consideration can be given to the figure of Hamlet, who appears and disappears throughout

the text, who appears one moment in one guise, adopting the rhetoric of one form of identity, and another moment is different. Where, then, is Hamlet? And what is Hamlet when not 'present'? ('He' can never be fully present, of course, at any one moment because his being, such as it is, like any being, is structured by the movement of time in its constant deferral of the present caught up in the unceasing movement between past and future. What's more, his being can only be signified within a network of signs – dependent for their very operation on the interplay of presence and absence.) Hamlet dies at the end of the play. Is he, then, always already dead, even before the play begins, since the ending will determine the beginning and will also determine the intervening sequence according to the logic of textual movement, and since the ending of the text already exists before it is ever read from beginning to end?

In one very important, deconstructive, sense Hamlet is never there, anyway. Hamlet is an effect of language and, as such is signified by a series of signifiers acting as substitutes for the presence of Hamlet. In other words Hamlet is always a metaphor for something which isn't there but which is signified – or deferred by the presence of the metaphor. What applies to Hamlet in this sense may apply equally to anything in any text. Anything signified within a text must point to something, an idea or chain of associations, going beyond the limits of the text, outside the text. The inside of a text and the outside of a text is an opposition that cannot be strictly maintained.

This idea of the metaphor as substitution clearly has far-reaching implications in the way it breaks down the inside/outside opposition and undoes the possibility of clear limits to meanings generated by texts. Certainly an important aspect of deconstructive thinking about language is that the idea of metaphor – an idea in English previously specifying a limited kind of linguistic effect – is made into a general linguistic principle. All language is always metaphoric, substituting itself for what it is said to represent. Any kind of name is a metaphor standing in the place of what it names, and is a substitution for it – and gives it identity in a systematic ordering of named things, generally structured in series of oppositions. So too other kinds of language effects are also metaphoric in that they signify relationships between things in an equally substitutive manner.

This has important consequences for the status of all forms of discourse. Any claims any discourse may make to represent the real, or the truth, or the real truth, must be undercut by the recognition that discourses are always an ordering at one remove from what they may claim to be ordering. The logic of the metaphor in language is always at

work whether the discourse in question is the discourse of football terraces, the discourse of scientific research, the discourse of family relationships or the discourse of news reporting. Truth and reality can only be expressed within these kinds of discursive regime, and can only deploy different kinds of rhetoric, intertextually infiltrated by other kinds of discourse, always subject to the logic of metaphor. The rhetoric of truth – of a discourse claiming truth for itself – would be seen by deconstruction as an expression of a will to power. Even the most scientific, 'objective' language is not immune from the sharp critique of deconstruction.

Finally, perhaps the most bizarre opposition that deconstruction has sought to undo is the opposition between speech and writing. Deconstruction would claim that all the features of writing can be equally ascribed to speech, but that speech has been privileged over writing in descriptions of language, descriptions particularly that have struggled to assert the victory of the individual over the 'machine of writing'. So, much writing about 'literature', for example, will speak of 'voice' – finding in this metaphor a guarantee for the presence of a person in the impersonal text of writing. Deconstruction, though, might suggest that texts – in terms of their material and ideological being – are far from personal.

## POLITICS, IDEOLOGY, INSTITUTIONS

In what precedes this section I've attempted to illustrate certain theories – all of them having a bearing on language and texts or textuality. These theories all have a potentially interrogative inflection, in so far as they may be used to question established ideas, and may propose alternative ways of looking at powerfully dominant ideas. The ideas in this case belong to the field of English in education, but are not confined to that field, many of them enjoying general currency, or common-sense status. These ideas are concerned with reading, writing and speaking practices; they might be generally characterized as ideas about literacy; but it should also be emphasized that they are not 'merely ideas' that anyone is free to disagree with: they have been granted institutional power and operate within institutions that determine the identities of subjects.

The theory of discourses proposes an alternative way of looking at language in so far as it puts language into specific social and institutional contexts, examining how beliefs and attitudes are embedded in those contexts. On this model, language is an activity undertaken by various groups of people, and it is not simply an activity they do, but

one which also organizes them – their ideas, beliefs, attitudes and values.

Semiotics indicates how sign systems operate according to a principle of difference, establishing distinctions between things and producing an order of things. Semiotics also indicates how signifiers are loaded with cultural meanings, and do not bear meanings on their own, outside of a cultural context, establishing a strict correlation between language and culture. Semiotic readings can reveal how signifiers – words, for example – create images and ideas that tend to be stereotypical. According to semiotics it's the world of words which 'creates' the world of things – an inversion of common-sense ideas about representation.

Psychoanalysis offers a theory of the subject – the reading writing and speaking subject – in relation to language and culture. In this model, the subject is not the author of meaning, but is ordered, constructed and positioned within and by language. The subject hovers between the imaginary and the symbolic orders, divided into conscious and unconscious systems, unable to make direct contact with the 'real'. A radical questioning of the idea of personal identity is entailed in this perspective.

Phenomenology theorizes the relations between the subject and the object, examining how perspectives, aspects and ideas position the subject's knowledge of the world. Phenomenology can be used as a model for reading – reading the 'world' as well as reading texts.

Deconstruction offers a very wide range of ideas about texts and language, ideas tending to 'deconstruct' the established identity of things linguistic and textual. Deconstruction is a critical, sceptical theory aiming to expose the grounds established thinking rests upon as problematic, contradictory and uncertain. Deconstruction generally proposes the analysis of rhetoric and sees rhetoric at work wherever there is a claim for meaning to be grounded in truth.

But if deconstruction claims that all meanings of all statements of all texts are always undecidable, what use can such a thoroughgoing scepticism be? If psychoanalysis proposes that the subject is used by language as much as being a user of language, what space is given for the subject to operate in? If phenomenology suggests that we can never know things in themselves, and that ideas and language always construct our knowledge of things, how can the subject – anyone – ever really know anything? If discourses determine what can be said and position subjects according to their own orderings, doesn't that leave the subject powerless in the face of impersonal forces that are far greater than the individual will? And if semiotics suggests that all

meanings of all signifiers are predetermined culturally, how can the subject ever evade the replay of established stereotypes? All of these sets of ideas have a radically anti-humanist inflection; they rob the individual of the supremacy it enjoys in liberal humanist ideology; they 'decentre' identities, decentre the hallowed private individual, and put emphasis on social contexts and their structuring forces. Language is less an instrument than an external force – a force, though, inhabiting the individual in its most private spaces.

All these problems are important to the possibility of constructing a practice that aims to put the theories I've outlined into play in the field of English. They engender issues concerning the social contexts of language, meanings and textual practices. They therefore lead to a consideration of cultural contexts – which in turn must inescapably engage matters of ideology and politics. For theory to have any useful application, it is essential that it addresses how meanings are produced in specific social contexts, relating language uses and texts directly to the attitudes, beliefs, behaviours of general social life.

In effect this means that all language use is bound up with ideology – with views, attitudes and ideas making assumptions about the way the world is, about the identity of things, about the nature of people and of society. Ideology is not something belonging only to the external realm of the public arena; ideology – as language, forms of language, ideas, thought, attitudes, beliefs, practices, behaviours – is always also enmeshed in what might be called the politics of everyday life. In fact, it is never possible to clearly demarcate the difference between the intimate, the everyday, the personal and the external, the public, the impersonal. Ideology is embedded in the language we speak, in our ideas and in our most personal feelings. As subjects of discourse we are 'interpellated'; we make imaginary identifications with culturally constructed positions and identities. We are called upon, or 'hailed', and in responding we give assent to the positioning, the structuring being held out to us – within established institutional frameworks. This happens to teachers, for example, all day with great frequency – and is a feature of the political construction of the institution of the school.

Meanings and identities are produced by discourses – always within institutional frameworks. Language and textuality are always framed and produced and always have ideological inflection. The distinction between the political and the personal is untenable; the idea of a neutral position (even of a liberal neutrality) is not possible. There is nowhere to escape from ideology; it is impossible to stand outside of ideology in some 'objective' position. The value of theory is that it provides a means for understanding processes of meaning more fully. While this is

partly a process of disillusionment, it is not absolutely so. Theory shatters the illusion of the individual's free creativity; but it makes more clear the kinds of choices that can be made, the kinds of positions that can be taken. This applies as much to the politics of daily social life as it does to reading and writing and speaking practices, which cannot, anyway, be separated from daily social life.

One political project consistently addressing the politics of meaning and identity in recent times is feminism. Feminism has utilized the theories outlined to analyse the public, cultural construction of feminine identity, has addressed all this to language and textuality and has undertaken deconstructive readings of institutional practices. This is clearly a political venture seeking to theorize meaning and identity to reveal its social construction. But feminism has also sought to go beyond the analytic, to provide an understanding of the mechanisms of social change and to effect changes – changes of an ideological nature – concerning how women are regarded, concerning assumptions about the social roles of women, and has contested these things to effect changes of an institutional nature, addressing, for example, the jobs that women do, women's organizations, discrimination, misogynistic behaviour and so on.

Feminism has addressed language and textuality to examine how existing, established reading, writing and speaking practices have defined meanings and identities in relation to women. The purpose of this theorizing has been manifold – but has included a thoroughgoing critique of patriarchal ideology as expressed in language and textuality and has also, positively, been able to propose different reading, writing and speaking practices constructing meanings and identities differently and having implications and consequences for the way things are – meanings and consequences that are ideological in effect and have a bearing on institutional practices within the arena of the politics of gender. An important implication of much work in feminism has been to question the way textuality itself has been seen as a privileged site in the construction of identities. Whether in relation to Literature, or to a broader notion of literature, or to the field of popular culture: feminism has sought, in effect, to break down these supposedly discrete categories, to break down the idea that they are especially the places where identities are formed, to break down the differences between them and other forms of social exchange. In effect the difference between text and non-text has been deconstructed by the way feminism has sought to address equally all forms of social practice, from a political perspective foregrounding language as ideology – a perspective identifying the political with language uses.

The example of feminism has potentially far-reaching implications for English and for English teaching. For while some aspects of feminism have been incorporated into the more liberal practices of the subject, they tend to remain within the sphere of the incorporated; that is to say, they become another way of looking at things along with all the others, rather than being centrally informative. This means that they remain, effectively, marginalized. The same consideration applies to the issues of race and of class. If issues of gender, race and class are simply additional, though, simply other or more things to take into account, then the liberal model must be, in the end, fundamentally untroubled by them, must remain essentially conservative and – it must be said – anti-democratic.

The theories I've outlined are not simply deconstructive in that they take things apart. They have the power of offering different models, of breaking down established definitions, and so of opening new spaces, ways of understanding formerly closed that can be used to change, to develop and extend, for example, current reading, writing and speaking practices in English in schools. New models of literacy, new and powerful ways of understanding literacy on many different levels become possible. The kinds of practices embodied in liberal and in established versions of English really use a very limited set of ideas; a deconstruction of these practices is the opposite of negative. It has the positive force of proposing multiple new practices: different fields of operation open up, different approaches become possible, new – and often surprising – combinations may come into being. Deconstruction unfixes, mobilizes, takes a dynamic view of discourses and cultural practices.

An application of the theories I've been proposing, an application maintaining an interest in ideology, politics and institutions, an application aware of the cultural implications of the issues, would, it's true, necessarily tend to deconstruct in the breaking down sense existing practices of English teaching, would tend to undermine the very identity of the subject. But existing practices have been largely founded, I'd contend, on very restrictive models of language, models blind to their own constructedness, blind to the political effects of their institutional situation, and blind to their implication in politically suspect systems of belief. Existing practices have been largely founded on a narrow definition of textuality, and have privileged certain kinds of textuality – certainly stories and poems, for example – over others. Existing practices have obviously then been founded on an inadequate notion of literacy.

To break down may also mean to liberate many other possibilities, to

'deconstruct' in order to allow a greater flexibility, or 'play', to diversify and expand in order to more fully and more explicitly incorporate a reading of language and textuality in relation to ideology, politics and institutions.

It may be argued that there's a danger in all I've suggested that teachers and students are to be robbed of their linguistic/textual innocence, that the pleasures people have clearly taken from reading novels, say, will be replaced by the solemn business of semiotic analysis, or the grimly analytical work of psychoanalytic deconstruction. This is not the case at all. This position would have to depend on the false assumption that textual pleasures are 'innocent' in the first place, that there is a clear distinction between pleasurable immersion and analytic reflection. It would also tend to associate textual pleasures with the privileging of the representational fictional text – a strange privilege when considering from where and how most people get most of their 'textual' pleasures.

Theory such as I've advocated here certainly has ways of addressing and analysing textual pleasures, of explaining the kinds of pleasure taken, for example, in the imaginary identifications people may make in relation to texts, and the pleasures to be had from various different kinds of closures of texts, of analysing the 'hermeneutic' pleasures generated by reading processes generally. The analysis of the pleasures, though, doesn't reduce them to any degree, any more than the analysis of football reduces the pleasure of watching or of playing football. It is also the case that there are pleasures associated with theory: that reflection itself can be experienced as pleasure. Analysing, theorizing textual pleasures does perhaps change them in so far as it may render them conscious – and in doing so is likely to make conscious choices more clearly available to reading, writing and speaking subjects. This is no reduction, no loss. It is, though, I would suggest, an opportunity largely denied by current practices.

### 3 On the subject of reading

#### THE ROLE OF READING IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Although the *Bullock Report* (1975) claimed that no more than one school in ten made adequate provision for reading, the business of reading, one way or another, has been central to the practices and to the ideological structure of English since the subject began. The importance credited to reading is again given official statement by the 5–16 document on English containing the proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science: 'Good schools foster positive attitudes towards books and literature. . . . Literature helps secondary pupils to explore and express their own thoughts and feelings and moral and social values. . .' (*English 5–16*, 1989: 3.9, 3.11). Reading, here, is clearly equated with the idea of literature. In general, within the secondary context it's likely that notions of the value of reading will most often be connected to ideas about 'books and literature'. Ideas about what constitutes literacy are crucially significant in maintaining reading as an educational activity. In all officially commissioned reports on the teaching of English, the centrality of reading is unquestioned, even though the nature of the reading done, its particular texts and specific forms may not be very explicitly elaborated. Reading, apparently, is reading – everyone knows what it is, what it's for and why it should be done.

In secondary schools the place of reading in English takes many different forms. Some English departments will have established clearly formulated attitudes, policies and practices concerning reading. Others will be more partial, more haphazard and more cloudy in their apprehension and implementation of a policy for reading. The attitude of the school as a whole institution will have some bearing on what kind of reading community exists in the school. The kind of library the school has and the way it operates will be implicated. The whole school policy

– if it exists – may or may not accord with the policy of the English department. Whatever the situation – of a department, of a school, or within an individual English teacher's classroom – ideas about reading, what it is and what it is for will be a force within the institution, will influence practices and are quite likely to be deeply ingrained. The ideas in question may be more or less explicitly stated or may be wholly implicit, operating only at the level of practice. That reading is worth doing, though, is a truth (almost) universally acknowledged, though why it is worth doing – and often with whom it is worth doing – is likely to produce very varied, often divergent positions. *English 5-16* asserts one stereotypical view: 'Studying literature and encouraging others in that study is an enrichment for pupil and teacher alike.' (1989: 7.2) Traditionalists and progressives alike would mostly agree with this assertion. A theoretically motivated approach, though, might want to challenge it, beginning by asking questions about, for example, what is understood by 'studying', by 'literature' and by 'enrichment' on the grounds that all those terms represent ideas that can be and ought to be questioned and contested.

Among institutional variations of attitude and approach to reading, it is possible to identify dominant models and ideas largely, and necessarily loosely, based on the idea of studying literature as some kind of enrichment. These are expressed in what English teachers do in practice with classes, as well as in institutional structures, examination syllabuses, assessment procedures and official documents. The idea of literature, of there being certain texts or kinds of texts that are worth studying in themselves, is the basis for much of the teaching of literacy in secondary schools.

The focus of a challenge to accepted assumptions and commonly held notions about reading might centre on the following points:

- 1 the idea of literacy;
- 2 the idea of literature;
- 3 ideas about how reading works;
- 4 reading texts and ideology;
- 5 general reading – the contexts and organization of reading.

An approach to these issues would inform not only the teacher's perspective on reading, but would equally have practical implications for an approach to reading in the classroom and would determine the kinds of activities students engage in. The list above might well provide a title of elements in a course, to be approached explicitly with a wide-ranging textual focus. Literacy – in spite of its often taken-for-granted status in education and in public life generally – is a highly charged

issue, loaded with social, cultural and political assumptions. The frequency of articles in the national popular press about English in schools, and very often about the identity of literature (as in the familiar 'Chuck Berry vs Chaucer' form – when traditionalists are set against 'progressive cranks') may act as an index of the importance of the idea of literature in debates about wider cultural issues. Judgements about literacy – sometimes represented as concerned with technical matters, like so-called 'reading-ages', for example – are ideologically generated. In schools and in English the ideological aspect of literacy is most often concealed. It could even be said that the business of English in schools is, partly, to conceal the ideological component of literacy. The very idea that there is something called literature, the idea that there are literary texts, the idea that reading is in itself enriching, for example, are all, of course, socially, ideologically produced ideas. They are therefore worth pursuing in an interrogative manner with students who are often and have been often immediately subjected to them. They are all part of the stuff of institutionally defined literacy.

Teaching 'literacy' could well involve some examination of the *idea* of literacy, rather than simply assuming that literacy is a comfortably established state that everyone recognizes instantly when they see it. It could also – and consequently – look at the idea of literature, rather than accepting it as a necessary given. Moving beyond literature – whatever that is – it might address ideas about the operations of reading in general. That would probably imply looking at ideas about texts and how they communicate, in turn requiring some kind of approach to reading practices and to ideology. Texts, though, inhabit and operate within contexts and within fields of organization. This, too, might be worth exploring.

## LITERACY, LITERATURE AND THE LITERARY TEXT

It is an important assumption (made by the document *English 5-16* and preceding and subsequent reports) that literacy is closely connected with literature and the literary text. Literacy is thus associated with the authority of the book. Somewhere lurking in this ideological construct is the notion of a progression and development. This involves, in turn, an ordering, a hierarchy, a system of differentiation – as may testify reading ages, and reading schemes with their different levels. Children in primary schools are familiar with this view of literacy – as in many cases they still find themselves ploughing their way through Roger-Red-Hat, Billy-Blue-Hat, and so on (until, finally(?), and many years hence, they achieve the zenith of *Anna Karenina*?). The book itself can

represent a symbolically important element in an educational rite of passage – as the goal to reach for above the lower level of the sentence maker. Literacy, graded and ordered, becomes an important focus of difference and distinction in educational contexts, and this is reflected outside educational institutions, too. The social, cultural, political significance of literacy and of the idea of Literacy can be attested in many ways. The idea of being well-read, for instance, remains an important factor in social and educational identity – part of the small change of cultural currency.

Where does literacy begin and end, though? How can English teachers begin to tackle this enormous field of knowledge, of cultural, educational, general social practice? How can we begin to provide our students with more than merely received notions of things textual, of reading, of its discourses and its practices? This chapter attempts to propose an approach to some of the issues involved in teaching a more theorized, more conscious and self-conscious, more critical and questioning approach to literacy than has generally been traditional in the various practices of English in schools. What is proposed here is that the idea of literacy be examined – or deconstructed – in a non-systematic way. There is no need to start at one specific point and to move methodically through a series of precisely intervalled stages. No such starting point really exists. Work on writing, for example, might easily and equally be construed as work on reading – the clear distinction between the two activities being deconstructed by different ways of seeing them both. Illustrative texts, lessons, activities are designed to approach different aspects of literacy that are always inter-related and so don't need to follow a precisely ordered programme. In what context and on what occasion the question: 'What is literacy?' may be posed explicitly, will depend on factors such as the progress of the work, the kinds of questions or responses that arise, the readiness of the students. The intention, though, is that the question should necessarily come to the fore during the kind of work described.

#### AN INITIAL APPROACH TO LITERACY

With year ten and eleven students in secondary comprehensive schools, it's obvious that each student will arrive into any English class with a personal literacy history of their own. In many cases they will have been already graded and differentiated on a scale of literacy. They will also arrive with a set of culturally produced assumptions about literacy and the business of reading. A useful starting point might be to examine students' own assumptions, to create an issue, open a discourse, as it

were, and to begin to attempt a fresh analysis of reading/literacy. A description of their own attitudes towards literacy and assumptions about it can be elicited quite easily by a number of questions. The material for the lesson is produced by the students themselves in the form of their responses. The following questions might be useful in this context:

- How is reading learned?
- What different kinds of reading are there?
- What is reading?
- What is reading for?
- What is a good reader?
- What kind of reading is done in schools?

Each of these questions could provide the starting point for several other questions. The question: 'How is reading learned?', for example, could be specifically focused to look at the contexts of learning to read, the kind of techniques used, the kind of reading material used, the way that learning to read positions and constructs reading subjects of particular identities, and so on – each of these points being laid open to question, with alternatives being considered. This initial exercise could be developed into a more elaborate exercise designed to put reading – and attitudes to reading – under interrogation. The questions above could obviously be used in many ways. Each question raises potentially contentious issues. Students could be invited to consider their own personal reading histories – and the implications of the questions of their own position in relation to literacy and its institutions. Students could be asked to develop their own – more detailed – set of questions to use with one another; reading questionnaires could be discussed and devised to provide a survey of the field.

An ethnographic study of attitudes and ideas on literacy, reading and literature might be developed, based on questions addressed to a wide cross-section of members of a reading community. Responses from different members of the community could be analysed, and identities could be defined, explored, challenged, in relation to the perspectives offered by the process of survey. A school is a good example of a reading community – obviously with radically differing identities ascribed to individuals within it according to how they stand on a scale of literacy, what their attitudes towards different kinds of reading are, how they represent themselves as readers, what their personal 'literacy inheritance' is, and so on. Using this approach, the specific ways literacy operates in a community within an institution, an institution clearly linked in with other powerful institutions, can be explored. The



materials for such an enterprise may be devised by teacher and/or students and may, of course, vary in degrees of sophistication and detail. The end product might furnish materials for students to present in written, spoken or video form. It's critical, though, that the questions get raised, that they get seen as *possible* questions, possible approaches to the business of literacy. Further questions might be proposed following the initial inquiry; questions such as:

- What different purposes are there for reading?
- Are some kinds of reading more functional than others?
- Do different groups of people do different kinds of functional reading?
- Are some kinds of reading done purely for pleasure?
- Do different groups of people read different things for pleasure?
- Are some kinds of reading better than others?
- What different contexts are different kinds of reading done in?
- What different kinds of institutions might be associated with different kinds of reading?
- What different kinds of reading are done in schools?

Whatever activities might follow, asking these questions addresses a different set of issues from the general approach to literacy in schools. Pursuing particular issues generated by these questions might begin to open a new agenda for reading practices, a new approach to the idea of literacy – and to institutional practices of literacy.

## INTRODUCING THEORY: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF READING

A phenomenology of reading would simply seek to re-address the business of reading at the level of a general question as simple, but demanding, as: How do we make sense of what we read? This initial question can be broken down to a series of questions that – simple though they are – may enable a review of the whole business of the perception of reading 'matter', defining and making sense of reading 'objects' – and may also encourage a questioning of the everyday assumptions generally used to define reading processes.

The analysis of how reading works – sometimes referred to as 'reception theory' – would involve looking first at the nature and definition of the textual object, and second, at the nature of the reading process – or the field the object is placed in, defined and interpreted. Any attempt to address the reading process would need to take into account the nature of the reader and the reading audience, the nature of

the reading context, as well as dealing with the conventional tendency to see reading as a simple interchange between a reader and a text.

According to the model of phenomenology outlined previously, texts are not perceivable, any more than anything else is, as objects in themselves. Their identity is always already determined by the particular social configuration; within it they take up a specific place; within it they are already granted a specific identity, already catalogued, as it were, within a system of distinctions organized into categories. Although this 'system' is not necessarily explicit, and isn't written down in detail anywhere, it is powerful in determining modes of reading and the production of meanings. The way established reading practices determine particular meanings is well illustrated by most of the practices associated with literature in education – where certain specific types of reading and certain specific types of meaning are called for, or demanded.

Texts don't stand on their own as bearers of their own self-defining meanings. Any text is always read from a particular point of view, by a subject (or subjects) positioned at a particular point. As the model of phenomenology makes clear, the object *in itself* is not perceivable by the 'spectator', and the object *in itself* – the 'true' text – is never more than an abstraction, an idea distinct from particularly positioned readings of aspects of the textual object. This can be made clear to students without much difficulty, by using the phenomenology model, and by simple exercises in differential readings – looking at different aspects of texts from different perspectives using different ideas – following through the implications of a group of students' own reading of a particular text.

It is very important, though, that the phenomenology of reading should not end in the (banal) reduction to pure individualism, a position likely to claim that reading, and all readings, are purely a matter of individual preferences or personal predilections. This is where the idea of reading practices is important, reading practices being those attitudes and habits that are institutionally rooted and that have established status of common-sense inevitability. The liberal model of reading asserts on the one hand that any kind of reading is possible – that a single text may contain a range of varied and even contradictory meanings. In not acknowledging that this position has a tendency to totally negate the idea of literature – since any text can mean so many things to different readers – the liberal model also fails to recognize how its own preferred modes of reading are structured and restricted according to established habits of thought. The range of readings on

offer in established liberal reading practices is in fact a range within a very limited notion of what constitutes a reading.

Any attempt to construct a moderately inclusive and general theory of reading must go beyond presently dominant notions. A phenomenology of reading is required that can explain, on the one hand, variant readings and, on the other hand, how readings are embedded in particular social, institutional practices. Theory – of various kinds – can do just this: a sociology of reading is also necessary, though, to make sense of the relations between questions of textual identity, questions of meaning and their social contexts. Taking a wider view of reading than is offered by the limited model of the reader and the text, literacy may be addressed in the social context of the school. The school, in turn, can be seen within its general social and cultural context. It's possible, then, to conceive of a teaching of literacy dealing with general notions about literacy, explicitly placing textually specific meanings in their wider cultural context.

Practical examples of classroom work that follow are offered as an attempt to construct a phenomenology of reading that engages students in the process of consciously developing theory in relation to textually focused activities.

### THE TEXTS OF LITERATURE

Textual analysis has been the adopted, favoured form of literary encounter in most practices of English and certainly tends to be the way that literary study is presently organized. The single text is read and studied, then perhaps compared with another similar or contrasting text – though usually a text of like form and identity. The form of the approach generally ensures that it is the unique characteristics of this particular text that are being addressed, and that the text is a bearer of certain meanings, though all of this tends to be very hazily formulated. Generally, the text is represented as an object of positive value, worth studying in itself.

The idea of literature is crucial in maintaining the idea of a text being valuable in itself. It's rather curious, though, that English Literature in schools in many cases has been based on texts that could only be described as being rather dubious examples of English Literature. The familiar texts of English in schools, texts the subject English Literature has been based on, are not, according to any formalized or traditional view, official texts of English Literature. They must, however, curiously and paradoxically, bear the status of *literature*, otherwise they could not be claimed to be worthy of study in themselves. Even

though it may be conceded that the focal texts are inferior – to the established texts of canonical English Literature – the assumption remains that there *are* texts of intrinsic merit, even though exactly what they are cannot be determined. In the business of literature, much must be left to personal preference – so long, of course, that it's personal preference for the right kind of text. This confusion – between freedom and very strict constraint – is at the core of English Literature as practised within schooling and remains at the core of the idea of English in general.

*Lord of the Flies; Kes; Of Mice and Men; An Inspector Calls; Animal Farm, Across the Barricades, Talking in Whispers* and many of the other texts that have figured in secondary English have never existed officially and unequivocally within the borders of English Literature. These texts have been brought together by no recognized procedure at all. No-one has ever attempted to justify the existence of this secondary canon. There is no common agreement on what texts exactly are to be included in it or where its limits might be drawn. No-one has ever determined why these texts are peculiarly suited to the study of English at this level. Why they are there remains a mystery; their unofficial status remains unjustified. They represent the practice of a subject that is – in a philosophical sense – ungrounded. Recognition of this significant gap in the construction of the subject argues strongly in favour of a complete redefinition of the textual field considered worthy of attention.

### THE GROUNDS OF READING

The modes of study of literature in English have also been formulated on indefinite and questionable principles. The idea of personal response, for instance, is a highly dubious notion – effectively limiting the scope and constituency of the subject. Personal response is formulated on a very restricted notion of textuality. Allied to personal response are dominating concepts like 'character', for example, and other categories of response and analysis that have governed reading practices in English. Although these ideas have alienated the majority of the subjects of English, this has not deterred their continuation, and has, perhaps, been the reason for it.

In the following sections of this chapter is an approach to texts and textuality attempting to reformulate the field of enquiry, according to different sense of textual identity, addressing a broader textual field, taking different approaches to texts, attempting to change the grounds for the study of texts, to begin to deploy a different vocabulary, a

different set of terms and ideas to engage with a wider field of textuality.

### TEXTS AND TEXTUAL ISSUES

One of the things that theory does with the content of English in its established and conventional forms is to suggest different ways of looking at things that are ensconced as the everyday material of the discourse. This will necessarily tend to imply a different kind of vocabulary, so that while conventional practices with texts may refer to character, a theorized view might refer to an identity or a symbolic function – in this case stripping the notion of any direct connection with reality, with the idea of character in fiction as being in any way continuous with character in the real world. The constructed nature of fictional identities is thus suggested while, at the same time, the process of granting identity in language forms, contexts, genres and discourses may be seen as related to the granting of identities in general and real social exchanges. The idea, then, is not simply to deconstruct ideas about fictional texts. There would only be a limited purpose in examining, for example, fairy tales for their structural features and forms unless the implications reached beyond the limit they themselves represented. In this sense, theory foregrounding the cultural and political dimensions of things linguistic and textual, does not simply deconstruct the particular terminology of established ideas to displace them with another set of terms tackling the same entities. The general effect is to alter the grounds of study, to direct attention beyond the limits of the immediate textual focus, to see how local textual effects, details and functions are configured within and correspond to the large and general effects that infuse all things linguistic, that are central to the way we experience and interpret the world.

A practice of language and textual analysis that goes beyond established terminology has, at least, the virtue of offering choices, of indicating that there *are* different ways of looking at things. Established practices tend to remain – in spite of their protestations of freedom, allowing free individual responses – within the same repetitively restricted frame of reference. It's a frame of reference representing itself as the natural terminology of response – but it is, of course, very much a constructed terminology of a particular kind of practice. These differences in terminology – between routine notions of response and theory – may be represented as a series of alternatives in the following rough tabulation. The sense in which the two sides of the table represent strictly direct opposites is, of course, loose – partly because the terms borrowed

from theory don't address the same identities signified by the conventional terms. Ideas about the very standard stuff of textual analysis are often represented as being natural common sense. These ideas about things as apparently simple as time, place and character are eminently questionable, though. They are also prohibitive of other ways of looking at texts, other ways that can be much more varied and revealing, that might develop and extend thinking without restricting and suppressing the features of texts that might be described as textual and constructed. Table 3.1 offers an initial view of some possible options.

Table 3.1 Conventional and alternative ideas about texts, and textual analysis

<i>Conventional/established ideas</i>	<i>Alternative ideas/views</i>
status and identity	intertextuality and institutional ordering
independence, uniqueness	genres, discourses
characters	symbolic code – elements and identities
setting	interplay of presence and absence
places	
objects	
story	syntactic/narrative structure – opening/closure
development	hermeneutic code
time – of the text	cultural code/reading practices
meaning or meanings	phenomenology and reading practices
response, empathy, identification, enjoyment	interpellation, symbolic order; addressing and positioning the subject of discourse, pleasures
truth to life, realism	regimes of truth

To move from considering objects and identities in texts to truth and regimes of truth covers a great deal of thinking. The range of issues, from the relatively fine points of textual analysis to the larger questions about meaning and truth, might seem daunting and unwieldy, yet is no more inclusive than established practices that deal with these things, but that don't make them explicit or subject to a questioning process. Although examining something like the hermeneutic code in fairy tales, for instance, might seem at odds with addressing regimes of truth in texts and discourses, these things are interlinked. Thinking about the

genre of fairy tales can lead to considerations about genre in general and to a sense of how textual identities are organized by regimes of discourse. Discursive regimes are always configured in some relation to the idea of 'truth' or 'reality'.

Established practices of English have locked the possibilities of thinking about texts into certain entrenched modes. Theory can offer the opportunity for more mobile and more probing ways of looking at texts – addressing at the same time issues that would conventionally be passed over. How texts engage attention, for example, can be re-examined in ways that go beyond present explanations. Phenomenology begins to theorize the position of the subject or audience in relation to the text. Models that reach beyond the limits of the naive idea of individual response or textual meaning may be constructed and developed. Textual pleasures, for example, are assumed simply to be a property of reading, a matter between the text and its reader. Theory, though, might encourage teachers and students to reconsider *how* textual pleasures are activated, what kinds of pleasures there might be, how these relate to genres – how texts may address subjects in discourse, how they may engage identifications, how they may address the 'symbolic order' and the subject's position within it.

The scope of the differences outlined above may reflect a number of demanding issues and may represent a kind of working model for a project of teaching that seeks to reconfigure what passes for textual, linguistic study and practice in schools – what's generally undertaken in the name of English. Each item listed above might constitute the material for a substantial project.

A general approach to textual analysis, taking one text initially and trying out a number of angles, might, however, be useful. The study of individual texts can be quite simple – initially, at least – 'theorized' by applying a formula for textual analysis, a formula recognizing the text's configuration within a larger textual arena. One such formula is given below.

**Textual identity:** the status of the text; genre and the text.

**The context:** where, when, social setting.

**The time of the text.**

**The symbolic structure:** important roles, objects, places.

**The narrative structure:** from – through – to.

**Questions and gaps in the text.**

**The ideology of the text.**

A literary text, a text from popular fiction, a TV soap opera, a detective

film, a wildlife programme, a documentary – all these different kinds of texts might be addressed using this outline.

The question of textual identity is certainly not a question very much probed by established, routine practices of reading and literature in English. This first point invites consideration of the text in the textual field and the text in relation to the institution – so challenging the idea that the text has a meaning and function independently of those things. The second point asks about the context of the text – where is it set and when, but also invites consideration of how the text represents social relations. A question such as: 'What differences does the text seem to construct in relation to different identities?, for example, would be a generalized way of addressing this point. A more specific way of beginning to address the issue would be to ask: 'How does this text represent, for example, the relations and differences between men and women?'

The issue around the time of the text touches upon crucial matters of interpretation and identity. The time of *Macbeth*, for example, made explicit as an issue, includes examining how a time sequence might be represented textually and what assumptions are commonly made about time sequencing in texts; it may also touch upon the question of the time of the writing of the text and the assumptions that this may carry with it. The time of the writing of the text, of course, is not identical with the time of the content of the text – the time of its setting. How might these time differences be addressed? The critical time of the text, though, might, theoretically, be construed as the time of the reading of the text, shifting the sense of its moment of production from some imagined ordinary point in time, to the present time of its production or reproduction – the present time being the time that determines the kinds of meanings that are given to it.

The idea of 'opening' – allied to the idea of 'closure' – might be used to initiate a discussion of when and how texts begin and end. This is not necessarily just a matter of examining specific beginnings and endings, how they operate, how they might address and position a reading subject, but might go further and engage with issues about textual forms and identities and the kinds of expectations, constructions of meaning and limits on meanings those things might involve. Students can be invited to consider these issues in relation to specific examples, but they might also be invited to think about general features of opening and closure in an explicitly theoretical way. Specific openings of texts might easily be linked, for example, with the idea of genre – looking at how openings of texts confirm, merge or affront genre expectations. Endings can be looked at in similar ways, and might be used to explore

notions of where the limits to the meaning of the text might be set. When Shane rides off into the glowing west from whence he came, the conflicts at work in the earlier phases of the text have been resolved. Not everything, though, will necessarily have been resolved, and some problems that the text presents will have been left unaddressed, not dealt with by the closure. In the case of *Shane*, the relationship between Shane and the boy's mother is to an extent an unresolved issue. Its implications would be difficult for the genre of the classic western to pursue. Asking a question like: 'What kind of questions might this ending leave you with?', would be one way of inviting consideration of how meanings generated can spill over the apparent limits of any text, and might in turn be used to ask about how meanings of texts might be held in place by things outside of texts.

Conventional reading practices have no way really of linking signifying processes with the general cultural meanings they engage, produce and reproduce. In addressing the idea of 'character', though, utilizing a different kind of terminology can provide a perspective that examines more clearly and fully how verbal entities are construed in reading processes as character identities and given specific symbolic functions and roles within a text. In this way, specific practices of reading and writing may be highlighted – and examined for the assumptions they make about language and textuality. Textual elements are demystified from their established formulations. Identifying and looking at different textual elements enables textual construction to be seen. Looking at the materials of the construction make it possible to see the kinds of orderings that hold texts together. This necessarily means looking at cultural practices and identifying cultural meanings. These practices and meanings may then be addressed from different perspectives, different attitudes towards them being made possible.

The idea of narrative structure highlights the sense of the text as an ordered entity, in which the ordering is not inevitable, but is a feature of an active process of construction. The ordering may follow certain definite patterns that can be identified in practice by looking at different assemblages of textual elements, the kinds of ordering differing according to different genres.

All narrative texts in their movement from one thing to another pose questions that may be answered in the continuing progress of the narrative and all leave some questions unanswered. Different reading practices will produce different sets of questions to ask of texts and will construe the questions texts raise differently. For example, one reading of *Great Expectations* might propose the question: 'Does Pip marry Estella at the end?' Another way of reading the text would put a

different question, say: 'Why is Estella restored to the text, albeit briefly, in the final moment, and what kind of closure does the text therefore seem to be seeking to effect?'

The ideology of the text is to do with how the text seems to represent the world and how it seems to configure different identities. Obviously this is a large and critical issue. It relates to all the other kinds of features of texts that might be addressed using theory. But it is important to identify ideology at work in texts, to represent the case that texts offer particular views of the world rather than standing in some direct relation to it. Addressing ideology it's important to raise the question of whether the ideological content of the text – its meaning – is a property of the text itself or whether it is produced by modes of reading. This can be examined by looking at one text and seeing how different readings – making different meanings for it – may be produced.

Questions and gaps are features of all texts and may be just as revealing of how they work in terms of genre and ideology. Gaps are necessary for texts to function at all – but it is in their gaps that texts may be said to reveal their ideological constitution most. Gaps and silences indicate the places where meanings that are generally current and dominant will tend to fill in. 'He rode into our valley in the summer of '89 ...' sets a number of stereotypes into action, gaps initiating questions like: 'What does "he" signify? 'What was "he" riding?' and so on, which are quickly and noiselessly filled in by ready-to-hand meanings. Of course other meanings are perfectly possible and perfectly plausible, but they don't push themselves forward with the same instant alacrity.

Textual issues could be represented by the following questions that students can apply to a number of different types of text:

#### *Identity*

What kind of people read this text?

Where? Within what institutions?

What would they do with it?

What kind of text is it?

What social activity or activities is it associated with?

What other kinds of texts is it distinguished from?

#### *Context*

What places are represented in the text?

What interiors are there? What exteriors?

What public places are there?

What era is the text set in?

- What tense is the text represented in?
- What social relations are evident in the text?
- What differences are there in status, in identity and in role?

#### *Time*

- What era is the text written in?
- What era is the text being read in?
- How does the era of the text's reading represent the era of its setting?
- What movements in time does the text signify?
- What movements in time do readers have to assume?

#### *Symbolic structure*

- What identities, or 'agents' are there in the text?
- What are their different roles and functions?
- What objects are there in the text?
- What symbolic meanings can be given to these objects?
- What places are represented?
- What is the symbolic meaning of these places?

#### *Narrative structure*

- From what situation does the narrative begin?
- What changes are there?
- What instigates each of these changes?
- What direction is the text moving in at its moments of change?
- Are there any changes in direction?
- What kind of ending does the text have?
- How does the ending organize the movement of the text?

#### *Questions and gaps in the text*

- What questions does the text leave open?
- What possible answers are there to these questions?
- What answers are most likely to be given?
- What assumptions are these answers based on?
- Are there any unanswerable questions?
- What gaps are there in the text – in terms of explanations, details/ descriptions, actions, location and time?
- How are these gaps likely to be filled in?
- Are there gaps that cannot be filled in?

#### *Textual ideology*

- What ideas about the way people behave does the text seem to promote?
- Does the text represent people differently according to – race, class and/or gender?
- How does the text organize its different identities?

- What ideas and attitudes about the world does the text seem to promote?
- What ideas and attitudes about the world does the text assume?
- How does the text seem to address the reader or audience?
- What assumptions does it make about the reader or audience?

The issue of genre may be approached by considering fairy tales as an example, examining two or three texts. The procedure can be relatively simple, involving constructing a structure box; identifying elements and the ways they tend to get organized. One way of concentrating focus to begin with might involve considering the idea of genre in relation to the symbolic structuring of gendered identities, for example, looking at the kinds of roles assigned to male and female characters; looking also at the different ways that texts address male and female identities; and looking at the pleasures these texts seem to yield – in relation to the issues of gender they activate. This example of genre might then be put alongside other genres to see what the differences and similarities are according to the identified points of interest. Example 3.1 shows a structure box and follow-up activities which could be presented to students.

The structure box offers the opportunity to look at general features of the genre, or discourse, of fairy tales. Inside the structure box may go all the elements that might make up fairy stories – elements such as identities, places, events, time and so on. The box can easily be filled in by the students and its contents discussed. The other activities may develop ideas in practice, playing upon the idea of the difference between conventional and less conventional forms and the structuring of elements. The elements of the genre may be identified and explored. The extent that those elements themselves produce certain kinds of meanings can be examined by looking at the possibilities that the genre may offer for redefined meanings. In this way, meaning – the creation and the reading of meaning – may be understood as at least partly a property of genres, and certainly not as something that a text may make for itself, by itself. The example of fairy tales, organized in this way, might also be useful for asking questions about texts and the idea of reality. To what extent might fairy tales be thought to stand in some kind of relation to the way things are outside of fairy tales? Given that fairy tales are understood to belong to the realm of fantasy, a number of ways of looking at them might be considered and discussed: for example, the kind of treatment of fairy tales by psychoanalysts who read unconscious symbolism into them might be considered, their relations with ideas about gender might also be looked at, as might their connections with other narrative forms.

**Example 3.1** Examining the structure of the discourse of fairy tales**Structure Box**

including, for example:

identities  
events  
beginnings  
endings  
time  
places  
objects

Is the reader inside or outside the structure box?  
What about the author?

**Activities**

- Write your own fairy tale using a conventional structure and contents.
- Write a fairy story that changes or challenges the conventional structure and contents.
- Read *Rapunzel* and *The Company Of Wolves*: and discuss in the light of what you have found out about the structure of the discourse of fairy tales.

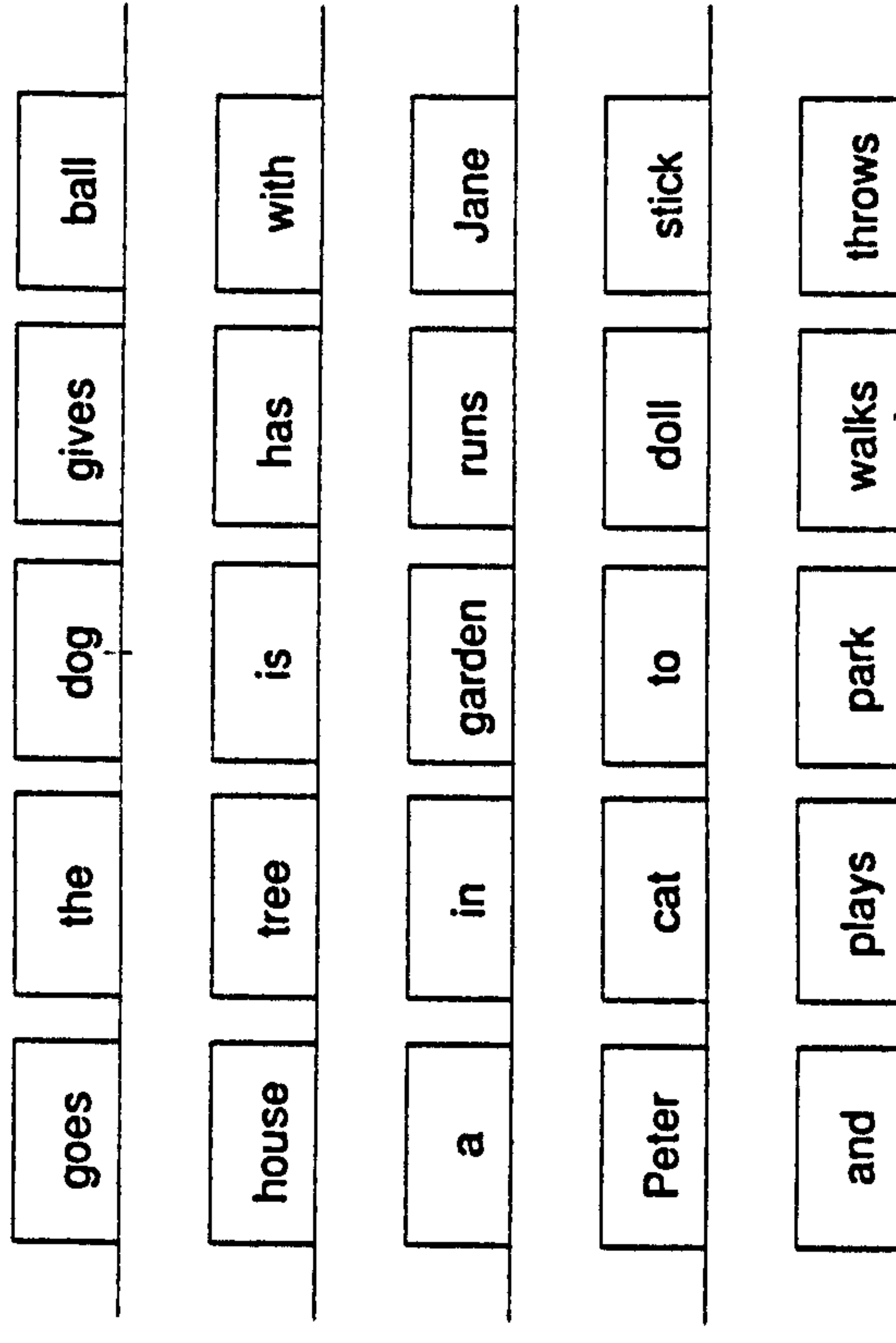
An important aspect of this work – an eminently deconstructive issue – is to examine the idea of what is inside and what is outside the text, so prompting questions about the very identity of the text. The things that are in the text must also refer to things that are outside the text. The idea we may have of the text being something inclusive with clear boundaries cannot then be maintained. All things in the text being also outside of it – even if only as ideas, stereotypes, general categories or common reference points of language – the text cannot then remain stable within itself, but must always hover between its inside and outside. This hovering might be expressed as what the text is. The elements of the text must have meanings that are independent – or outside – of the text, and the configuring of those elements must also correspond to forms of organization that are not unique to the text – these are conditions of the text being recognizable as the kind of text it is, and are also conditions of its being able to mean something.

Then may come the question of the reader – whether the reader is

inside the structure of the text or whether the reader stands clearly outside. What about the author?

The question of genre may be further pursued in a more definitely comparative way by going beyond the limits of one genre to look more explicitly at genres of different kinds – examining the issue in a more generalized sense, though still being able to refer to specific instances.

A sentence maker is, in fact, a kind of writing machine and one that usefully provides a way of looking at textual elements and genre. One way children in primary schools are taught to write and to read (both at the same time) is by using a sentence maker. The sentence maker is a mechanism for writing – and makes use of children's already acquired ability to read. It consists of strips of paper pasted to card that has slots for cards with words written on them to be placed in. Children are given words that they can read and are then asked to put them into some kind of order on their sentence maker. An example is shown in Figure 3.1.



**Figure 3.1** A sentence maker

*Note:* The cards may represent several instances of the same word.

The sentence maker is like a rudimentary language consisting of prepositions, verbs and nouns. The child makes up sentences by selecting the elements and putting them into an order, as the following examples may illustrate:

Jane goes to the park with Peter.

Peter has the ball.

The cat runs to the park with the dog.

The dog has the stick in the park with Jane and the cat.

The tree is in the house

The words are elements of meaning that have to be recognized by the child. But to use the sentence maker the child also has to know how to put the words into a meaningful order or sequence – according to the rules of syntax. The child needs to know, among other things, the conventions of language that enable the elements to be put together into a sequence – the roles and functions that the elements have. While this knowledge may not be conscious – active knowledge about language rarely is – it is absolutely necessary.

This is both a writing and reading machine. In fact, the distinction here between writing and reading may be shown to be unclear – and thus the childish example may illustrate some important ‘grammatological’ points like, for instance, the way that genre determines meaning. The point of the sentence maker in the context I’m proposing is that it provides a relatively simple model for the study of genre and syntax in texts. A sentence maker may be imagined that could be designed for use with any kind of text and would simply consist of elements that would be available to be put into order. So, for example, it is possible to imagine a sentence maker for football commentary or for nuclear physics. In each case the sentence maker would have its own particular elements and in each case the user would need to have knowledge about how the elements might be put together in order to operate it effectively.

A genre sentence maker might have different sets of cards for different textual genres – to illustrate how genres may determine meanings and how different genres may determine how elements may be characteristically combined into sequences. Students could work on producing sets of cards that had on them the characteristic elements of different genres, and could then put the elements into play using a sentence maker to place them and move them around as necessary. In doing this they might explore the ‘rules’ of syntax as they work at the level of genres – determining how narratives get shaped, what identities have what functions, what genres have what kinds of closures; they might look at any of these things in a broad and general way or in a detailed way – depending on the number of elements required to make up a set. The point of this exercise would be to illustrate how genres operate, how the elements and their ordering may be made conscious, and how genres may be ‘interfered with’, manipulated and altered. The

last point may be part of learning how certain genres may deal with certain kinds of cultural stereotypes – familiar images and forms of representation that might be playfully but consciously challenged. Example 3.2 shows how this type of exercise could be presented.

### *Example 3.2* The sentence maker or forms of fiction

Construct sentence makers including necessary and possible component parts for each of these various types of fiction. The components might consist of identities, places, time, events, objects, beginnings, endings and ideas.

- a detective story/novel
- a romantic love story/novel
- a boys’ adventure story/novel
- a nineteenth century story/novel about growing up
- a horror story/novel
- a story/novel about World War II
- an anti-war story novel
- and so on

The sentence maker can consist of a number of cards with single elements written on each. These cards can then be dealt, at random, and then configured into a characteristic ordering of the genre in question. The structure of fictions can then be looked at across a wide field and can be understood from different perspectives: initially from the point of view of their constituent elements; and from the point of view of their forms – the narrative forms that shape and organize the elements. What may also be considered is the different ways these genres tend to configure identities, the different ways they may be read – different kinds of attitudes towards them, different statuses different groups may accord to them. Some kind of speculation might take place about these differences and what produces and maintains them.

It would be important, though, to move beyond the limited realm of fiction for work on genre to have general significance. The extension of the textual field may link, in the first place, cinema narratives with the genres of fiction. But other – equally important though perhaps less likely – connections may be made between genres of fiction and other kinds of writing and representation, such as news items, adverts on TV, newspaper reports and magazine articles on topical issues. A great deal of work could be done examining TV news genres and how these get organized into news programmes; analysing the different kinds of



reports there are, what their characteristic elements are, how they get presented, what ideas they generate and what general forms they take.

The connections between genre and ideology and how these things might position readers or audiences can be developed in relation to a specific example, in this illustrative case, by examining the newspaper report below, going on to answer the questions raised in Example 3.3

#### Treading the Path of Tears

Jan, a sturdy little police collie, tore into the earth of the haunted moorland wilderness. Dank mud caked her black and white fur as she dug relentlessly into the ground, her finely tuned nose seeking to lay the ghosts of Wildcat Quarry. For handler Sergeant Neville Sharp, of West Yorkshire police, it was a horror revisited. He gritted his teeth and held back his fury and tears as his seven year old dog scratched furiously into ground that holds secrets and terrors. Two decades ago he was a young copper assigned to help dig up the mutilated victims of the deranged madness of Myra Hindley and Ian Brady. He had watched as the bodies were exhumed and taken away. 'I was just a lad at the time,' he said yesterday. 'I was so sad, very sad, when I saw those little bodies. I'm a 43 year old now with two daughters of my own. But I shall never forget what I saw on that awful day.'

Sergeant Sharp is one of the eight-strong sniffer dog team who will be minutely inspecting every blade of grass, every mound of earth and every rock on this desolate moorland called Saddleworth. It is a disturbingly grim place, hovering above the Dove Stone reservoir. Little of this bleak landscape has changed since the stomach churning discoveries that first shook the nation all those years ago.

In the quiet village of Greenfield, just two miles away down a winding muddied road, the people are bracing themselves with grim lips to relive the horrors. The village pub, The Clarence, is the place where Brady and Hindley calmly and callously played dominoes after their frequent trips to the moors.

It gives you a feeling of chilling eeriness to stand on Hollin Brow knoll where the abused and tortured body of Lesley Ann Downey had been found. Or to walk across the charmingly named Isle of Skye road and stare at the earth where the mutilated remains of little John Kilbride were discovered.

(*Daily Mirror*, 21 November 1986)

The question about what kind of writing is involved here might provoke some consideration of genre; and this might usefully be directed towards considering the difference between fiction and non-fiction,

**Example 3.3** 'Treading the path of tears': ideology and interpellation – addressing the subject

What kind of writing is this?

What is the function of / what is represented by:

- Jan, the police collie?
- Sergeant Neville Sharp?
- the pub?
- the village of Greenfield?
- Neville Sharpe's daughters?
- the Dove Stone reservoir?
- Saddleworth Moor?
- the ghosts of Wildcat Quarry?
- Myra Hindley and Ian Brady?

How is the reader expected to respond to each of these various things?  
How is the reader positioned by each of them?

How is the reader interpellated and positioned by the story?

examining whether, in this case, a strict difference between the two categories can be maintained. The positioning of the reader by the textual deployment of ready-to-hand stereotypes is clearly evident in this example. Each of the things identified – textual objects, places, identities – carries specific symbolic meaning and orients the reader in certain ways of seeing, thinking and feeling. The police collie associated with Sergeant Neville Sharp clearly represents a kind of natural good. The landscape – Saddleworth Moor, Wildcat Quarry, Hollin Brow Knoll – are associated with a natural eeriness that complements the representation of unfathomable evil in the 'story'.

This type of exercise can be usefully compared with generic features of fairy tales and might be done as complementary to it. It's possible to use this example to highlight the way established reading practices invite you to give 'character' a certain kind of reading to produce the appropriate and inescapable responses. How could you not reject the horror of the Moors murders? Equally, how could you not feel the essential goodness of Neville Sharpe – representative, quintessential policeman, father and kindly dog-handler – a decent man bewildered by senseless, horrific evil. The text promotes the idea of normality – symbolized also by the village with its pub – violated by the outrages of the murderers, and positions the reader to accept these stereotypical identities and meanings as essential, natural and inevitable. The text,

though, does not do this on its own; the reading practices, the positioning of the reader, the intertextual echoes and references, the stereotypes deployed work together to produce the effect.

The theme of genre, the positioning of the reader or audience, and ideology might be pursued in relation to gaps and intertextual references using Example 3.4, which takes the text of *Shane* (Schaefer 1957) as its key text.

#### Examples 3.4. *Shane*: gaps and ideology in the reading of texts

##### Extract

He rode into our valley in the summer of '89

... he was weaving quick and confident. It was incredible, but they could not hurt him...

He was the man who rode into our little valley out of the heart of the great glowing west and when his work was done rode back whence he had come...

From reading the extract above:

- define the possible heroine
- describe important aspects of the setting
- produce a cast-list – with defining characteristics
- outline significant stages in the plot
- describe the hero
- identify important objects
- identify important ideas

and, finally, consider how it is possible to answer all these questions.

Most of the essential components of the narrative and its developments are somehow contained in these brief lines. The responses from students presented with the following questions are likely to be fairly developed, fairly precise and 'accurate'; but the critical question, in relation to the kinds of responses that may be produced, is concerned with where this knowledge comes from and how – unconsciously and apparently automatically – it gets transferred to the few clues that are offered by the textual material. It seems that a whole range of details, a whole body of knowledge may be triggered into play by a few textual clues. This seems to be something that is a feature of how meanings are generated by signs. Visual and linguistic signs may operate in quite similar ways, and the text above – the radically pared down version of *Shane* – could be compared with images from Clint Eastwood films,

images that generate very similar sets of stereotypical responses and ideas. It could also be compared with and set alongside a range of other texts that would seem to activate very similar stereotypical images and ideas; and the business of where meaning comes from and of the relations between meaning, texts, and culturally produced sets of meaning may then be – in a preliminary way, at least – explored. Adverts of various types, for example, might provide ample material for comparison and development. Popular music, popular forms of fiction of certain types, and many cultural products would be relevant. At issue, explicitly and immediately, could be the question of masculine identity and its various different representations in culturally powerful media forms.

The main questions asked of the *Shane* extracts could be broken down into a host of questions, such as those below:

- Who was he?
- What kind of past did he have?
- Was he married?
- How old was he?
- Where did he come from?
- What was his ethnic identity?
- What kind of clothes was he wearing?
- (What colour clothes was he wearing?)
- Who is 'speaking'?
- What is the gender of the speaker?
- How old 'was' the speaker 'then'?
- How old 'is' the speaker 'now'?
- What is the ethnic identity of the speaker?
- What is going on in the valley?
- Where is the valley?
- Who are 'they'?
- What gender are 'they'?
- How many of them were there?
- Did they want to hurt him?
- How long did it take to do his work?
- What was the work that was done?

There are many more questions like those above. How can it be possible to answer these questions? It obviously is possible. That it is possible – actually necessary for there to be a story – indicates how reading literary texts depends on the operation of assumptions and familiarity with genres. This puts a decisive emphasis on the role of the reader, but it is important not to assume that the reader has a free choice in

answering these questions. The answers are strictly limited by dominant cultural ideas, and these dominant ideas – or ideological conditions – are written into established reading practices. It is evident, from the exercise above, that the text is dependent for its meaning and its functioning on meanings outside of itself, meanings it brings into play via reading practices. These theoretical points – antithetical to common-sense accounts of reading – can be made available to students using the above exercise.

The business of addressing the wider textual field is necessarily complemented by the placing of texts within a field. This implies consideration of how texts are given differently defined identities. In turn, this implies a system regulating and determining the identities and statuses of texts, though the system may not be explicitly formulated. Students may be directed to look at aspects of texts apart from what is conventionally designated as content. Signs of the identity of the text within a system of differing textual identities may be examined. Questions may be asked about how these identities are maintained, and whether they operate with equal force within different contexts.

While looking at the 'packaging' of books may now have become a fairly standard kind of activity, it would be a significant development to go beyond the examination of individual texts looked at in their disparities and to begin to build a sense of texts being placed within a larger – mobile but structured – textual field. It would be important for the exercise outlined in Example 3.5, for instance, to consider other kinds of texts as well as those conventionally addressed by routine English.

Similar analysis could be applied to other texts – TV programmes, sporting events and their representations in various media, material objects and their representations in adverts, for example. All these 'texts' could be looked at in terms of the way that their identity is readable from various features granting them status, placing them within a specific arena or textual field.

An important aspect of this work is that it addresses the idea of the textual field in general and the idea of different texts and media producing different textual fields. In relation to the idea of the textual field, students can produce readings of novels alongside readings of other texts of a very different order. Once the textual field is opened and addressed, the idea of reading practices – practices like those in English, for example, that favour only certain kinds of texts – can be set alongside and seen against others. A network of texts and fields can be produced. Students may be engaged on a project to begin to tabulate

### Example 3.5 Fictional Identities

Choose 3 novels and examine each for clues as to its identity such as:

- the front cover
- the back cover
- first paragraph
- names in the text
- kind of language used
- kind of print
- point of view of narration
- references to objects
- places
- any indicators of cultural context

Write about how, in each case, the identified features work to give the text an identity.

different fields and texts. A model might be produced that begins to figure how different texts could be positioned – a kind of intertextual network – illustrating how various texts and kinds of texts are differentiated and connected. Examining the textual field in this way, it can be shown that textual identities are configured in certain ways by particular reading practices; reading practices that, in turn, can be shown to belong to particular cultural practices and to particular kinds of institutions and institutional practices. Emphasis is given, then, to an idea of reading practices moving well beyond the scope of English and its idiosyncratic predilection for fictions of a particular and limited kind.

This project, although beginning with looking at the identities of different kinds of fiction texts by reading certain 'external' signs, intends to a) place texts within fields and within a larger field, and b) demonstrate that texts, their meanings and the reading practices that give them meaning are variously and differently situated and defined. So questions about meaning – and how it operates within particular cultural formations – may be pursued, looking for example at how meanings produced by ways of reading Shakespeare might be compared with meanings produced by readings of Levi jeans or *Rambo*, or Black and Decker power tools. Different discourses, it can be shown, employ interconnecting ideas, using similar and different signs to produce related meanings, meanings, though, that retain some consistency of identity in their cultural contexts – and that are not intrinsic to special texts.

It might be useful for students on courses currently titled 'English Literature' to consider examples of what is signified and understood by the designation. The following approach to *Great Expectations* offers a way of reinscribing the text – or elements of it – into other forms, providing a positively deconstructive approach to its identity and status as English Literature. More information could be provided about the outline of the narrative. Students could be asked to fill in gaps and construct the outline of a 'drama' using a list of some structural functions, such as those given in Example 3.6 below.

**Example 3.6 *Great Expectations*: some structural functions and extracts**

#### Structural Functions

- an orphan boy, brought up in a country forge who has a wealthy benefactor
- an escaped convict, later captured and deported to Australia, who returns in secret a wealthy man much later
- a powerful London lawyer
- a bizarre and very wealthy old woman jilted when young
- a beautiful but cold young woman, 'adopted' by the old woman
- the forge where the orphan boy is brought up
- the eccentric old woman's ramshackle house
- the lawyer's office
- the orphan boy's London lodgings
- Newgate prison
- a file
- a large inheritance
- moving from home in the country to London
- falling in love
- an unexpected return
- an arrest and a trial
- a fire
- a final meeting

#### Extracts

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip...

I took it upon myself to impress Biddy (and through Biddy, Joe) with the grave obligation I considered my friends under, to know nothing

and say nothing about the maker of my fortune. It would all come out in good time, I observed, and in the meanwhile nothing was to be said, save that I had come into great expectations from a mysterious patron. Biddy nodded her head thoughtfully at the fire as she took up her work again, and said she would be very particular; and Joe, still detaining his knees, said 'Ay, Ay, I'll be ekervally partickler, Pip,' and they congratulated me again, and went on to express so much wonder at the notion of my being a gentleman, that I didn't half like it...

I took her hand in mine and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so, the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.

More information about *Great Expectations* might be provided, including, for example, an account of the narrative and how it configures the structural functions. Students might be asked to consider, in relation to the limited material they've been given, what themes might be in play. They might also be invited to consider what kind of narrative structure is involved, what kind of narrative position is taken and how this may place the position of the reader. They might also be asked to take into account the identity of *Great Expectations* within the order of English Literature, considering how this might determine the kind of reading it would be given and the kinds of meanings that could be made of it, as well as considering the kind of audience this would tend to imply. All these issues could be dealt with by discussion or by providing further material – perhaps by providing sets of questions dealing with each.

Practical work, though, could be organized around the idea of transposition – raising the question of what happens to the identity of *Great Expectations*, and to its 'meaning', if it gets transposed into other forms. Students could be invited to transpose the narrative features of *Great Expectations* they've been given into the following types of text: an American soap opera, a UK soap opera, an Australian soap opera or a Hollywood detective film, and might devise storyboards and produce dialogue for each different type based on a few chosen scenes. They might also be invited, for example, to produce scripted 'trailers' for each kind of text, considering what kind of audience, and what kind of audience interests, they want to address. Other kinds of transposition could also be considered, for example: women's magazine stories, TV adverts; conversations held by different groups of people in different contexts could also be considered.

According to this kind of procedure, the identity of the text, its structural properties, its themes and its meanings can be seen to belong to a particular context – the context of English Literature – in the first place; but all those things can be transposed into many different contexts, shifting the text's identity, shifting its meanings, too, so that the idea of special properties and special meanings belonging to specific texts in any kind of essential way may be effectively, practically deconstructed. In the process many important points about the placing of texts within different arenas in the textual field may be raised.

Understanding ideas like textual fields and discourses producing meanings is not very closely allied to the practices associated with the idea of personal response – not in its routine forms, anyway. Structures of meaning generate structures of response too, and institutions, like the institution of English, for example, also legitimate, organize and control appropriate and proper responses. This is, no doubt, one of the time-honoured functions of English. In spite of the theological aura of the mystical that sometimes attends references to it, there is nothing mysterious or subterranean about the business of personal response and (there's nothing much *personal* about it, either). English quite clearly *demand*s certain kinds of responses to certain kinds of writing – and what English syllabuses mean by personal response is really quite strictly restrained. Unconstrained personal response is likely, in certain circumstances, to get you into trouble, or at least to exclude you from entry into the charmed circle of legitimate attainment. However, exercises may be constructed to examine the business of reading and response, and theory can be produced that analyses forms of response in a quite direct manner. The suggestion in Example 3.7 inverts the text-response formula, in that it *begins* by looking at likely responses.

The business of personal response, though, may be more complex than this outline of structural features suggests. A different approach to personal response – one that addressed ideas like interpellation and identification in a theoretical manner – would be required to reach beyond the apparent limits of the idea as it is predominantly conceived by the official versions of English and by its dominant practices. Questions might be asked about how English demands these kinds of response, how other kinds of response are excluded, what the consequences might be of refusing certain forms of response, and so on.

This kind of analysis of specific genres of poetry and their habitual forms of expression may well be linked in with other kinds of work on genre – genres of fiction, for example. The sections defined by the points above enable students to analyse how features, and responses,

### Example 3.7 Poems and personal response

Write a list of appropriate responses to each of the following types of poem:

- a poem about a scene in nature or a natural object
- a war poem
- a poem on time and death
- a poem of forsaken love
- a poem of the urban environment
- Write a list of metaphors/similes for each of these types of poem.
- Write a list of metonyms for each of these types of poem.
- Write a list of words signifying objects for each of these types of poem.
- Write a list of words signifying moods for each of these types of poem.
- Write a list of rhetorical features appropriate to each of these types of poem.

How, then, are personal responses to all of these things organized by these different types of text?

are produced by the deployment of genres – and how, in turn, the genres will tend to delimit the kinds of expression that are possible. This kind of work could easily be analysed along with the kind of treatment of poetry that demands personal response – when personal response may be a good deal less intimate and individual than imagined. Another direction that this work might take would be to transpose the signifying elements and responses onto different forms, so that exactly the same kinds of responses and features that are attributed to poetry as a special category can be attributed to other – and often contrasting – forms of expression. It might be demonstrated that a John Donne poem can elicit similar responses to a TV car advert. That kind of exercise could be undertaken in a general project, one of the effects of which would be to deconstruct the identity of poetry, to demystify its special status and to demonstrate that, as a special category assumed to be worthy of attention in and for itself, it is not really plausible. While the kind of work outlined above could be simply used to identify structural properties of certain kinds of poetry, it would be more critical and more adventurous not to leave it at that, but to pursue questions about the institutional identity and value of poetry.

The identity of poetry in general may be subjected usefully and positively to deconstructive critique. Another aspect of this kind of project might involve some comparative analysis of texts belonging in a thoroughly established sense to official English Literature. The texts in question hold their place according to the notion of English Literature that still remains institutionally dominant. The specific texts of English Literature are in it because they are believed to be of value in themselves. They represent fine expression, sensitive feeling, cogent thought and other admirable qualities. Exposure to these texts gives access to these special qualities – at least, that has been the theory of English Literature and the justification for its continued existence.

What happens, though, if we analyse the apparent values of English Literature as expressed in some of its representative texts? What happens if we set these texts alongside texts that are generally deemed by the institution of English Literature to be inferior, to belong, in themselves, to inferior modes of representation with inferior forms of expression; texts that are deemed, by implication, at least, to be more crude, less subtle and to be of less sensitive emotional quality; texts that are deemed to be decidedly inferior, if not altogether absent, in quality of thought? What happens if these different texts of divergent and, in some senses at least, opposing identities, are examined in relation to one specific topic that seems relevant to their apparent content?

The contrast elaborated in Example 3.8 invites comparison between various texts differentiated according to their modes, their identities and their relative statuses. Within the field of English, Marvell must occupy a position distinct from Madonna, and that distinction must be based on the notion of superiority of some kind – otherwise the idea of English Literature as valuable and worthy in itself must collapse. But if we compare these texts from the point of view of how they represent women, how they address women and how they seem to position male and female readers, it's difficult to see how the texts of English Literature – according to conventional reading practices, anyway – can escape the charge of an intransigent sexism. Here – in relation to all these texts – important questions about texts, their identities and their meanings can be pursued. Taking a specific perspective, the difference between textual identities – construed as a difference in quality – collapses. What are the implications of this deconstructive effect?

'Fiction and reality' represents a complex network of issues that might take analysis and classroom activity in many different directions. The largeness and complexity of the topic though need not –

### Example 3.8 Madonna and English Literature

Texts:

#### English Literature

To His Coy Mistress

The Flea

Goe Lovely Rose

#### Madonna

Like A Prayer

Cherish

Express Yourself

Answer the following questions in relation to these texts:

- What different kinds of language do these texts use?
- What different identities are likely to be given to these texts?
- What different kinds of status are likely to be given to these texts?
- In what different contexts might these texts be given different identities and statuses?
- What words or other signs are used in these texts about women?
- What images of women are there in these texts?
- What assumptions or ideas about women do they seem to portray?
- What attitudes towards women are expressed in these texts?
- How do these texts position the reader?
- How might different readings of these texts be made by men and by women?
- What are the implications of this comparison – between English Literature and Madonna – for the identity of English Literature in education?
- And Madonna?

and should not – prevent its being tackled. The classic way that literature in English has of dealing with the issue is to equate certain texts with certain kinds of representation of the real – thus suppressing the problematics of representation, evading the business of textual constructions and the force of the 'imaginary'. No text can escape from the medium of its representation; texts cannot reach directly into reality and demonstrate it. Texts are deemed to be real or realistic on the basis of decisions that determine them as real or realistic. Habitual ways of reading – of watching TV, for example – are often highly conscious, in their everyday terminology, of the constructedness of texts. Texts, though, are not constructed by processes that are unique to themselves.

They make sense through reference to recognizable signs, signs that get deployed in other texts. In all these senses the representation of reality – or rather the assumption of reality – is something affirmed by particular perspectives on reality. Reality itself – in some pure and direct sense – is no more directly representable than it is directly perceptible.

'Drama and the representation of reality' is a topic that might usefully address issues of representation while also addressing what might be called the idea of the autonomous drama text. Some attempt at this admittedly unwieldy project could begin with a single text that enjoys the status of a 'drama text', such as *Romeo and Juliet*. The initial complication in this case is the fact that the drama text in question is also a relatively popular film – popular in English in schools, anyway. The following points or a selection of them could be addressed as a generalized way of looking at *Romeo and Juliet* – as drama text and film – before beginning to approach the issue of what drama is and how it might or might not stand in relation to the representation of reality:

- the context – setting: in terms of time, place and social order; the interplay between order and disorder in the text;
- the style of the text: language, mode of presentation, points of view;
- the direction of the narrative – as tragedy;
- the symbolic ordering of the texts – significant figures and objects, their roles and functions;
- stereotypes deployed in the text: other texts, and kinds of texts, they connect with;
- textual ideology: ideas and issues promoted by the text and how they are represented;
- the status of the text and its institutional identity: the position the text takes up in the textual field; its identity in relation to other texts similar and different;
- alternative views of the text: other ways of interpreting it, or other ways of perceiving it – from the established;
- the context of reception, the context of reading – how this might affect the kind of meanings that get made of it and responses to it;
- the different forms of the text: reading text, film and play, and how these differences might determine meanings and responses.

This more inclusive approach to a single text can be useful in so far as it tends to offer multiple ways of looking at the text, offering different perspectives on meaning and identity that suggest strongly that the text is not some simple unity held together by itself, defining its place in the

order of things textual, or giving itself specific and limited meanings. The effect of all this is to problematize, though perhaps indirectly, the idea of the presentation of 'reality' and, by implication, at least, to suggest that reality itself, in relation to texts, is always something constructed and represented. If the meaning of the text is uncertain, ambiguous, shifting according to different factors, and if the identity of the text is granted to it, temporarily, by social convention, then the notion of some kind of direct communication of the real or of truth, is not really sustainable.

The identity of the literary text – as a discrete category, with special meanings and subtleties of its own – can be neatly deconstructed along with the idea of textual place, time and context. In Example 3.9, the idea of a special context for a literary text is deconstructed by placing it alongside a contemporary text – of very different status – and finding a number of similarities.

### Example 3.9 Why Summerbay and Verona are the same

Look at the way each text – *Romeo and Juliet* and 'Home and Away' – represents and organizes a sense of place.

What features of place are shown and what are their different functions?

Look at how the following things are represented by each text and compare them:

- clothes
- young love
- generation differences
- the family
- masculinity
- femininity

Exercises can also be devised that effectively deconstruct the integrity of textual meaning and textual identities by examining how different meanings might be construed for the same text. Looking also at how the same meanings or differences in meaning might also be construed for texts of widely differing identities, the idea of special qualities belonging intrinsically to specific categories of text is also deconstructed, as shown in Example 3.10. Unusual connections might be made, and a whole class might work together to create unusual combinations.

**Example 3.10** Contradictory readings: common-sense and alternative approaches

Take a text – perhaps a ‘standard’ text from English Literature, *Macbeth*, say – and decide on three important themes, ideas or topics ‘in’ it. Do the same with another kind of text – for example a soap opera such as ‘Eastenders’.

In *Macbeth* for instance you may choose the family, gender difference and personal identity. For each of these find three sections of the text and explain how a) a common-sense reading, and b) an alternative reading might use these sections of text.

Consider the implications this exercise might have for textual identity and status.

From the starting point shown in Example 3.10, work could be done on an oral presentation or a piece of writing showing a) how texts can be subject to contradictory reading, and b) how *Macbeth* might produce the same kind of contradictory readings as ‘Eastenders’.

While it might be useful, and interesting to examine single texts as examples of types or genres or specific textual identities, it might also be useful to do some work that directly addresses categories of texts. The suggestions in Example 3.11 about dealing with the idea of drama might well be transposed to refer to stories or poems.

Most of the examples of work that might be done with classes so far has had a specifically textual focus, and the texts in question, while not necessarily belonging to the established order of English have, nonetheless, been recognizable as texts. It would be important to emphasize, though, that all language is textual – is structured by form, genre, context and identity. It would be important, too, to bring the general textuality of language into play in teaching that addressed reading – or writing or oracy, the clear distinction between these categories being open to deconstruction along the lines suggested by the work addressing textuality. It would certainly be a move towards liberation from specific textual categories to examine a range of texts incorporating things that would be unlikely, under the present regime, to be considered texts.

### A RANGE OF TEXTS

In English lessons reading has traditionally, but questionably, tended to focus on the single text. The reading of the single text, depends on certain notions of meaning and value. It effectively limits the scope of

### Example 3.11 Deconstructing drama

We can look at the idea of drama in relation to different forms and the representation of reality, considering such aspects as:

- staging
- roles
- audiences
- performance
- construction

Consider the ways these ideas can be applied to:

- an Australian soap opera
- an Indiana Jones film
- a news broadcast
- a sporting event

Looking at drama, narrative and the organization of identities and meanings, consider the way these different kinds of drama ‘stage’ and represent:

class	the family
gender	race
gender orientation	individual identity

ideas and activities, in an ideological sense as well as in a practical sense. Comparative textual work – where it does occur – still tends to put together texts of similar identity and status, when more productive effects might be achieved by looking at texts of disparate kinds and by looking at cultural phenomena that are not usually defined as texts. This might be construed as a deliberate move away from the idea that ‘reading’ itself is identical with literature, or with what *English 5-16* refers to (rather indeterminately) as ‘the literary text’.

The idea of drama, ‘the drama text’ is a case in point. At GCSE, or ‘Keystage Four’ – even on 100% coursework courses – there has been the requirement that drama be one of the categories of literature statutorily studied to meet the demands of the literature syllabus. The integrity and distinctness of the drama text, since it is never specified nor elaborated, is assumed. A different approach to the idea of drama, to the idea of the drama text, though – interested in definitions and identities – might explore a far wider field of materials than the routine notion of drama allows for, might put together combinations of different cultural products and phenomena. The point is not simply to produce unusual combinations, but to give explicit recognition to the



idea that there is a textual 'field', and within that field texts are positioned, given certain kinds of identities, and that the meanings of texts belong to the general kinds of cultural meaning given to signs that move within the general field. Deconstructing the established identity of texts in this sense doesn't mean that you simply deny differences. It means that you examine where differences come from, how they get established and what assumptions go with them. It also means that you make explicit systems of meaning that go beyond the limits of one single text or one single category of texts.

Putting together disparate texts is perfectly feasible within the 'real' limits of English in schools. In order to look at drama in the first place students might be asked to consider what is understood by that term. What different kinds of drama are there? Theatre, TV plays, films, soap operas, are common forms of drama that are readily recognizable. But what, then, does *drama* mean? Is it necessarily related to acting, to roles being put into play, with dialogue, with action, and so on? If so, then other activities may surely be construed as drama. What about sporting events? Or 'real life' dramas? What about items in a news broadcast? And what, then, might be the essential difference between drama and fiction in novel form? Is there an *essential* difference between drama and items in a TV news broadcast, or between drama and certain kinds of item in newspapers that may include features ascribed to drama? Comics, of many kinds, may well be regarded as drama. Looked at in this way the idea of drama – and therefore, surely, of the drama text – seem to spill over the conventional limits.

There's no reason why the film *Witness* – to begin with one example among innumerable possibilities – should not be studied as drama text. Although, it might be argued that it doesn't come within the scope of the subject, not only is it as 'good' a text as any to study, it is as 'literary' a text as any, and as much a drama as any 'scripted' drama text – as much scripted, too, though with a different kind of script perhaps. Any doubts about these matters are produced by the illusory identity of literature. Doubts about the authenticity of *Witness* as drama text – practically, in terms of what the letter of the syllabus might demand – can be dispelled by rendering parts of the dialogue into written form. With a script – so the conventional wisdom goes – it becomes a drama text, never suspecting that as a film it already has a written form, that film is just a different kind of writing. Indeed, watching film requires as much interpretative work as anything else. It is not – as is sometimes assumed – a 'passive' activity. As much 'reading' is required to make sense of *Witness* as to make sense of any other text.

In relation to *Witness*, an aspect of the text identified as 'literary'

could be construed as the staging of 'traditional' American values associated with the conventional virtues of the cowboy film. These values and ideas can be identified as intertextually related to *Shane*, a literary text, as well as referring to countless cowboy films. Toughness, determination and independence in relation to masculine identity can be seen as factors in these different texts of different identity. Literary values can be seen as related to ideas that operate in cultural forms unlikely to be identified as literary. These values and ideas, though, are not exclusive to the cowboy novel or film. They can be perceived at work in any number of texts of so-called popular culture: Levi Jeans adverts, for example. They can also be seen to be at work in the more remote and revered texts of English literature. It is quite possible to construe aspects of the character and the role and the structural and symbolic functions of the Prince in *Hamlet* as perfectly in accord with certain kinds of qualities attributed to the cowboy hero. 'In what ways is the hero of *Hamlet* the same as the hero of *Witness*?' is a question that students might be invited to consider. There's no reason why this question of the idea of the hero should not be applied to *Twinkle*, the girl's magazine, or to any number of news items, sporting events or to a whole range of contexts and 'texts'. This kind of movement between texts is possible because texts must constantly refer beyond themselves, to other texts, to general cultural signs and meanings, in order to be able to make sense. The idea, then, of some special category of meaning, the 'literary', or 'drama', for example, can't really be maintained.

Special categories of texts demand that the texts in those categories have special properties. But the notion that texts contain the meanings they operate is one that's worth exploring. How can sense be made of the difference between what's inside a text and what's not? The interface between outside and inside of texts – and the implications this has for the activation of cultural meanings – may easily be approached by students, perhaps using the pointers outlined in Example 3.12.

### Example 3.12 Inside and outside the text

Make a list of features in the text – objects, identities, places, words, images, ideas.

Underline all the features inside the text that might be considered also to be outside the text.

Give meanings to all the features that you have underlined – inside and outside the text.

This exercise can be extended to look at different texts, like *Hamlet*, *Witness* and news items where there might be features in common. The implications are clearly deconstructive for the idea of the integrity of the text. It can be seen that meanings move in and between texts, that they are not securely lodged within single texts.

Meanings change, are shifted and extended in relation to general cultural shifts. The meanings that inform the way that we make sense of texts are – theoretically, at least – the same in relation to *Hamlet* as they are in relation to *Twinkle* or the 'Nine o'clock News'. The meanings that are actually made of these things may be different and may depend on the position of the 'spectator', and the way the 'spectator' regards the identity of the text.

Deconstructing the idea of the integrity of the text by looking at what's inside and what's outside the text – and how this distinction cannot be maintained – might also be developed in relation to textual gaps showing how any apparent continuity of the narrative is illusory. Gaps in a text indicate, clearly, what's been left out. But, then, everything that isn't in the text has been left out. Some gaps in(?) the text, though, are more glaring than others, more present, as it were, by their absence. Any text depends for its effects on gaps – where questions that might be asked are not, and where the spectator must fill spaces by making assumptions. These assumptions clearly must come from outside the text, they must belong to a set of established assumptions that come into operation when reading texts. These might be referred to as reading practices. In the case of *Witness*, for example, many gaps might be identified. How did Rachel's husband die? When and how did John Book learn carpentry? It hardly seems significant that we don't know the colour of John Book's grandmother's eyes. We assume, though, that Rachel's didn't murder her husband, because that would be incompatible with her textual identity and textual function. We can assume almost anything we like about how or where John Book learned carpentry, if we want to, because the text doesn't invite such questions (though we mustn't assume that he learnt carpentry in jail where he was serving time for fraud under a false identity): it is simply necessary for the progress of the narrative and the symbolic ordering at work that John Book have carpentry skills. So, he has them. But it becomes increasingly evident, as the pursuit of questions relating to gaps goes on that the text 'in-itself' doesn't ask or suppress these questions; it's the reading practices that determine what the text is, how it functions, what meanings it bears. The 'events' of the text can be taken to show how the narrative structure is carefully and formally

organized, yet may also illustrate how the reading process must assume and produce connections to make a meaningful sequence. Once the operations of assumptions are foregrounded, the whole of the integrity of the text can be seen to depend upon them, upon assumptions that are not in the text at all but must be always outside of it. Gaps and intertextuality may be used as initiating points for an explicitly philosophical enquiry into reading practices, into the production of textual meanings, or in other words – and to put it in the elevated language of formal literary theory – into a general grammarology.

*Witness* offers a clear example of the dependence of reading and interpretation on an intertextuality going in many different directions. Themes of order, difference and identity might be attributed to *Hamlet*, just as they might be attributed to *Witness*; but the same themes might equally well be attributed to any number of texts, including Levi jeans adverts, *Twinkle* magazine, or many features on TV news programmes. The idea of intertextuality does away with the idea that meanings are generated by anything strictly intrinsic to the text-in-itself. It's only by making reference to other, already established (textual) meanings – moments and codes – that the film can make sense. Traditional reading practices with their customary notions of the unique literary text engaging personal responses are unlikely to withstand the idea of intertextuality and the chains of meanings and connections it might mobilize. Focusing on intertextuality suggests a process operating always beyond – and against – the idea of the free-standing, self-contained text. Discounting intertextuality not only has a limiting effect on the procedures of textual analysis; it tends also to limit questions of meanings and values to the personal.

The meanings that texts deploy, the meanings that oscillate between inside and outside the text, are configured textually by the production of a context, though this too is produced in relation to ideas about contexts and textual settings. This issue also might be explored with students. It's often useful to examine the way a text's opening addresses the spectator, to examine the kinds of meanings it refers to by way of establishing a context. The opening sequence of *Witness*, for example, could be examined as an opening sequence, to look at how, metaphorically, metaphorically, it evokes a period, an atmosphere, a community, a set of expectations, how the music works, how we are being prepared for the fact that a story is about to unfold, and a context is being established. Further intertextual questions, addressing aspects of the identity of the text might be considered: What is dramatic about all this? What kind or kinds of drama does *Witness* enact? Quite disparate texts might be examined in the same kind of way.

By examining the relations between what is inside the text and what is outside, the idea of the integrity of the text is deconstructed. Listing, say, twenty important things inside the text, is a way of beginning. How many of these things are outside the text? Where, then, does their meaning come from? Where then is the meaning of the text? Inside or outside? And so on. Any text may be used to develop this kind of approach. The main point being that texts are not objects in themselves, but the occasions for reading practices to be played out. And reading practices put values into play.

Meanings – or rather readings of meanings – are related to the issue of genre. Genres might be conceived of as reading forms that carry with them established sets of assumptions. With *Witness*, questions might be asked about how the film establishes its genre identity, when there may be shifts in genre identity, what kind of effects shifts in genre identity might produce. An exercise in transposition might invite consideration of what would happen if *Witness* were read in the same way that *Hamlet* is read, or *Twinkle* or news items or Levi jeans adverts. Transpositions of this kind could be used to examine the different kinds of status that are accorded to texts. Suggesting that similar kinds of culturally established meanings operate in texts of widely differing status might have positively deconstructive effects.

As any of the above points indicates, the text in question is not the exclusive focus of attention; it is more of a 'pretext' for examining ideas about and features of textuality in a more generalized sense, for building up a new vocabulary for dealing with texts, and for providing a means for the critical examination of textual productions, and textual identities – and in the end for the institutions that maintain and purvey these things. An outline for work taking *Witness* as an initial focus might also be applied to quite different things.

In Example 3.13 specific features are examined in relation to 'textual ideology' – the meanings drawn from a general cultural arena, activated and organized by the text in question. Clearly this must involve looking at how features of the text refer to ideas beyond themselves – as metaphors loaded with meanings – and must also take into consideration genre as an organizing principle of meanings.

Looking at how particular identities are signified will indicate the components of a symbolic order of meaning. In the case of *Witness*, examples could be: McPhee as the callous, slightly dandified, villain, representative of an essentially corrupt world; Samuel, the Amish boy as innocent witness, vulnerable outsider, representing a world of simple, pacifistic, values, admirable but inadequate in the hard world of Philadelphia; John Book, tough, independent hero, essentially

### Example 3.13 Textual and intertextual analysis

Read *Witness*, *Hamlet*, Levi jeans adverts, *Twinkle* and newspaper and TV news items, and discuss and list:

- events
- objects
- identities and roles
- important images/stills

What do the above mean *inside* and *outside* the text? You may also wish to consider:

- context: landscape and community/interiors: interiors and exteriors
- oppositions
- intertextual references
- gaps in the text – assumptions
- signs of genre
- status of the text

good, embattled with the forces of evil.

Objects in texts, like identities, can be seen to carry symbolically loaded meanings, meanings that are organized by the context of the text. In the case of *Witness*, Rachel's bonnet might be identified as an example, signifying Rachel's attachment to the Amish community, and so the film emphasises the moment of its removal as she gives herself sexually to John Book (having, of course, already fallen in love with him), who represents other attractions, different values. John Book's gun signifies the difference between his world and the world of the Amish and his Amish clothes signify his temporary belonging to that community.

Particular moments will contain a cluster of symbolically loaded effects. So, the moment of the murder in the station toilet can be shown to establish the Amish boy, Samuel, as witness; it can be shown to establish Philadelphia as the dangerous context of the 'real world' where men must be more than usually tough. The moment of the barn-raising establishes the positive, if limited, values of the Amish world, values which are to be preserved and protected by the American way of life, values John Book can admire with wry superiority from the vantage point of someone who has their kind of skills himself (he's a carpenter, of all things), but who moves more easily in a wider world. The points made here could be raised with students by means of a series of carefully directed questions.

Significant events, objects, moments: all can thus be perceived as

different but completely interdependent aspects of a signifying system which operates according to already established codes and is inescapably ideological. Ideology here, though, does not necessarily indicate a fixed system. Although meanings deployed may depend on reference to stereotypes, and genre may control how meanings are organized, readings of these things may be shown to be mobile. A politics of reading – aware of symbolic orderings and variant readings – may begin to emerge, as the focus of this kind of enquiry moves beyond the confines of the single text. Objects, identities, moments and genres in TV adverts – Levi jeans, for instance – might be examined for their symbolic meanings. Objects, identities, moments and genres in news items might be looked at in a similar way. The way that meanings are activated and organized can then be explicitly addressed. Being explicit, alternatives can also be considered. Different ways of watching and reading can be considered allowing different contexts of watching and reading to be brought into play.

The section asking for an account of community is useful in raising ideas about the representation of culture, values and ideology. The textual construction of the idea of community – associated with the representation of place and of social relations – clearly engages matters of value and ideology. Views representing how the world is are features of the way texts position and engage audiences in relation to a context. Texts on this view construct *ideas* of how the world is rather than representing it as it really is. This applies as much to dramas like news items and documentaries as it does to *Witness*, *Hamlet*, TV adverts or *Twinkle*. Established reading practices have only partial resources for addressing the idea of the textual construction of reality, and they still preserve certain kinds of texts from any critical account of textual ideology and status.

In relation to the idea of drama, a body of work that looked at disparate texts and construed them as drama – or narrative, for example – might seriously re-address the idea of the representation of reality. Looking at texts in the way suggested above insists on the construction of 'reality', and, along with a phenomenology of the reading of texts, makes the whole idea of reality problematic, emphasising as it does the provisional nature of textual identities, meanings and interpretations while offering at the same time the idea of alternative reading modes.

Textual issues cannot be separated from issues concerning values and ethics. The reading of texts may depend on interpreting codes and on recognizing intertextual references. But codes and their meanings are

not produced by texts, they don't reside with any stability within texts, nor do they exist independently of texts. They are themselves a kind of textual language, a language that may be interpreted differently, that is subject to ambiguities and to alternative forms of expression, just like any other language. A critical view of text might ask – in relation to the matter of values – what values does the text seem to represent? What other ideas in relation to values might be brought to bear upon a reading of this text? What different cultural positions – with different values – might this text be read from? So questions of values may be foregrounded by certain approaches to texts.

### REDEFINING THE TEXTUAL FIELD

The idea of intertextuality is very simply demonstrable in this case. Students will have no difficulty in explaining the idea to themselves – nor in illustrating it. Any part of the film, visual moment, important event, or important object, anything going towards making up its signifying structure can only mean whatever it means because it refers, beyond itself, to the same or a similar thing in another text. All texts are connected with other texts, and could not be read if they were not so connected. The connectedness is not casual, either – not a haphazard kind of random cross-referencing. It is more in the nature of a dependency. In our own culture, for example, the reading of narrative (as narrative) fiction is determined, phenomenologically speaking, by the idea of narrative fiction preceding any reading of it. This, not usually explicit, idea will be influenced by the reading of films as much as by the reading of narrative fiction in book form. Narratives or stories are not, in the ways they function, strictly different from form to form. Films, novels, Shakespeare plays, TV adverts are all caught up in the play of intertextuality. And so we may return with a quizzical glance to the formulations of *English 5-16*: about 'positive attitudes towards books and literature' (Are they possibly different from one another? What is literature? What is a 'positive attitude?'); about 'the three main literary genres', and all the other many and varied references to literature and its importance. We may now question the ideas and processes that seek to keep the study of 'literature' as a discrete, but essentially unformulated category, separate from media studies and separate from a wider conception of textual studies. It is, of course, necessary to maintain the category of literature in order to maintain present definitions of literacy, present orderings and hierarchies of literacy. These definitions of difference are outmoded in terms of the real cultural experiences of our students,

just as they are philosophically untenable and ideologically loaded. Is *Witness* a literary text? It operates according to the same principles and codes, and has fundamental qualities in common with any so-called literary text. This issue – and its ramifications – is worth pursuing with students, and will be partially developed in what follows.

A usefully provocative way of indicating the importance of intertextuality and of deconstructing the privileged status of literature is contained in work that puts texts of disparate identity together ('Why *Twinkle* and *The Tempest* are the same'). This kind of deconstructive thinking can be pushed further, so that, for instance, titles like 'Why *Macbeth* is the same as a Black and Decker TV advert' might appear, or 'Why *Coriolanus* is the same as a Bosch power drill'. Phenomenologically speaking, material objects are also texts and take part in the general intertextual interchange, and because they are very obviously – and very significantly in cultural terms – ideologically loaded. The kind of reading that goes on constantly of material objects and of texts in everyday life doesn't count towards a literacy rating. Even though the same kinds of processes may be involved in the reading of these things, they do no enter into the charmed circle of literature. Reading material objects as texts, alongside the familiarly privileged texts of study, though, may be just a starting point. It is possible to extend the textual field to address all sorts of activities that are textually bound: examining conversations of various kinds, examining social procedures like applying for a job from a textual and discursive viewpoint, or examining the kinds of texts that operate in the context of the family, the workplace and other arenas of textuality and discourses.

### A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES AND APPROACHES

Most of the work done with reading, literature and texts generally in English takes as its focus particular texts, as does much of the kind of work outlined above. An attempt to introduce a theoretical perspective on a practice addressing texts and textuality in a much wider field of operation, would need to look beyond the specificities of particular texts and address reading in more general terms. An example of an initial approach to general reading is offered by the survey in Figure 3.2.

Students might use the above model to develop their own questionnaires. They could then begin a kind of ethnographic study, could define groups, collate responses and organize their findings. Findings

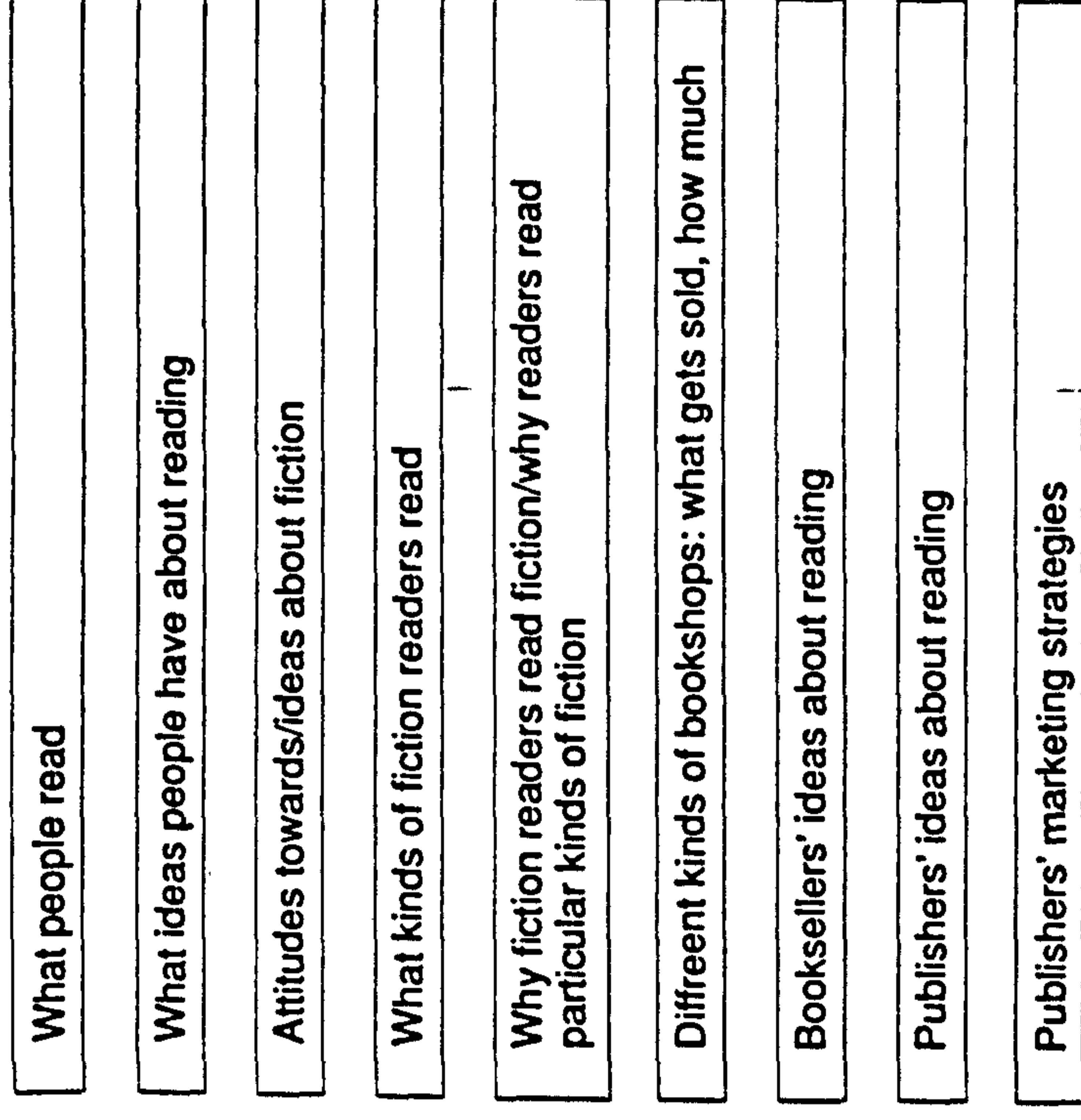


Figure 3.2 Reading survey: fiction

about fiction could then be measured against findings about other kinds of reading that people do. Some kind of account of reading fiction could then be configured within a more general field of reading, and the idea of reading here could be extended to include a wider range of 'reading' such as reading different kinds of 'cultural products' and 'events'.

### TEXTUAL PLEASURES

Analysing texts is no more obstructive of textual pleasures than analysing or discussing football. The idea that there is a simple and innocent enjoyment of texts – an enjoyment that analysis is likely to distort – is highly doubtful.

In relation to textual pleasures students might look at a range of issues including:

- identification and interpellation;
- the effects of reading genre;
- the reading context – where, when, with whom, in what conditions.

The issue of the relations between textuality and subjectivity is a

complex one that has been highly theorized in recent times, especially by academic theorists of the cinema. In the context of English in schools, though, it is certainly possible to construct theories of textual pleasures that are accessible and that still deal with issues not generally approached by conventional practices of the subject. Questions on identification, for example, might go into many different aspects of the issue, without being dauntingly difficult. Questions about how identifications work, what kinds of pleasures they may yield, what different kinds of identifications are involved in any one single text might be profitably and easily pursued. 'How does the process of identification engage with gender differences?' is a question that might be asked of any text, involving looking at different kinds of responses, different ways subjects may be interpellated or addressed by a text, and might involve considerations of acceptance and resistance of offered positions and identifications. Studying genre has obvious implications for an analysis of textual pleasures, and here research that has been done into audience responses to certain kinds of texts from popular culture might be considered, and similar kinds of analysis – of a local and limited scope, perhaps – could be undertaken by students. Although these projects would necessarily be limited in terms of the ethnographic field they address, they might nevertheless furnish sufficient material for theoretical work to be done on different modes of reception.

Examining textuality and pleasure in a more open field than English habitually has been used to dealing with is very likely to surmount the common difficulty found with students who are deemed to be either non-readers or apathetic readers. Most students – just like most people – are actually constant readers. Most students have considerable experience of textual pleasures, though these pleasures aren't always associated with the texts, nor the pleasures, allowed by the narrow definitions of English.

## CONCLUDING

This section has attempted to suggest some ways of opening up the study of reading in English lessons. It has been proposed that the idea of literacy itself be explicitly raised and questioned. It has been proposed that current definitions of literacy be examined. The *idea* of reading – what it is, what it's for, how it works – has also been suggested as a useful line of enquiry, beginning with the students' own personal and collective experiences. Some illustrative examples of reading have been offered, too, with the intention of suggesting ways of approaching reading within a theoretical framework, and thus going

beyond – and often against – the established practices of English. There is no kind of necessary ordering in any of this. These are certainly not the only kinds of activities that might be used to achieve similar effects.

Almost everything described so far has been conceived as a whole-class activity, though none of it need be; any of the topics or texts proposed could be done with small groups or with individual students. I would also suggest, though, that the English department, or the English teacher, as part of an approach to the study of literacy and reading, should reconsider the form of the so-called 'private' reading lessons. If students should, once a week or so, be able to spend time in class reading, for pleasure, something of their own choice, what sort of limits are to be set on the kind of text permitted? It can be useful, for all sorts of reasons, to get students to bring a reading text along to every English lesson, to regard it, that is, as an indispensable piece of equipment. It can also be useful to keep a record of the students' reading, a kind of handy diary or account book, recording their reading experiences. The encouragement of private, individual reading has become a fairly standard practice. If the identity of reading is changed, though, by an extension of the field of reading and, the notion of literacy itself, then many different kinds of text must be considered as points of reference in any account of reading experience.

A record of individual reading experiences constructed from a wide variety of different texts can be referred to usefully during any analytical work on reading that may be going on. It also constitutes a text or a body of texts that the teacher – and the institution of English as it stands – is not in a position to dominate and control. Such a policy for reading, promoting it by giving it time and status, but avoiding the simple – and in many cases alienating – valorizing of the book, can have positive effects. It can work against the narrow definitions of literacy that – scandalously – define many of the populations in secondary comprehensives (quite absurdly, of course) as uninterested, unmotivated non-readers. It can also promote freshly positive attitudes to a freshly defined field of reading.

A deconstructive attitude, an approach that did attempt to rethink – with the students involved in the process – the practices and ideas of writing in and beyond the confines of the established conventions of English, could be instigated as an important part of a redefinition of the subject. The implications of this kind of interrogative approach would be to effect a radical expansion of the field of writing, making what gets addressed in relation to writing in English much more diverse, more wide-ranging and more philosophically probing than at present. This extension of the scope of the subject's encounters with writing could mean much more than just examining different kinds of writing; it could also work to redefine the idea of what writing is. To address the field of writing in a much more extensive and more interrogative sense – making explicit ideas about writing – does seem to be more educationally adventurous, more intellectually creditable than rehearsing the standard practices simply because they are there, in the uncritical acceptance of precedence or in accordance with principles that have been found to be inadequate, or compromised as partial.

There are a number of ways in which ideas about writing in English – and in education generally – might be theorized and restructured by doing some theoretical analysis. There are several possible, practical starting points for theory to begin to address the field of writing. To engage in the practical theorizing of writing simply means approaching the ordinary, everyday, established activities and ideas of writing in English from a quizzical angle. It means reviewing assumptions, and 'making strange' the often deep-seated assumptions that present themselves as common-sense truth. One of these deeply rooted assumptions, about writing is that reading and writing are distinct and clearly separable things that operate according to quite different procedures. To put this differently, to challenge its status as truth might be to claim something to the effect that the subject of reading is equally the subject of writing, is the subject of language and textuality in a thoroughly general sense. This implies attention to the general cultural production and dissemination of meanings, as well as examining contexts of exchange and the effects these things might have on subjects of language. Writing might be looked at as a specific type of language, having a particular correlation with 'general' language, and might also be looked at as representing general features of language.

Obviously, this is a large kind of project. The initial probings offered here only suggest a partial way towards deconstructing the habitual forms of thinking about writing – and only partially suggest ways of deconstructing the assumed differences between writing and reading.

### PROBING WRITING

If students – or 'subjects' – of English are habitually invited, in the name of English, to write stories, essays and other things; if writing is of central educational significance and also of general cultural significance, then it must be worth trying to theorize this phenomenon, in spite of the daunting scale of the task. The practices of writing in English invite many questions. Any serious attempt to review, question, or to reassess the content and values of the subject would need to look again at writing in a number of ways. Such a venture would need to examine the practices of writing in English and the ideas about writing purveyed by English.

Writing is, as obviously as reading, an *essential* component of English, a taken-for-granted, fundamental category and practice. This is so much the case that in the general run of things writing in English tends not to be theorized or justified at the level of practice at all. The only kind of theory you get at this level is likely to be one-dimensional, or to be simply aligned with criteria of assessment and judgement, or it might unambiguously promote the virtues of writing as self-expression. This kind of uncritical, implicit theory takes the form of saying something prescriptive like: 'This is good writing; this is what you've got to do to get a good grade'; or in a more liberal manner: 'This is the kind of good writing that will enable you to express yourself more fully, and will enable you to explore yourself and the world you live in'. Why this particular form or that particular style of writing is considered good is unlikely to be the focus of many, if any, lessons. Alternative views of the subject of writing are unlikely to be proposed. How a practice of writing that valorizes notions such as self-expression, for example, becomes ascendant is equally unlikely to be explored.

writing and speech, writing and other media. Plenty of other practical examples of writing-related activities could follow from the ideas proposed. Any ideas suggested here could, for example, be used by students to produce ethnographically based work to gauge people's experiences of and ideas about writing.

### THEORY: ASPECTS OF WRITING

A framework for an initial expedition into the theory of writing might organize the practices of writing, the categories of writing, ideas and attitudes about writing using the following points:

- 1 The public/established categories of writing.
- 2 The individual subject and writing.
- 3 Institutions and writing.
- 4 General writing (or 'grammatology' – to give it one of its names from 'high theory').

These four categories of enquiry could be used as an initial conceptual framework, itself open to question as the project develops. Ideas concerning the four areas suggested here could be developed in the light of specific work on particular issues with particular texts.

The following questions indicate the directions of enquiry. It might be useful to broach all these questions with students at some point. They may be applied to any piece of writing. A similar set of questions can be devised by discussion with students, or by students working together.

#### 1 *The categories of writing*

- What kind of writing is this?
- What other kinds of writing is it 'related to'?
- What kind of people might be expected to read this?
- What kind of activity is it linked with?

#### 2 *The individual subject and writing*

- Who wrote this? What position is being assumed for the writer of this?
- Who is being addressed? What position is assumed for the reader of this?
- What – if anything – can you tell about the writer, or about the condition of its production?
- What assumptions are being made about the reader?

### 3 *Institutions and Writing*

- Where would you expect to find people reading this?
- Would the meaning of this change somewhere else? if so how?
- What special, specific terms are used?
- Into what kind of groups would the people reading this be organized?

### 4 *General Writing*

- What key words are there? What key contrasts are there?
- What conventional ideas about the world are presented?
- What alternative ways might there be of reading this?
- What would happen if it changed into another form: a film, a video, a tape?
- What might examining all these questions tell us about writing and meaning?

These questions differ quite markedly from the standard set of questions applied to texts in the established categories of English. They address a completely different field from the standard questions about meaning and effects of texts. In the context of classroom practice, they could equally well be applied to written texts placed in front of students, to texts that were about to be written or to texts in the process of being written. They could equally well be applied to texts that were simply under consideration, whether they had been written or not, whether they actually were about to be written or not. They are generalizing. In other words, they address the field of writing in an open sense that does not make distinctions at all times between writing and reading, between what *is* a text and what is the structure – or form – of a text, between language, text and writing. These questions represent potentially deconstructive issues that can be pursued to varying degrees. The main point, though, is that writing is being differently conceived. Different kinds of writing can be examined in different ways – from specific perspectives that move away from the restricted notion of the individual writer. There are plenty of other potentially deconstructive perspectives with other kinds of questions – those posed by sociolinguistics, for example – that might be put into play to do similar or complementary work.

#### 1 *The categories of writing*

Obviously there are many different kinds of writing. Any specific instance of writing can be looked at in terms of the category it belongs to. All writing, though, belongs to more than one category and could be placed in different categories according to different ways of organizing



writing or looking at writing. A story, for example, might be a children's fairy tale. A newspaper article might also be a story, though in a different sense. One thing, for example, that might be involved in putting writing into categories is thinking about what kind of people would be interested in this kind of writing, what kind of people would read it or write it. Another aspect of its identity might involve considering what kind of social activity or activities it would be associated with. The identity of any piece of writing may change according to its context. Writing identities can be mobile and varied, but they can also be fixed by contexts, like the context of English in secondary schooling. All these different considerations might be involved in thinking about categories of writing.

## 2 The individual subject and writing

Writing involves the individual subject in many ways. Some writing, or kinds of writing, seems to have more individual quality to it: a letter to a relative would be different from a set of instructions on how to use a power drill. All writing can be said to be written *from* a particular position. Equally, all writing can be said to address someone or some people in another position or other positions. The writing in question will make certain assumptions about the reader, depending on the kind of writing involved. Writing will address the reader or readers in certain ways, ways that will vary, depending on both the writing and the reading context. It will assume that the reader belongs to a group or category of people. The individual addressed by writing is generally conceived of as belonging to a group or type, except in certain specific circumstances. The point can be made that writing positions subjects and may have a positive, determining effect on subjects' identities; writing may actively group subjects. In certain specific contexts writing organizes differences between subjects – in a general sense this might be related to gender, in a more specific sense it might be related to education, to examination English – where writing is often subject to control and judgement.

## 3 Institutions and writing

Writing takes place within many different and varied institutions, but is always written and read in some kind of institutional context. Even when you may least suspect it, writing is organized within the context of some kind of institution. It may be the institution of the school, the family, or football. *This writing is framed by the context (among others)*

of the school – a specific type of institution with all sorts of ideas and behaviours of its own. The institutions of writing *organize* writing, writers and readers. Writing may use specific terms that identify it as being attached to a particular institution. Writing in one institutional context might not make much sense – or might make a completely different kind of sense – in another.

## 4 General writing

One way of looking at writing is to see it as being structured around certain key words. These words can tell you a lot about the kind of writing you're dealing with. Writing also tends to be structured around key contrasts – opposites that are set against one another. In all of this, writing always refers, one way or another, to ideas about the world. Writing is about ideas and is ideological. Some of the ideas activated by writing will be conventional – readily recognized and understood or stereotypical. Some ideas produced by writing, on the other hand, might be strange or might challenge stereotypes. It is generally difficult to say whether ideas are contained *in* writing or whether they are more produced by readers, reading, or reading practices. The idea of general writing tends to break down the strict differences between reading and writing – finding common processes at work in both – and tends to propose that any kind of sign production is a kind of writing, that it operates in the same way as writing. Writing practices get structured in certain forms, or genres; knowing genres means knowing what kinds of meanings are conventionally available for specific kinds of texts.

Discussion and analysis of some general principles about writing could well begin by applying the questions – with or without the explanatory guide-lines – to different, disparate examples of writing.

## STORY WRITING

Story writing – tied to a loosely conceived notion of creativity – remains a more or less central activity in the commonplace practice of English in schools. An interrogative approach to story writing might be conducted by looking at particular aspects of stories and what happens when they actually get written – using the classroom as a site of analysis and production, making explicit the necessary connection between these two processes. This kind of work with stories – giving emphasis to structural and ideological features – is not the same as 'imaginative response', a practice tending to deny consciously theo-

retical aspirations. It does, though, suggest that reading stories cannot be an activity totally distinct from writing stories; writing being a kind of reading of forms, procedures, processes.

An important aspect of a project to review the practice of story writing would also involve reviewing the *idea* of story writing, not just in a generalized and abstract sense, but by reviewing its institutional functions and the kinds of assumptions – of an educational and social nature – that inform the practice, explicitly or implicitly. This might involve students being invited to ask questions about the predominance of story writing in schools – and might lead into a general consideration of narrative and its significance in general discourse. This, in turn, would be likely to involve deconstruction the idea of the story in its present sense in English, giving attention to the many different kinds of stories that circulate in many different cultural forms and cultural products. In this context it might also be possible and useful to examine some other ways of reading and defining texts other than as narrative, including deconstructing the idea of stories as belonging to some special realm of experience or knowledge.

Using a particular perspective, a simple beginning might be devised to engender reflective possibilities. Taking the general topic of stories and gender, as an example, looking particularly at representations of feminine identity might be profitable in itself. A more or less self-contained set of activities relating to gender could also be used to formulate an approach to writing and stories, to begin to investigate some of its processes, its structures, its effects. Practical analyses can be given theoretical inflection and can be used to address general theoretical issues.

The following approach to stories and gender activates a simply formulated question with far-reaching implications: What is involved in the apparently simple, innocent activity of writing a story? This question may provide an approach to some of most far-reaching issues of cultural theory. Students may be invited to examine quite critical theoretical issues of writing by being invited to write their own simple story – deploying stereotypical representations of gender differences. What they have written themselves may be set against other instances of writing, other texts that deploy stereotypical gender images. A few disparate examples may serve:

*Elle* magazine;

a few children's stories;  
soap operas;  
TV ads.

Students can examine these in relation to:

images of women / men and boys / girls;  
ideas expressed about women / men and boys / girls.

The stereotypical images of gender found in these may then be compared with those in the other examples from students' own pieces of writing. Students can produce simple lists indicating their findings for each of the above. These lists, drawn from different media, may be used to indicate how cultural meanings circulate through different sign systems, and how the kinds of meanings available in writing are already determined by these systems. This kind of approach can be used to indicate interconnections between different kinds of writing; and can be used to ask questions about where generally available meanings and sets of meanings come from, and how they are held together. Questions also about the individual writing subject's relations with these systems or sets of meaning may be considered. The implications of all this is to work against the simple idea of the creative individual, with its mystical overtones, and to address – potentially with a great deal of specificity – the available meanings and position of the writing subject in relation to them.

The points of focus shown in Example 4.1 can be identified for students to consider and apply to different texts.

#### *Example 4.1* Stories and gender

Examine the following in relation to various stories, and other texts, thinking particularly about how they seem to represent gender identity and gender difference:

- nouns/identities: meanings and cultural encoding
- sentence structures: syntax, orders and relationships
- identities, their roles, their functions: symbolic identity and structural functions
- actions, verbs and the way they position identities
- adjectives/descriptions: oppositions and values
- cultural references – to culturally specific objects or ideas

Write down examples of each of these. Compare your findings with the findings of others.

Effectively this activity involves identifying and examining the various components of texts and the way that they get organized in stories. Pointers might be given and questions asked about how these elements

appear in other forms of representation, about what they signify. Connections can then be clearly made between writing stories and generally available meanings.

Activities that could follow discussion of the findings include the following:

- writing about how identities, relationships, structural functions and values operate in different types of story – and how these also relate to the same things as they are produced in other cultural products;
- writing stories deploying identities, relationships, structural functions and values as they have been found in investigations;
- writing stories that challenge by changing identities, relationships, structural functions and values that have been identified;
- producing writing adopting different forms, proposing or presenting alternatives to story forms, actively deconstructing narrative and intermingling images and ideas in other forms.

Writing doesn't have to be the mode of presentation for any of this. Students could equally produce oral presentations, audio or video tapes.

Among the issues raised by this approach to the business of writing is the assumed difference between the idea of writing as creativity and the idea of writing as producing meaning according to its ready established structures of form and meaning. In deconstructive terms, this point is expressed in a number of ways which invert the conventional wisdom of writing, for examples, the idea of the subject who writes as the subject of writing. What it is possible to write is largely determined by the predominant forms of writing, by predominant images and ideas. The writing subject can only reconfigure these already existing identities. One of the functions of the exercise can be to emphasize simply the issue of *values* in writing and where they come from. In this exercise, in responding to these questions, the idea of writing as a kind of neutral tool is called into doubt – to the extent that it's no longer tenable – and an alternative model has to be found or made. Words used by the writer, their meanings, the ideas and values they convey are not determined by the writing subject – just as the way they are put together is not and cannot be. The writer, in the case of the story, is under obligation to deploy already existing meanings, orderings and structures. Students may consider these determining factors; they may also consider how meanings may be constructed in relation to cultural powerful or dominant forces, and may consider alternatives to these. The case of gender offers an obvious instance of a cultural field – frequently configured by powerful systems of meaning – that can be approached from different perspectives, where different meanings can consciously be constructed.

Here the relations between ideology and writing may be explored in a directly interrogative manner. The following questions may be applied to the stories read and written in this work:

- 1 What ideas about the world seem to be present(ed) in this writing?
- 2 What different ways might there be of looking at this writing?

There are two main, and critically interlinking strands to this topic in relation to an alternative, deconstructive approach to writing. One concerns how writing engages with ideology through language and structural forms; and the other concerns how stories might get received differently, effectively how the meaning of writing might be differently construed by readings. To emphasize the idea of the reception of stories – how they get read, what kinds of meanings are given to them, what kind of identity they are granted – consideration can be given to the specific and immediate context of writing, that is to the institutional location and functions of writing done within the arena of the institutions of English and state education. Such writing is done in a self-reflexive mode, conscious of its own situation and the limitations that this imposes on it. This kind of approach positively enables a number of moves beyond the reaches of conventional approaches to story writing.

### THE IDENTITY OF WRITING

One aspect of an attempt to extend the narrow attitudes to writing of English involves raising questions not normally broached. The big question: 'What is writing?' represents an attempt to open up fresh perspectives on writing, to explore some of the issues in relation to writing that a renewed sense of enquiry might demand. The impetus of the demand can be seen partly in terms of the state of the subject – a state that has been broadly described as 'in crisis', but might also invite less neutral terms to describe its uncertain condition.

In previous times, it might have been possible to secure a practice of writing on notions that are now really untenable. English Literature once could signify a kind of excellence to which writing could aspire. This idea may have been completely illusory, but it held a kind of symbolic value that could hold the idea of the subject together. Education in English was partly about emulating these models of excellence, appreciating writing of particular subtlety, perhaps, or metaphorical power, in order that some of the effects might rub off. The cultural narrowness of this idea hardly needs emphasizing now.

Simplified notions of language – largely stripped of its social dimension – have also played a part in holding together the identity of

the subject. If teachers didn't, as authorized purveyors of English, believe in Literature, or didn't believe the students in their charge were capable of appreciating its subtlety or metaphoric power, then at least there was the English Language to fall back on. Everyone knew good English when they saw it, and even those poor unfortunates who were not blessed with it could recognize it when they heard or read it. If you didn't know exactly how it worked in all its parts, then you could always check it in Fowler. Writing was the appropriate way for the painstaking promotion of good English. Good English – it was believed, and still is by a fairly large body of eccentrics – embodied the values of 'our' civilization. Sociolinguistics and virtually all modern theories of language insist on the social and cultural specificity of cultural forms, making the very idea of an English language impossible, throwing into radical doubt all notions of intrinsically 'good English', though essentially that is exactly the idea embodied in assessment criteria. The means for judging and discriminating between different levels of attainment in this monologic model of language is, characteristically, writing. In this sense, at least, all 'subjects' of the education system are subjects of writing. And the model of good writing remains anachronistically tied to notions of standard form, notions that carry with them residual echoes of cultural domination.

More liberal and 'avant-garde' models of English over the past forty years or so have advocated writing in English as the means for self-expression. In a position sometimes different from and sometimes colluding with the 'good English' model, the liberal progressive version of writing in English believed that the personal growth of the individual could be developed by the practice of writing. More or less freely (though this problem was never really explored, never identified as problematic) expressing themselves, the subjects of English could explore their own inner being and the world around them through writing. The good intentions of this model are challenged by the social functions and dimension of writing, for one thing. For another, the whole idea of writing as self-expression runs fundamentally counter to most established theoretical positions that have seriously looked at the way language works in social contexts.

What is sketchily offered here proposes new ways of looking at writing as part of teaching its practice. Analysis and practice are not seen as different activities. What follows, initially, is an attempt to broach the question: 'What is writing?' afresh. This large and general question can be organized to direct an exploration of what writing is in the philosophical sense, how it can be defined and understood, what features can be ascribed to it and what useful ways of understanding its

identity and general cultural significance can be constructed. This line of enquiry operates rather abstractly, quizzically asking what writing is. Beginning, perhaps, from simple ideas about writing as a technology of communication, issues can be tackled and ideas broached that previous models of English would have left untouched. More practical, but with philosophical implications, too, is the project to undertake an analysis of what different kinds of writing there are. The idea is to survey the field of writing – partly to establish that there is a differentiated field of writing – to examine the idea that writing takes different forms, occurs in different contexts, serves different uses in various institutions, looking at different social functions of writing, deconstructing the notion of universal categories or types.

### TAXONOMY

One way to approach the theory of the extensive field of writing is simply to begin to produce a categorized list which aims to identify what different kinds of writing there are. The functions of this, and of the various lines of questioning that may follow, would be manifold. It is, fundamentally, a theoretic move engendering different potential lines of enquiry, all relevant to any attempt to address the field of literacy – to any exploration of language and textuality, as may be seen in Example 4.2.

Writing will have been organized into main groups, main categories and sub-categories. Where these different identities come from and how they are held together will also have been examined. Through discussion, different ways of defining categories of writing will be considered. In a sense, it is not necessarily of great importance how exhaustive this account of the different identities of writing and their institutional locations is. The idea is to produce a taxonomy – and not to pretend to simply reflect how things are. The taxonomy is a theoretic device, a model for understanding, and in that sense is a 'creative' production, like all such models. Part of the point of the process is to recognize that forms of knowledge and ways of organizing identities are subject to processes of production, and that the ensuing productions will be done from particular points of view and with particular purposes in mind – whether these operate consciously or not. These general considerations could be raised with a class that has been engaged in the activity and could be addressed in the form of a general consideration of the final point above.

It is evident that once a taxonomy of writing is produced, writing can be seen to take many different forms, having different structures, rules

**Example 4.2** Taxonomy of writing**How to make your own writing taxonomy: a whole class or group activity**

Make a rough list of different kinds of writing that you can think of: for example, letters, fictions; put the different kinds of writing you've identified into groups.

For each grouped item on your list – which we will call for the moment a main category – make another list comprised of different types.

Compare your main categories with other peoples; combine to make shared lists of main categories and subcategories.

When you have gathered – say – six main categories and a fair number of examples for each category there are a number of things to do:

- 1 Identify how different categories will be organized – where and among whom will these kinds of writing take place?
- 2 Try to say what kind of people in what kind of situations – and give examples of these – might be engaged in these kinds of writing; what might be the relations between readers and writing, what might be the differences?
- 3 Try to say also for what purposes they may be engaged in them.
- 4 Try to identify some of the main terms, or forms of language, that may be used in some of the categories of writing defined.
- 5 Try to identify the various different positions that people may take up in relation to your examples of different kinds of writing.
- 6 Consider how all of this work has changed the identity of writing – as it is understood by common sense.

governing its different uses; and, of course, different kinds of writing will be seen to have quite different contexts. This constitutes already a different approach to writing from any generally conceived by dominant practices of English. To have discussed these possibilities and formulated them in one way or another with a class of students constitutes a move away from the casual acceptance of the established categories and notions of writing that characterizes English. It provides a conceptual basis for further developments – in terms of both analytic and productive work – to take place.

A scheme of work complementary to the taxonomy of writing might begin by looking at different examples of contexts of writing, in the manner of a survey undertaken to categorize and distinguish different types of writing from a different perspective. The specific location of

writing within different contexts – geographic, institutional, cultural – might then be addressed. Questions might be asked about how specific contexts of writing could determine the nature of the writing produced.

Pursuing the idea of a taxonomy by engaging with different questions, significant theory – abstract and specific – has been brought into play. The following conclusions may be examined and illustrated by students with specific examples.

- 1 Different forms of writing have different structures;
- 2 and appear in different contexts;
- 3 according to different forces of production and different processes of reception;
- 4 and are given different identities and meanings by different groups of people.

This introductory, theoretical approach to writing can be developed quite easily in relation to particular cases. The conclusions offered above might be applied to a number of different examples of writing. Particular examples of categories of writing could be addressed more fully and extensively. Further questions could be raised about how different identities are given to different forms, about where categories of writing come from and how they are maintained, why some forms of writing enjoy a higher status than others, and so on. All of this work could conceivably address writing and the subject English as a move towards deconstructing the presumptions of its established identity.

**INTERROGATING WRITING**

Another, different, approach towards theory addresses the question: 'What is writing?' in a more abstract manner, trying to explore the identity of writing, to investigate the properties of writing that make it what it is, to probe the attributes that distinguish it from and also connect it to other things. A philosophical analysis – opening general questions – would aim to reach beyond the limits of a common-sense or institutionally established understanding of these things. From a common-sense point of view this kind of questioning seems perhaps comically pointless. Everyone, surely, knows what writing is, and anyway, the most important thing is to learn how to do it well. Why waste time wondering about the meaning of meaning? Why worry over abstruse – and in the end probably unanswerable questions – of the impossible magnitude of, 'What is writing?' In response to these hypothetical objections, that nevertheless answer to the current state of things generally in English, it might be worth rejoining with a challenge to the

assumed state of prevailing knowledge. Knowledge about language has not seriously been much incorporated into the general curriculum. It has now, curiously, become a requirement in English. Knowledge and theory, though, go hand in hand. You can't have knowledge without a context of beliefs and assumptions. The move engendering the question, 'What is writing?' is an invitation to look again at existing assumptions and to reformulate or at least to re-examine first principles. Why not engage students in this process? Why not attempt to provide the means and the context for them to engage themselves in this kind of fundamental interrogation? Surely asking those large, even cumbersome, questions must be the grounding for any kind of *critical practice*?

There are problems, though, in taking on a question as stupefyingly unwieldy as: 'What is writing?' (in any context, let alone with students). In the first place, it's hardly ever the kind of question we ask in the context of an educational 'philosophy' which tends to eschew abstract theoretical questions in favour of practical activity. Teacher culture and professional identity have to a large extent preferred a more crisply business-like, more bluffly practical approach to learning. Perhaps assured that its mission is essentially utilitarian – to deal in settled certainties or to be continually practically productive (according to the workshop model) – teaching culture has tended to rely on fundamental categories and favourite established forms, ranging from the certainties of formal grammar to the well-established comforts of story writing.

Considered in the abstract, the question: 'What is writing?' does seem difficult to get hold of. Writing is something we are so familiar with that it seems hard to find a perspective from which to view it effectively. It seems equally difficult to think of a possible starting point. Some forms of theory (associated with the general trends of post-structuralism) can most powerfully help to analyse fundamental aspects of this topic. Deconstruction begins, really, with a revaluation of ideas about writing. It proposes a new kind of field of study or science of writing – grammarology – but you don't, actually, have to be fully conversant with the ideas of Jacques Derrida to pursue some of the questions and ideas that might lead to a serious reconsideration of what writing is, questions and ideas that might produce ways of looking at and understanding writing; they are questions and ideas necessarily different from ideas about writing that have gone unchallenged for so long.

It's perfectly possible for students to begin to deconstruct dominant, common-sense notions about writing. Another thing students will be doing by answering the questions below is deconstructing the notion that abstract theoretical analysis is beyond their scope of achievement.

- 1 What are the characteristic features of writing?
- 2 What distinguishes writing from, for example, speech?
- 3 What kinds of *relations* are involved in writing
- 4 What kind of identities are engaged in it?
- 5 How does writing work? What kind of technology is it?

From this kind of open-ended beginning, it is possible to touch upon important ideas in relation to writing and how it works. The act of raising these questions opens a field of study with many possible developments. As shown in Example 4.3, a series of points for students to consider might help to approach the topic in a thoroughly exploratory manner, addressing specific aspects of the larger questions.

#### **Example 4.3** The identity of writing

##### **Consider and comment on the following points**

- 1 **Characteristic Features**
  - Writing is recorded words.
  - Writing is technological.
  - Writing can be read, can be understood by someone else.
  - Writing is a way of organizing ideas.
  - Writing uses rules.
  - Writing uses recognized symbols.
  - Writing deploys established meanings.
- 2 **Writing and Speech**
  - Writing is different from speech because writing can be recorded.
  - Writing is more permanent than speech.
  - Writing is more technological than speech.
  - Writing is less personal than speech.
- 3 **Writing Relations**
  - Someone always writes to someone else.
  - Someone sends a message to another person.
  - It is always important to know who the writer is.
  - You always know what the writer wanted to say.
  - You always know what the message is.
  - You can tell about the writer's personality from the writing.
  - All readers read things differently.
  - All readers read writing the same.

Some further general questions might follow from the exercise outlined above. These questions are intended to follow through and generalize

from the deconstructive import of the points that have already been raised.

Is writing then fundamentally different from speech?

Is speaking a kind of writing?

Is maths a kind of writing?

Are maps a kind of writing?

Are pictures a kind of writing?

Are films a kind of writing?

Rethinking writing in this way might engender related questions more directly aimed at a reconsideration of the functions of writing in the school, and might invite students to consider their own situations, as students within a systematic organization of writing identities. All the points and questions are designed to offer opportunities for students to re-examine what writing is – to consider ideas that make connections between different forms of expression, that question how they work and how they have generally come to be understood. If students are prepared to entertain the idea that speech, for example, operates in ways very similar to writing or that pictures might be thought of as a kind of writing, having some of the features of writing, or that the meanings of writing are structured within particular contexts and by particular modes of reading and understanding, then both the field and the understanding of writing have been significantly expanded.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO GRAMMATOLOGY

The points for discussion in Example 4.4 offer fairly explicit theoretical perspectives on the identity of writing – what it is, what it does and how it works – at a general level. They are formulated for open consideration, and might be put to work by referring to particular examples. They could also easily be broken down into smaller units and presented as a list of points to be ticked or crossed. Students could be asked to produce writing on all of this or to produce diagrams with notes, for example, indicating ideas and connections.

## WRITING AS TECHNOLOGY

Whatever else it is, writing is a kind of technology. It might be worth considering the technological character of writing in two senses:

1 as a technology of inscription and duplication: as a means of encoding language in a recordable form, using specific material

### Example 4.4 What is writing? Some ideas for consideration

Consider the following ideas and give examples of how they might work

Writing is:

- a system of signs: like signs used in a set of traffic lights, or in a film or in a picture. What signs does writing deploy? How do these signs work?
- an order of words: a way of putting signs together in a special *order*; change the order and what happens? How do particular forms of writing put things in order?
- a system of *substitutions*. Do words stand in place of the *things* they represent or of the *ideas* of the things they represent; language is always metaphorical – it means something different from itself, always refers to something other than itself. Think how words and statements are kinds of substitutions or metaphors: give examples and explain them.
- a way of putting ideas in *order*: words refer to ideas (not things? ideas of things? what they are and how they are?) and writing puts ideas into order.
- something to do with exchanging a *message* or a *meaning*? Do all kinds of writing work like this? Are all meanings and messages in writing clear? What decides what the message is? Does this change with different types of writing?
- always done by a writer. A writer is always situated in a certain position, with a certain kind of identity. Can there ever be a writing not situated by the identity of a writer?
- capable of being recorded, *repeatable*; writing can still mean something when the writer is not there. What happens to the ideas of the writer when the writer is not there?
- a system of *rules* and *conventions*: how do you think these are established? Who controls them? Are there *laws* for writing? How might the laws be enforced?
- depends for its ability to communicate on *recognition*. What different things have to be recognized – by a reader of writing – for the writing to be understood?
- something that *describes* the world, the way the world is; OR does writing *construct* our ideas of how the world is? What might be the difference?
- something that depends on *presence* and *absence* – at the same time.

- The words are present, but the meanings – ideas or thoughts or things – are not; they are absent.
- is something that is done in different *contexts*, for different *purposes*, using different signs and orderings. Think of examples. Can there ever be a writing for *all* purposes and contexts?
  - a *social practice*, done for specific social purposes: think of examples and consider their different social purposes. Can writing ever not be social?
  - an *organization of identity* – of different identities: of the things being written about, and of the writer and the reader(s)
  - something that can have conscious meanings but might also have *unconscious meanings* – meanings that are not present in the words themselves, but that come into play, whether in the writing or the reading. What might this idea tell us about meaning?
  - something that is organized into different *genres*: news articles, poems, letters, fire drill notices, computer printer manuals, graffiti, autobiographies, shopping lists, and so on. What happens if you fail to recognize the right genre?

processes to inscribe its elements so that they may be repeated endlessly beyond the moment of their inscription;

2 as a technology of forms of thought, feelings and ideas, an aspect of the general technology of language, a technology not simply outside the subject and used by the subject, but inhabiting the subject, bearing and conveying general cultural meanings.

Writing may then be examined as a kind of technology in terms of the material structures of writing processes, allowing for inscription, repetition, recognition, but also in terms of what might be called a technology of *forms*. Only within the structures of established forms or systems can writing be done or be read. In this sense, writing can be seen as a technology of 'iterable' statements, guided by preset rules. In relation to this understanding of writing as a system, writing can be seen as a technology of meaning and values involving the manipulation of forms within various social contexts – specifically, institutions. The formal and structural sense that writing is a technology cannot be distinguished clearly from the consideration that writing is also a technology of thought and feeling – giving shape and form to readily established ways of thinking and feeling about things. The tendency of these considerations is to work against the notion that writing could ever be a kind of 'free' expression or a way for the individual to his or her unique and deeply inner being.

Students may be asked to examine these theoretical points explicitly and for themselves – points running counter to the practice of writing which regards it simply as self-expression or neutral tool. The idea of mastering this technology is then implicated in the idea of a technical know-how, but is more than just technical, and is something advocates of liberal English have hardly been able to confront. The idea of writing as a technology in the larger sense emphasises the importance of the material forms of expression as being the structures and forms of thought, rather than proposing some ghostly, unseen, shadow of thought that can't ever be known, assumed to hover spirit-like somewhere 'behind' the material forms of thought – or writing.

Looking at writing as a technology in this way would seek to develop awareness of how writing systems operate in different contexts – but also at different levels; and like any kind of technology, writing positions identities in relation to its social operations. This is clearly visible in the school context, where different levels of the technology of writing are used to differentiate between different identities of students, most crudely and blatantly in the grading system and in the criteria of assessment. Technology in this sense is very obviously implicated in institutional operations.

The following questions may initiate thinking on this topic and may lead to the practical examination of different kinds of writing.

What different technologies of writing can you identify?  
How do they work?

Is speaking – like writing – a kind of technology?

What different *forms* of writing are there?

How do they work?

Do different types of writing 'ask' you to read them in different ways?

How does this happen?

In what kind of social situations does writing take place?

Do the social situations of writing determine the kind of writing that takes place?

Do they determine the form of the writing?

Do they determine what can be said and what can't be said?

What other technologies of communication can you think of?

How do they work?

Do different technologies of communication involve different kinds of thinking?

What people have most control of the technology of writing?

In what different ways might people have control of technologies of writing?



In what ways might control of different kinds of technology of writing be related to having *power*?

One example of how the technology of forms of writing operates might be furnished by considering fairy tales. A simulation of the technology of this form can be produced by constructing a kind of writing machine. This would simply consist of a set of cards having different components of fairy stories – events, identities, places, objects, beginnings, endings – written on them. The cards can be shuffled and a hand randomly dealt. The random arrangement of elements can then be organized into sequence, a way of demonstrating how genres structure the meanings of elements in writing, as shown in Example 4.5

#### Example 4.5 Fairy stories and genre

Introduce and explain the idea of genre

Explain the idea of the genre of fairy stories.

Explain the idea of a 'sentence maker' in relation to the elements of a genre of text.

Explain

- a) structural functions (elements)
- b) syntax (ordering)

and give 2/3 examples of structural functions and syntax at work (using the work you did with cards).

- Illustrate this in relation to *Red Riding Hood* and show how various structural functions carry with them symbolic meanings.
- Illustrate the same points in relation to two other kinds of text – for example, a TV advert and a story in a newspaper.

Conclusion, explaining how you've used the following ideas:

genre  
structural functions  
syntax  
the idea of a writing machine

and consider the implications all this has for meanings of texts

A particular culturally common image in different forms might be examined to compare the operations of different technologies of representation, as can be seen in Example 4.6.

#### Example 4.6 Comparing technologies of representation

**Text:**

- 1 'La Figlia Che Piange'
- 2 The Nescafe TV advert using the song 'I Can See Clearly Now'
- 3 The Gucci magazine advert using the image of a girl on a motorbike

**Consider:**

- the three different kinds of technology of representation involved
- the images deployed by each in each particular case
- how these images produce or correspond to ideas
- how these images relate to other images in other examples of the same technology of representation
- how these images relate to each of the other examples
- how these images relate to images and ideas
- how each of these texts position and address the subject
- how each of these texts represents femininity

Students may be asked to consider the phenomenology of perception or 'reading' as it is implicated in these different technologies of representation. This would mean examining what aspects of the 'object' may be viewed by the reader, what possible perspectives there are, what kinds of ideas of the object might be available, and it would also invite consideration of the position of the viewer or reader. All these factors may be brought into play in an examination of how the different technologies – the written text, the TV advert and the picture – work in their representation of a similar object or idea.

The kind of thinking involved in relation to the topic of the technology of writing engages, among other things, the topic of the subject in language – the subject in its relations to the technology of language. The subject – the individual – in this kind of thinking is very much perceived as the subject of language, shaped by writing at least as much as shaping it. Any shaping that is done must be done in reference to culturally available images, producing culturally organized meanings in forms that are culturally established technologies of representation.

The topic of grammarology – essentially a general interrogation of writing – might be approached by taking specific texts and considering what particular questions might be asked of them. The following is a suggested checklist.

- Who is writing?  
 To whom are they writing?  
 What are they writing about?  
 What are they writing for?  
 When are they writing?  
 What are the main ideas?  
 What are the key terms?  
 What kind of language is used?  
 Are there any special terms used?  
 What kind of form is used?  
 What kind of time, place, social context, institution are invoked by a reading of the writing?

The specific issue of the cultural identity of writing might be approached by considering the following points, in relation to particular examples:

beliefs	behaviour	work
language	relationships	knowledge
social activities	dress	gender
objects	ideas	identities

Students might be invited to construct their own terminology drawn from the various topics they've looked at using material as presented in Example 4.7. They may be asked to consider terms from established theory and to transpose these into their own frames of reference. They may be invited to put these terms to use in relation to a number of

*Example 4.7* A terminology of enquiry

terminology – dominant terms  
 discourses  
 special terms – specific elements of vocabulary  
 forms/structures – and what differences there might be  
 gaps and assumptions  
 status  
 form(s) of inscription/material production  
 rhetoric – including consideration of positions of address (what positions of address are being adopted?)  
 oppositions – contrasts and how identities of things are organized  
 institutional context  
 ideas about the world  
 symbolic order  
 genre(s)

different kinds of writing. They may also be in a position to examine this terminology with the standard terminology of response – that of common-sense or conventional English.

Students may also be invited to try putting these terms to use to inform analysis or preparation of their own pieces of writing. Their general function is part of a project to provide ideas for the more explicit awareness of writing, what it is and how it works.

### EXAMPLES OF WRITING: AUTOBIOGRAPHY, GRAFFITI AND SHOPPING LISTS

Autobiography exemplifies a number of characteristic beliefs about the nature of writing. It is a thoroughly characteristic, cherished activity of English and represents beliefs about the individual and writing. In English in schools it epitomizes writing as individual self-expression, drawing together notions about the self, about identity, about narrative and about writing. An approach to autobiography from a radically different perspective could begin by opposing the ideas it's founded on; asserting the idea of writing as an impersonal symbolic ordering and, suggesting alternatively that the self is in fact erased rather than expressed in writing, that narrative form, usually used to structure autobiography, is a kind of strait-jacket preventing certain important aspects and ideas of the self from being expressed, and that the general cultural form of autobiography positions and defines the self in a limiting kind of way – in relation to important cultural notions of identity and personal history.

A way of approaching this topic with students might be to begin by considering the relations between autobiography and other kinds of writing it would normally be distinguished from. Putting together the examples of graffiti, shopping lists and autobiography may clearly illustrate issues and problems that can arise from a probing of writing and its familiar categories. It may, deconstructively, also lead to different possibilities of writing being brought to view, as well as raising questions of a theoretical kind. Deconstruction in this sense means analysing differences and identities, trying to examine established categories in order to see how – according to what procedures and what forces – they are maintained. In one sense this can simply be a kind of game; interesting enough, though, perhaps, undertaken for no further purpose. It can also, in this case, lead to consideration being given more directly to issues like the social contexts of writing, ideas about writing and the self, and might usefully make explicit points about what could be called the sociolinguistics of writing. It can

certainly emphasise certain critical points about ideas that dominate writing in schools – where writing is a very significant component in constructing different identities for its subjects or students.

The apparently clear differences between shopping lists, graffiti and autobiography may, in the first place, illustrate simply how the form and function of writing varies according to its context and the (social) conventions that operate within that context. It may also illustrate how the technology of writing influences how we read its relative authority and significance. If the form of the autobiography is defined as being determined at least partly by the 'I' of the 'addresser', and partly by the narrative form, then the characteristic feature of a shopping list could be simply that it lists items. The characteristic features of graffiti would probably be more difficult to define, since graffiti may take many forms and may operate many different genres. To investigate these variously different identities might be usefully illustrative. For example, it is easy to illustrate that it might be possible for a piece of graffiti, written, say, on a toilet wall, to have an autobiographical form (indeed, some may aspire to do so). We might well ask, and not really decisively be able to answer, whether this graffiti is not, then, autobiography, or *an* autobiography? Does this piece of graffiti appear in the form of an identifiable genre? Is autobiography a clearly definable genre? Does the problem raised by these questions mean, in turn, that we can have and recognize autobiographical writing (an autobiographical fragment, say) which is not *an* autobiography? Does it also imply that we may not be able to tell the difference between autobiographical writing and autobiography – in the sense of the *true* story of someone's life? And doesn't the very idea of truth in this context run into trouble, in the sense that it might be difficult for an autobiography to claim *any* kind of objective truth? What might be the implications of this point, though, for other forms of writing claiming some kind of hold on truth?

To go further, what would or could determine exactly when an autobiography became, fully and unquestionably, an autobiography? Would it be appropriate, or even possible, to use the word 'exactly' in this context? And, to go further in this deconstruction of writing and its identities, isn't an autobiography, in the full sense, always doomed to be (in any form we can imagine for it?) nothing more than a series of autobiographical fragments, linked together according to the already established, thoroughly impersonal rules of narrative composition? The only coherence and unity the fullest autobiography could then claim would be textual. In that sense it would be a constructed coherence, imposed by an external pattern, a symbolic ordering, an instance of a

particular kind of cultural technology, imposing its identity over the identity of the writing and reading subject.

It is also possible, in a deconstructive kind of inversion, to pursue this questioning in another kind of way. A shopping list may seem to be purely and simply what it is, without complication. Part of its being a shopping list in this uncomplicated way would be to do with its being used in the way a shopping list is used, although, of course, there are many different kinds of use for shopping lists. A shopping list, though, may take on a quite different kind of significance if it is introduced into an autobiography. A context may be produced in this case in which the shopping list, all or merely a part of it, perhaps a single item, would take on a new and different kind of significance, well beyond and totally different from the significance it had, or may have had, in a shopping expedition it may have been intended for. Here we come upon further complications, leading to further questions opening upon further lines of enquiry into the terrain of writing.

Within the autobiography, the significance of the shopping list may take on a new and different dimension or direction; but, it might well be asked, is it ever possible, with clarity and confidence, to know what the meaning of a shopping list *is*, without, that is, knowing all about the kind of living context it appears within? A shopping list found on the ground outside a supermarket may have no more meaning than a wayward piece of indecipherable graffiti. Such a shopping list would forever hold the secret of its own life story, its origins, its function and – in the end – its meaning, unless we could recover detailed knowledge of its history. Was it discarded as useless, or as over-optimistic, perhaps, on the way into the supermarket? Was it exhaustive, or were other items to be added as the trolley was wheeled around? Or did it have some other kind of role within a scenario that must forever remain mysterious? Was it, for example, a dummy or decoy shopping list, used as a pretext in a complicated network of relationships. And so on.

Analysis of the list's contents may or may not reveal important points about its 'author', although it would be impossible to say with any conviction what the status of these points would be, according to the logic of the questioning procedure outlined above. And here, the deconstructive idea of *undecidability* in relation to texts and textual meanings has been illustrated and may be brought explicitly into play. Texts and meanings, writing and meanings, writing and interpretation, writing and production of meanings: from these examples may be opened up a whole complex of critical issues, issues modern post-structuralist theory, in its own very limited context, has sought to propound. The shopping list on its own, then, may yield a very

productive line of enquiry touching upon fundamental questions about the nature of writing. Being fundamental, though, does not mean that they are simple or simple minded. Similarly, because they may be complex and demanding, doesn't mean that they are therefore beyond the reach of any students. If, as is clearly the case, students can understand how a shopping list may be read as a fragment of an autobiography, if they can also understand how a shopping list may be read as no more than a piece of haphazard graffiti, significant points relating to the idea of writing in general and to the categorization of writing can have been introduced. The students in question may demonstrate their understanding of these points in a number of ways – and these ways may be explicitly theoretical or illustratively practical. To play around with these identities – in this case 'shopping lists', 'graffiti' and 'autobiography' – is both actively theoretical and practically productive.

Students may further be invited to consider how, for example, an autobiography may consist of graffiti, gathered together in a certain kind of order, or of shopping lists, perhaps dated and illustrated with jottings, ticks, crossings off, marginalia and so on. They may be invited to consider how an autobiography may consist of a gathering together of different kinds of writing – graffiti, shopping lists and other – to produce a kind of document file which may, or may not, be an autobiography. Questions about the identity of different kinds of writing can be posed, questions throwing the idea of a natural order of writing categories into serious doubt. Links between quite disparate forms of writing – like, for example graffiti, and shopping lists – can then be forged in new ways when the context changes, in this case into autobiography. This kind of linking can be productive of a lot of thinking – of a lot of writing even – which is positively deconstructive. A useful task might be to compose an autobiography figuring both graffiti and shopping lists as significant features. The composition would not necessarily have to be complete; it might only be an outline, and that outline in turn might be used as the occasion for a commentary on the different kinds of identity of different kinds of writing, enfolded, as it were, in one piece of writing. Questions about meaning and about modes of reading are involved here, also. The meaning of any of the elements – the shopping list, the graffiti – clearly changes when enclosed in a new context. The items on the shopping list, for example, might take on a new significance, being granted special meaning or meanings in relation to connections made with other items in the text. Is this because they *have* a new significance, or because the different kind of reading they are now being given in this new context constructs their meaning differently?

Putting different texts together, or putting together different textual

identities or ideas of text, and asking some questions of all of them, and of the relations and differences between them, can have the effect of penetrating the aura of common-sense and established ideas that surround writing with their penumbra of obviousness. Clearly, doing this on its own doesn't produce a revaluation of attitudes to and ideas about writing and meaning. It is necessary to find some way of discussing the possible effects of putting textual identities into play.

What follows here briefly proposes one way the pursuit of the topic of autobiography might proceed; hoping to show how this topic may be a) taken far beyond its usual forms, b) usefully illustrative of fundamental issues, and c) demonstrative of the extremely limiting forms of much commonly accepted and celebrated practice of English teaching at this level.

The topic of autobiography can be used, then, to address a number of significant issues in the field of writing. Some of these issues may be specific to the topic of autobiography, but they all touch upon important aspects of writing in general. A theoretically alert approach to the topic of autobiography with students could follow many different lines, pursuing several issues, or could be more focused, concentrated and selective. Some of the issues raised might be concerned with writing and identity, writing and being, writing and memory, writing and the construction of the self – all issues emerging from some consideration of the relations between the individual writer and the system of writing. While these may appear to belong to the more sophisticated matter of deconstructive thinking, they can be dealt with in ways that are accessible. Of equal importance, they can be approached in a way that highlights issues of general relevance to any kind of subject claiming language and textuality as its proper business.

Autobiography may reach out into a great number of topics. In conventional, or liberal, English the possibilities of expansion for the topic are seldom really explored. The conventional, well established and most common approach to the topic is simply to invite students to write their own autobiography – an invitation that belongs to the best traditions of liberal, progressive English, where students are encouraged to express themselves fully in their own language(s). Autobiography, in some quite obvious ways, might be seen to be central to this kind of English project. The invitation might well be accompanied by an outline, giving guide-lines to students, providing a structure for their autobiography. Settling for an uncritical narrative approach, *questions* about autobiography and narrative, narrative and (in this case personal) history, narrative and subject positions, and, for example, narrative and the idea of truth are not generally explored.

The structure of the conventional autobiography in English is fixed and perfectly predictable in its adoption of a direct, chronological narrative form. This, it's suggested, *is* autobiography – and all the problematics of the topic are thereby denied. The question, for example, of how an autobiography can be in any meaningful sense 'auto' – if its form and structure are already clearly established – cannot be raised in the context of this model for the topic, nor, indeed, for this model of the subject, English. From background, through early memories, to hopes and fears for the future – this progress is presented simply as *the* shape of a life's experience, rather than the shape of a particular form of writing. The idea of there being a problematic relationship between the two – the life and the writing – is never entertained. The idea of that relationship being worth examining, that it might produce interesting ideas and might engage with significant topics in the field of textuality, language, identity and meanings in general social life cannot even be considered. It seems worthwhile to examine approaches that engender a great many more possibilities for different kinds of writing, approaches that students may adopt to produce work required by the subject, or to engage with ways of thinking that are not encompassed by currently dominant practices of English. There is no necessary ordering for any of this work; it is all intended to promote thinking about issues in relation to autobiography with an open and mobile structure. Initial discussion of the topic might be conducted perhaps in relation to some specific questions, or to some specific text or texts, such as the film, *Stand By Me*, the novel, *Great Expectations*, and/or an instance of standard autobiographical writing, or *Bonnie, Frieda and Annie*. The board notes in Example 4.8 represent the kinds of consideration that may be given to the film, *Stand By Me* in relation to an interrogative approach to autobiography.

#### Example 4.8 Autobiography: board notes for *Stand By Me*

Title	Solidarity	nostalgia – memory
	togetherness	recollection
	male bonding	sentimentality
	love song	censorship
		death – Chris

film narrative = body search  
 Teddy dices with death  
 Gordy's brother

Gordy = man in car at beginning = narrator + main character  
 Gordy = man at word-processor – writer of story (+ Stephen King – writer of horror fictions)

Death of Chris Chambers at end *and* at beginning – does the beginning determine the end, or the end the beginning?

(What is the significance of the deer?)

film = flashback  
 also includes flashbacks  
 + memories  
 + dreams  
 + memories of dreams

film = autobiographical text (of whom, though?)  
 not an autobiography?  
 fragment? fictional reconstruction?  
 partial text – exclusions, editing, censorship, repressions, demands of narrative sequencing  
 significance of male dominance – no women  
 identity, status of text?

The following points might be identified by way of focusing a deconstruction of the idea of autobiography:

In what sense can 'my' 'autobiography' be mine, if it belongs to the order of writing?  
 What and where am I anyway? If my identity and being are written in the first place in/by the order of writing, what remains of me in the writing?

The subject of autobiography is split by the grammar of identity, the shifting signification of subject positions – I, me; I, you; I, she; I, he; I, we; I, they.

My so-called autobiography is structured by the discourse of identity as narrative. This structure is a structure of gaps, absences and repressions.

The excess of my being over the order of writing cannot be expressed within the order of writing.

A range of approaches to the topic of autobiography is offered in the formal outlines of Examples 4.9 to 4.13, indicating how theory might be put to use in relation to this general theme.

**Example 4.9** Autobiography, shopping lists and graffiti: textual identities and meanings

List different statements that might be found in an autobiography – characteristic statements? What different categories could these statements be put into?

List different types of graffiti – and consider the different types of statements that graffiti might make. What different categories of statement might there be in graffiti?

Draw up a couple of examples of shopping lists? What different types of shopping list might there be and consider what kind of statements shopping lists might make – and about what?

Write an outline of an autobiography – including statements, topics and information. Write a commentary to explain the meaning of the different things in the outline.

Construct an autobiography made up from different examples of graffiti. Write a commentary to explain the significance of the different elements contained in this autobiography.

Construct an autobiography made up from different examples of shopping lists. Write a commentary to explain the significance of the different information that might be conveyed by this autobiography.

Consider these different outlines and commentaries using the following perspectives on writing:

- writing and construction – the ordering and production of meanings
- discourses, terminology and rhetoric
- writing and the production of truth
- undecidability
- the identity of writing, categories and genres
- recognizing the identity of writing – reading and writing practices
- order, ordering and syntax

If you put all of the different kinds of writing you might produce using the above points, what kind of writing would you be doing?

**Example 4.10** Writing autobiography

### General Considerations

- What form will the writing take?
- What genre?
- What kind of ordering or sequence will organize the writing?
- Where will it begin? At what different points could it begin?
- What different kinds of memories will it include?
- What different kinds of language will be used to write about different memories? What different sorts of discourse might be involved?
- What different kinds of data will be included? What will be the sources of the data included?
- From what position will the writing be done? Will it always remain the same?

### Autobiographical Data

- What different kinds of data might you include in a conventional autobiography?
- What other kinds of data might be included in different kinds of autobiography? Think of examples of different kinds of autobiography and identify the different kinds of data they might include.
- What would be the sources of the data in the different cases you have considered? How could an autobiography include writing about the sources of its data?
- If someone else wrote someone's biography or autobiography, could it change the status of the data?

**Example 4.11** Autobiography and psychoanalysis

conscious	-	'ego'	-	'I'
unconscious	-	'id'	-	'it'
symbolic order	-	language	-	the identity of things

What might the idea of the unconscious contribute towards considering the writing of an autobiography?

Would it be possible to write elements of the unconscious into an autobiography?

What would the idea of the difference between the conscious and the unconscious suggest about identity? How might this be taken into account in relation to writing and autobiography?

- What are the implications of the unconscious and conscious for the idea of the controlling author?
- What are the implications of the unconscious and conscious for the idea of meaning – and the control of meaning?
- What might be the effects of the symbolic order of writing of an autobiography? How does the symbolic order determine the identity of the writer of an autobiography?

#### *Example 4.12* Autobiography and dreams

- Would writing about dreams in an autobiography be writing about the unconscious?
- How would you know the importance and meanings of the dreams?
- How would writing about dreams – or writing a description of dreams – be different from the dreams themselves?

#### *Example 4.13* Autobiography and codes in the language of personality: interviews, statements and contexts

Take some of the statements you produced by doing interviews and writing reports on them.

#### Statements

- She's got a very guilty conscience.  
 He definitely doesn't eat peanuts.  
 She is afraid of large spiders and fire.  
 Luminous jumpers annoy her.  
 She would like to change her parents ages and their dress sense.  
 She doesn't think that she has been loved or in love.  
 She gets annoyed with people who are always happy.  
 He thinks you go up to heaven when you die.  
 She hates boys who act macho.  
 She doesn't believe in reincarnation.  
 She's afraid of being buried alive.  
 She's never stolen anything.  
 Someone she loves dying would hurt her more than dying herself.  
 She has recurring dreams about elephants, seals and Sainsburys.  
 He doesn't want to be too unconventional.  
 She doesn't wish death on people but sometimes wishes that people had never been born.  
 She always reads the last page of a mystery novel first.

- He thinks men are just lucky to have nipples.  
 She's always exaggerating.  
 She takes great pains to be liked and to be genuine.

These statements might be dealt with by looking at the following:

- the truth/reality of each statement: is it decidable?  
 the grammar of each statement – and what it suggests  
 the context and discourse of personality at work

The initial analysis/discussion of these statements might be extended in relation to examples from:

- teenage, women's, sport magazines
- TV news reports
- soap operas
- novels
- school reports

going on to look at how different discourses of personality operate in different contexts and involving the possibilities of doing research into them.

#### WRITING AS COMMUNICATION? CONVENTIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE MODELS

The challenge of theory in relation to writing runs counter to the grain of common-sense understanding of language. Writing as communication of thoughts, feelings and ideas, for example, is not quite what it was thought to be. The effect of theory can be disturbing to complacent preconceptions of the subject, English. The nature of this disruption can be approached with school students of English. In response to the thoroughly philosophical question: 'What is writing?', the following ideas may be productive starting points for explicitly formulating a general alternative view. The alternative model of communication can be offered for consideration and debate.

**Conventional model:** experience → language/meaning → interpretation → writing

(and then in reverse for the reader?)

**Alternative model:** language/meanings → interpretations → experiences → writing

(and then in reverse for the reader?)

In the conventional account of language, experience is translated or transcribed into a form of expression which may capture the flavour or quality of the experience, to varying degrees, according to how 'good' or 'authentic' the writing is. The form of expression conveys the idea of the experience in a more or less neutral form – and can communicate its flavour, its feelings, its 'quality' in general.

In an obvious, though not necessarily often expressed, sense, writing and experience are two completely different things. It is not the case that they are directly related in the way that is often assumed in ways of talking about language – ways that might use terms like 'truth' or 'reality' and so on, any expression in fact of writing's authenticity in the sense of a fidelity to experience. Writing may record experience, but this is then transformed by the process of writing into a linguistic experience, a writing experience, and this is not the same as the experience 'itself'. The experience itself, in so far as it is past, does not exist, in its original form, as itself. It is gone. Memory is a kind of writing, recording in another form, a form that transforms experience into a kind of writing.

At the same time, and on the other hand, the deconstructive, alternative model inverts the conventional view and claims, in effect, that the nature of experience, its quality, is actually formed and structured by the language expressing it, or rather, the alternative model would claim (rooting out a false opposition) that the difference between language and experience cannot easily be made and sustained. For the forms and categories of language will determine the nature of the knowledge of the experience, and will even determine what that experience is according to the ordering of language within the structures of the symbolic order. The symbolic order being the system of networks holding meanings and identities in place, determining – through language in conjunction with social experience – ways of being, seeing and feeling.

The alternative account might claim that this is what writing *is* – and might go further in saying that this pre-structuring is what makes writing possible. According to the alternative model, the idea of individual expression is tenuous. The individual 'becomes' an 'I' in writing – a structural function of language – or a name in a system of named categories. The story of my life becomes shaped and constrained by the established structures of narrative expression – structures and conventions which may well exclude important features, operating a kind of secret censorship on me. Moreover, the demands of autobiography as a narrative form give a determining shape to how I see and feel my experience in writing it. The formal outline, offered as a guide,

shown above, illustrates quite clearly how this structuring works as a positively determining force.

To take this topic further, practically, so that students may begin to think how their own writing of and/or about autobiography might take shape, some more considerations about the possible kinds of writing of autobiography – and its implications – might be simply addressed. The options could be laid out as shown in Example 4.14.

**Example 4.14** Writing: on issues of autobiography, identity, writing, being, and memory

**Narrative:** but what kind could it be? A fairy tale, a detective story, a science-fiction narrative.

How would the subject of this narrative be identified – 'I', 'me', 'he/she', 'you', 'we', 'they'? How would this narrative be structured? What would it have to include? What would be necessarily excluded from it?

**Or:** a narrative of a different kind could be attempted – a reading autobiography; a dream autobiography; an autobiography of friendships, of films, of crises, of learning, of music . . . and so on.

**Or:** a self-conscious autobiography written in awareness of the issues and problems raised by the idea of autobiography, by the conventions of autobiographical writing, and addressing them explicitly.

**Or:** writing might be addressed to other forms that autobiography might take, forms utilizing different media: film, soap-opera, video, photos, clothes, 'personal' objects, and so on.

**Or:** an autobiography might be possible taking into account other people's memories and accounts, an autobiography having to take into account a number of different and specifically positioned perspectives.

If the considerations I've offered above are worth taking into account, then autobiography is not, as might be inferred from its usual procedures in English, a simple and direct form of self-expression. It might, however, provide the occasion for many important textual issues, issues to do with writing – 'general writing' or grammatology – to be explored.

### RETHINKING WRITING

The kind of theory used in relation to writing here aims to be deconstructively exploratory. It aims to offer a beginning, at least, for



an examination of writing as a social practice, a conception of writing incorporating factors generally left out by established conventional and liberal practices. There are two main aspects to this kind of work with theory and writing. One concerns an examination of writing categories, of the different discourses that structure writing, of the institutions that writing operates within, and of the different forms of writing that get produced. On the other hand, there is the philosophical, deconstructive analysis of writing, examining ideas about writing in a critical way. This second aspect of the theory of writing seeks to ask fundamental questions about writing, how it works and what, in the end, it is. It entails looking at ideas about writing and eschewing the generally accepted notions that inform understanding of writing, in order to get new and different perspectives to bear on taken for granted assumptions.

It can be taught – in a number of ways, some implicit and some explicit – that writing is a very significant social practice taking many forms, inhabiting different contexts; that writing is mobile and that the categories of writing can be put into ‘play’, in theoretical and practical work. Different kinds of writing may be seen as ideologically loaded practices, reflecting ideas about a number of important social, cultural and, in the end, political issues. The importance of writing in shaping lives and in ordering different kinds of identity can be approached in this way.

It seems to me that this kind of movement, involving an expansion of the conception of the teaching of writing, is significantly more inclusive than the narrow round of writing activities, the narrow framework within which writing is taught to be understood at present.

## 5 Oral theory

### TWO EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE

The identity of oral English – what it is both theoretically and in its established practices – is typified in its characteristic exercises. According to the historical conditions of its conception and growth, the ‘classic’ practice of oral English tends to be associated with more progressive models of the subject (though there are, of course, other kinds of oral work in English). The established, fundamental character of oral English – inscribed in syllabuses, endorsed by documents produced by various bodies claiming a stake in the identity of English and operating as routine practice – might be worth reconsidering, though, in the light of the critique and reconstruction that some kinds of theory can offer.

Role-play and small group discussion are two examples of the more liberal tradition of oral English at work in the classroom and these are briefly analysed in the following section. Innumerable citations could be given of texts and manuals of English teaching advocating, describing, analysing transcripts and so on – all dedicated to affirming their practical and theoretical justification. They constitute elements in what might be called the routine order of the subject.

### ROLE-PLAY

The set-up for a role-play exercise might generally be represented as taking the following form: a situation is established, or a series of situations are established, and students in pairs or small groups improvise oral exchanges on the basis of assigned roles. The roles may be identified as part of the instructions of the exercise. Some consideration of how they are to operate might be given. There are classic examples including, at their most simple, family situations, meetings at

bus stops, encounters in the work place, in a shop, for example – all of which have been associated with a fairly long tradition of role-play in English and in creative drama lessons. In the end, the students are left to improvise, having been given some degree of guidance. The function ultimately being to explore language in use, to gain experience, to try out different linguistic situations and different linguistic roles in an open context of 'play'. While all of all that might be fair enough, and may lead into some fruitful exercises, the full possibilities of role-play – of the potential of role-play in a more fully theorized, or considered form – are not, it seems to me, realized in the exercise conceived in that simply active convention.

The positive value of the characteristic role-play exercise can be questioned on the following grounds. In this conception oral English begins and ends in practice, as it were. There is no analysis. The exercise depends on a notion of teaching language through practice – which is fine as far as it goes, and better perhaps than some crudely instrumental versions of language learning according to a monolithic notion of, say, grammar and composition. The classic role-play exercise is at least based on the positive assumption that it allows students to explore their language competencies in different language contexts.

The role-play exercise is based on a notion of language development linked directly to 'practice'. It assumes that the conditions that are set up are necessarily enabling and productive – and that the context provided unambiguously offers opportunities for the exploration of linguistic identities. But without some explicit way of addressing issues of context and identity, it is by no means assured that any sense of their significance will be realized in the enactment of role-play activities. In addition to this, the role-play situation is, obviously, subject to its contextual limitations; it is not a free-floating and unconstrained activity. The language that operates remains enclosed within the institutional context. Not that you can ever devise activities in education that somehow completely escape institutional determination. But the classic formulation of role-play has no way of making this explicit, of addressing and dealing with it. It is certainly questionable whether the role-play situation actually corresponds to the way language development occurs. Questions about operative notions of language and development may well throw the idea of oral work signified by role-play activities into serious – but necessary – doubt.

The exercise is illustrative of a specific model of oral work and of oracy – a model that entails specific notions of language, how language works, how language development is best fostered within the school context. The model – though apparently simple, though presenting

itself as being self-evident or purely common sense – is not entirely without problems, such as problems concerning the way that the relations between language and the social are conceived, or are not conceived. The extent to which these problems are critical, or are perceived as problems, though, very much depends on your position, on what sense of language and the social you're working from.

It's always worth asking, when looking at any particular aspect of educational and/or classroom practice, why the exercise is configured in a certain way. Why not start by asking about what might be necessary to begin to construct a conversation of the nature classically defined in oral role-play exercise? Why not begin the exercise by asking about the possibilities in terms of the social, linguistic contexts talk takes place in? The assumptions that underlie the routine form of the exercise are limited to the extent that they assume that language practices are not bounded by institutional factors. Consequently, they assume that language development can be engineered and monitored in the classroom by the well-intentioned teacher's good practices – in this case, setting the exercise in motion, allowing it to follow its own logic of progress, perhaps gently intervening now and then (though when, why and on what grounds?). This naivety characteristically ignores issues of language and identity that could well be profitably explored, issues that could be made explicit in the way that students are invited to engage in activities, or to consider the nature of the oral work they are involved in.

This critique, or questioning of the identity and meaning of role-play doesn't necessarily mean that the concept has to be ditched altogether. There are ways of redefining the activity that might address the problems identified here and that might, in practice, greatly enhance its scope. One way is to put a new kind of emphasis on knowledge and research – both largely absent from the practices of English. Knowledge about how language works in specific social situations, in specific institutions, could be usefully communicated, and students could be given the means to conduct their own research projects into matters like linguistic role-play.

#### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION OF A POEM

Another classic oral exercise of the more progressively constituted English classroom is the discussion in small groups – often of a text, very often a poem. Again, all sorts of assumptions are at work in this kind of exercise – assumptions about poems, and about the way texts work, entwined with assumptions about appropriate kinds of oral work,

mostly to do with the opportunities for 'free' responses that poetry or other texts may allow.

The text here is in one sense, at least, a *pretext* – the point of the exercise being to enable the free expression of the students' responses to the language of the poem, its content or to the issues raised by some text or other. The point is also to enable the free responses of individuals a space or context for interaction, dialogue and exchange. The small group context is designed to make the discussion more freely available to all – to do away with any constraints that operate in full class discussion, to initially, anyway, eliminate the authoritarian position of the teacher in classroom discourse – to get more participation for more participants, to generate good discussion in the sense of lots of activity, high levels of interaction. In spite of its apparently generous aims, this exercise still begs the question: What for? We may, for example, simply ask: Why is it thought that high levels of discussion are valuable? What kinds of interchange actually take place? To what extent are they 'free'? What kinds of text or pretext tend to get used in small group discussions, and why those? What kinds of content characterize small group discussions, and why? The simple use of small group discussion – undertaken without any very clear consciousness of language models, of contexts, of different language identities, of the relations between language and the social generally – cannot in itself make any unambiguous claim to positive value.

### GENERAL CRITIQUE OF ORAL ENGLISH

The explicit emphasis given to speech in the classroom and to the importance of oral work in English may to a large extent have been associated with more 'progressive' versions of the subject. The evolution of the oral component of English is now expressed in its established place in the English assessment, formally recognized in authorized exam syllabuses and official documents. In one sense, it might appear that the various languages of students in classrooms have been given recognition – in the authenticity of their diverse identities. It is still, however, possible to attend oral moderation meetings where students are downgraded on the grounds of accent and dialect. This means that even the questionable liberal models of oral work are subject in certain contexts to traditionalist interpretations and procedures. It seems to remain the case that standard English is the dominant form, more likely than other forms to receive certificated recognition.

The assessment of oral work depends on the idea that there could be

a model of good speech. The model proposed would have to claim for itself that it was inclusive and universal, in the sense that it would be valid in all contexts and for all occasions. In the end, such a model is likely to discriminate against certain groups, or against certain types of speech, or against certain attitudes towards speech held by certain groups of people. Speech, like other language and textual phenomena, is embedded in social differences, differences of many kinds – regional, class and ethnic differences, for example. It is not possible to say in some universal and inclusive way what a good performance in speech would consist of, because different kinds of speech operate different criteria of performance in different contexts. But the official systems of grading oral work in the school context depend to a large degree on the assumption that oral performances can be graded according to general criteria that hold good in all contexts. This negates some important features of language, and whether intentionally or not, reasserts the centrality of standard forms of English speech, making them a kind of model from which other versions are often seen as deviations. The criteria which make a good performance in standard English do not necessarily apply to other forms of the language, forms which are just as capable of expressing a full range of meaning, but which may well utilize quite other linguistic features and forms.

The very idea that people can be graded according to the language they use – and in terms of education, schooling, the language they use in a specific context under many different kinds of constraint – is dubious, to say the least. But the continuation of assessment which differentiates, negatively, like the system of grading that operates in schooling is what the continuation of the subject as we know it depends on. Oral work seems to highlight this more than other things. This is at least partly because the subject – or student – is more clearly and more sensitively exposed as a language user in oral work. Recognition of different forms of language would imply, in the end, the impossibility of assessment.

The subject of language – the student in the case of English in education – is exposed also in the sense of the position of the subject within the institution. The position of the subject is determined by a configuration of power relations operating, among other things, according to differences in speech. The subject of English, for example, is a subject of the distinction in language based on an identity that is organized within a hierarchy of linguistic differences. The subject of science – the student of science – is defined by being in a condition of lack or deficit in relation to a language. This language is organized in certain specific ways. To attain recognition as an effective subject, the

student has to strive to adopt this language or at least orient himself positively in relation to this language. This means that the function of an oral exercise in English, for example, is not necessarily so simple or straightforward as it might at first appear. The idea of open discourse must be set against the discursive context, which has already, as it were, set things up and defined the languages and the linguistic possibilities, their recognition and validation.

It's well known that a significant feature of schooling is the domination of a language, a domination that, while it may recognize other languages, continues to place them according to a hierarchy of distinction. If the language of schooling tends to be the language of standard English, then other kinds of language are likely to be marginalized and may even be negatively defined. This means that whole groups of students are likely to arrive in a state of disadvantage in relation to language. It must be important therefore to question whether the practices of oral English confirm or counter this kind of linguistic disadvantage – not a disadvantage in terms of competence, but one based on (many) different kinds of social difference.

The centrality of standard English has consequences for schooling generally, but seems explicitly relevant in relation to the stated aims of oral work in English. It is – necessarily – assumed that the function of oral work in schools is entirely and simply positive. Accordingly, it is thought that the more oral work the better. This position is related to the idea that learning and development best take place in a context where there is discussion and exchange, and that the functions of oral work coincide with a model of language which emphasises its exploratory, dialogue aspect. It is also believed that the classroom can be the site of this kind of 'open' learning, that it can produce the conditions for exploratory learning through language use. Similar to ideas about writing and its positive benefits, the progressive model of oral work is founded on the assumption that *doing* is developing, independently of other restricting and defining factors. The consequence is that the other, defining, determining factors do not get addressed or adequately taken into account.

The concept of oracy has enjoyed a kind of currency over the past twenty years in education. It has informed practice and this is reflected in teaching methods, and to some extent in exam procedures. The meaning of this development would be difficult to fix for certain. It may be at least partly traced back to the general trend in liberal and avant-garde reformulations, reflected in Bullock and carried through in the aftermath of the expansion of comprehensive schools, and a general, though uneven move towards the refunctioning of education and of

English in education. It can be roughly traced back to the influence of new models of language being imported into English from certain branches or versions of linguistics and psychology, versions which were, on the whole, incorporated into a positivist, progressive and liberal model. This model may have had many virtues, one of which may have been an attempt to recognize the validity of different kinds of languages. The English classroom provided probably the most propitious site for a model of more participatory kinds of learning allowing space for students' different languages – given the very uncertain content of the subject. (Talk could be about anything you liked so long as there was plenty of it.) The lack of an adequately explicit sense of the operations of the institution helped to allow for the partial illusion that learners could simply and directly be makers of their own meanings in the context of classroom practice.

Oral work in English was generally founded on a concept of oracy lacking a social or political dimension, that tended, in the end, to see language as a more or less transparent means to achieving ends that could be generally agreed on and universally recognized. These ends would be conceived of as consonant with the general aims of the whole curriculum, admittedly conceived in a spirit of equal opportunities. Hence the currency enjoyed by the idea of language across the curriculum, an idea that sought to emphasize the importance of oracy, among other things, in all areas of learning, where learning was to be conceived of as exploratory and – in the end – as essentially productive. Without an awareness of the uneven distributions of power at work in discourses – and pretty obviously at work in educational discourses – the balance of any classroom dialogue, and its meaning within the institution and the larger system, was doomed to be uneven and already loaded.

That is not to deny the positive spirit of the enterprise altogether, nor to deny its positive force. It remains necessary, though, to look at the way oracy is likely to be configured within specific institutional structures – whatever its explicitly stated ideal and aims. Oracy allied with literacy produces a union that covers the field of linguistic being. The institutional functioning of the alliance as a means of organizing subject identities is perhaps obvious, though not often – in terms of the practices of institutions of education – recognized as so. According to the ideology of progressive English, the role of the English teacher in the celebratory model of oracy is various: to recognize positively the language skills in speech that learners possess as competent established language users; to provide the context within which speech can be allowed to 'be' – to flow freely, as it were – and to develop oracy

through use (a tricky idea). However, as already may have been implied, the problems with these notions are related to cultural identity and social differences – as they are expressed and experienced linguistically or sociolinguistically and institutionally. The school is highly likely to represent different cultural values from those experienced and held by the student. The different values embodied by the student, or subject of education, and the school, or the institution of education, will be expressed as differences of a linguistic nature, often, obviously, as differences in speech. The context of learning is then differentiated according to the extent that students, subjects are defined in relation to language uses that carry institutionalized authority and power. Because of the institutional context of the practice of English, the ideal of the free flow of speech is restricted. Implicated in the scene of English is the politics of power that may be defined in sociological terms, in terms, that is, of how the institution distributes power unevenly. In a context defined in these terms, the idea of free expression is clearly untenable. Expression, written or oral, must be structured and defined. It is most likely to be structured and defined in favour of those whose language most accords with the dominant forms of language endorsed by the institution. This means that subjects will be systematically, structurally disadvantaged in terms of the language they bear with them and its difference from the languages of the institutional practices of learning. This disadvantage may occur in spite of the intentions of the institution and the individual members of it.

A major problem here is the very tricky matter of intervention. By what right, under what authority, can the 'celebrating' teacher intervene in the language use of his or her students. Critical analysis of the notion of intervention produces a contradiction in terms of the position of the teacher who a) legitimately wants to celebrate the language of the student, and who b) legitimately wants to modify the language of the student in respect to the forms of language required by institutionalized learning processes. The most positive, 'celebratory' forms of oral work will have to face problems when confronting some aspects of schooling. (What about the silent student and the meaning of the silence? Or the generously open question that may – implicitly or explicitly – receive the terse and perhaps equally open response: 'Fuck off'.) Intervention is a difficult problem to negotiate. No such immediate resolution is, I believe, possible – given that any educational practice must depend to some extent on the notion. A more theoretical – or interrogative – approach to oral work in English, might, however, make it less possible to suppress this problem in the practice of daily classroom activity.

I'd propose as a kind of alternative, a classroom practice of oral

'English' work that addressed more explicitly the content of talk in the classroom: in other words, what gets legitimated as proper talk and what is marginalized, or excluded, as well as exploring the kinds of topics that form the content of talk in the classroom.

Generally speaking, the positive model of encouraging oral activity in the classroom, though no doubt founded more securely in sound theoretical grounds than many other more restrictive models, and though giving rise to much greater apparent degrees of participation in 'official' classroom discourses, remains naive in so far as it neglects the institutional constraints that operate powerfully to determine the effects of classroom practice. These institutional constraints are powerful not simply as additions which operate as well as, but as forces which enclose and redirect meanings. In so far as English concerns itself with meanings and how they operate, it seems necessary to produce some model of practice that will address the operations of oral language in the learning context more fully, directly and explicitly.

The only way of tackling institutional power in an attempt to transform practice seems to be to incorporate explicit awareness of it in relation to any activities which are undertaken. This means making explicit the purposes and functions of the activities you're engaged in and their relations to the power of the institution. On this model, at least, there's no pretending that any activity is simply worth doing in and for itself – since that's an untenable position. Nor is it possible to believe innocently that any classroom oral activity in English simply and directly enhances language development. Although to put a position in regard to oral work in those terms may seem entirely negative, I believe it is possible – necessary, even – to work from that position towards a much more expansive definition of oracy in education.

### PROPOSALS FOR PRACTICE

The few suggestions that follow can only partly address the issues raised by the problematic identity of oral work in English. It would be rash to pretend that they could be resolved easily; but they can be taken much more fully into account in a practical sense than tends to be the case at present.

Here it is essential that the practical practice of the subject itself addresses the issues and brings them into some kind of explicit focus. The importance of this is the effect it has on changing the identity of the subject, so that the established, taken for granted procedures and foundations cannot remain unperturbed. A reflexive mode – a mode of practice which doesn't accept the activity in and for itself alone, a mode

which makes explicit a number of important determinant features – seems to me to be as essential in this context as in any other. In the end this would imply radical changes in the assessment procedures of oral work in English – changes in the direction of an insistence on the necessary recognition of differences of language as positive.

How can oral work in English begin to address the institutional context, and the nexus of power and authority that functions in schools and other institutions? How could students begin to explore the forms of oral exchange that characterize so many linguistic encounters in the school context? How could students begin to get hold of some kind of analysis or definition of the constraints on oracy that operate in institutional contexts, and, conversely, to analyse or define the kinds of linguistic exchanges that are enabled, and produced by institutions? And would it really be possible for students themselves to undertake a general critical evaluation of orality as it is determined by characteristic definitions of work and productivity in institutions? In fact, to attempt that in the end might well require that students develop a whole sense of the construction and maintenance of meanings within institutions – a demanding and far-reaching theoretical enterprise.

On the other hand, what other approach is possible which doesn't pretend to be simply valuable and productive in itself?

### ACTIVITIES – SOME PROPOSALS

An extended section of oral work – or a complete course – may be instigated taking examples from standard practice and giving them different emphases by introducing new elements into them, to give a theoretical emphasis to practical procedures.

#### 1 Issues

The piece of work shown in Example 5.1 follows the standard form while including some consideration of the politics of public rhetoric and the politics of agendas of debate. Where possible, students may find out about access to different kinds of information from different sources, too, and this aspect can obviously be an important part of the work they're doing. The emphasis here can be given to exploring different positions taken in relation to topical issues and to some consideration of the different groups of people who might adopt or be in accord with different positions. Many other topics can be suggested by the students themselves.

### Example 5.1 Oral work on contemporary issues

This is, initially, a piece of oral work that will involve a lot of preparation and will end with a final presentation. A piece of writing may emerge from the work you do on this topic.

You will be working mainly in a group of four or five.

These are some issues which people might think of as being 'controversial' or important in the world today:

abortion	peace
drugs	nuclear weapons
death penalty	education

There are many others, too. You should try to identify some of them. Try also – in your groups – to agree on 1) an order of importance, and 2) an order of interest to you.

When you have decided what issue you want to tackle you will need to discuss and define a few things:

- 1 what are the main aspects of the issue?
- 2 what different opinions / positions are there in relation to this issue?
- 3 how will different kinds and different groups of people regard this issue?

You will then need to consider how you can construct a presentation which takes into account all the above points. Your presentation could include:

speeches	explanations	writing
drama	dialogue	arguments

You should carefully consider the kind of language used to express different positions taken up by people in relation to the issue you're dealing with.

You should also consider what general beliefs about the world and society people have who take up particular positions in relation to the issue in question.

When you are preparing your presentation you should check through this sheet to ensure that you have followed the directions completely.

## 2 Role-play

The topic of role-play can be configured anew including some consideration of social class and dialect and role-play in real life social drama. This could mean examining the relations between role-play and the languages of social intercourse, involving consideration of languages in relation to power, the power of standard English and institutional power and social groupings. The complex relations between institutions, language and power can be formulated in an active approach which incorporates theoretical perspectives. This might include an analysis of how roles are acted out within institutional formations as shown in Example 5.2.

### *Example 5.2* An approach to language and role-play

For this exercise you will be working in groups of three or four.

For this exercise you are required to draw up your own role-play situations. You will need to define:

- the participants in the role-play
- the social identity of the different participants
- their roles
- the kind of language they speak and what special features it is characterized by
- the institutional context within which it takes place
- the topic, or topics of the role-play situation
- the perspective or perspectives taken by each participant
- the institutional context, or contexts, that have a bearing on the role-play situation and the contributions made by institutional context in defining the roles of the participants

You will need to examine at least three role-play situations in order to begin to explore different possible forms of encounter. Try to find examples in real contexts and draw some conclusions from them. You might then find it possible to more clearly construct a role-play situation of your own devising.

## 3 Small group discussions

Characteristically, small group discussions concern snippets of literature, to be worked on for decipherment or explication. The practice of small group discussion, though, is often conceived of as worthy of

pursuit in itself, and it is certainly the case that in much liberal/progressive practice, whether explicitly or implicitly influenced by certain kinds of reading of Vygotsky, a small group discussing a poem is doing something worthy, irrespective of the poem and irrespective of the kind of interpretation or orientation of the discussion.

Clearly, the possibilities of small group discussion are truly endless. Anything could be the focus for talk of this kind. And it is generally taken for granted that an element of good teaching involves the discussion of topics in small groups – whether or not that leads to a larger discussion. It is useful, practically, for a number of reasons. And it is perfectly easy to introduce into the general scenario of small group talk in the classroom some indicators that might lend a useful theoretical perspective on the process. The following pointers – or some of them – might provide a useful guideline for a reflexive approach to small group talk.

What is the subject of the discussion? Can the subject be changed? How and in what ways?

What do you think is expected of you by this conversation and the way it has been set up? Why?

What kind of language is likely to be considered suitable for this topic? Are there other kinds of language that might be used? What might they be? What might be the effects of using them?

In what different contexts might discussions of this topic take place? With what different participants? With what different effects?

Small group discussion could then be set up to consider important linguistic features, including the motivation and control of the subject; the occasion of the exchange and the constraints it imposes; the rhetoric of discussion and the determining effects of the context of the discussion.

## 4 Sociolinguistic analysis

The outline in Example 5.3, or something like it, could be used with students, to encourage them to conduct their own analyses of oracy.

This could take the form of preliminary tools for investigations. It could be applied to many different kinds of context, contexts that could be discussed, and taxonomized, as part of an extensive project.

## 5 Projects in oral ethnography

This kind of analytic work could be developed in the form of specific projects. A number of these would be relevant to an emphasis on

**Example 5.3** Sociolinguistic analysis: a guide for the elementary analysis of speech acts/speech situations

**Questions To Answer:**

- What is the occasion of the conversation?
- What is the subject of the conversation?
- What is (are) the function(s) of the conversation?
- In what context is the conversation taking place?
- What roles are being taken by each of the participants?
- How many people are present at the conversation?
- Who is participating in the conversation?
- Who is talking most?
- What kinds of things are being said? With what vocabulary?
- What are the differences between speakers?

theoretical material and its implications for the productions of meanings in specific social contexts. The following topics could provide the grounds for a great deal of small group work – oral work both analytic and productive in kind:

*Dialect and social class*

Students could examine extracts from sociolinguistics or could simply be introduced to some of the main ideas. They could do active work looking at the ways in which dialects may deviate from standard English, for example. Interesting ethnographic work could then be done devising and using questionnaires to examine how dialect speakers experience their relations with standard English in the different contexts they move in.

*The language of youth cultures – subcultural groups*

Similar work could be done to examine the different kinds of language used by different youth subcultural groups – looking at variations in vocabulary, for example, and relating these to different sets of beliefs and ideological positions expressed by different groups.

**6 Oral work and media analyses**

Oral analysis might very usefully be applied to media products; and this could form the basis for what might be called a sociolinguistics of the media. This would offer a way of addressing media products, focusing on the way in which they represent spoken language, and language differences, for example.

Focusing on the way the media represent sociolinguistic phenomena could, clearly, provide the basis for a good deal of analytic and productive work. Analyses of media products – and the way they represent different kinds of language, the way they may ‘stage’ different kind of rhetoric, and the way they may linguistically represent different social groups of various kinds – could be very instructive and could provide the basis for looking at students’ own productions, and for looking at alternative modes of representation to those that seem to be dominant. This kind of analysis could obviously add a necessary supplement to other forms of semiotic analysis of media products – and could easily be managed by students along the lines suggested below.

Soap operas – dialect and social class; the language of the family; the language of the representation of gender differences.

News broadcasts – the different kinds of language in play in news broadcasts.

Analyses of TV schedules – looking at different times taken up by different kinds of language.

Analysis of radio – for example, radio 4 and/or radio 1, going on to examine different audiences, audience responses to different kinds of languages.

Analyses of different forms of popular music – the different forms of language and the different vocabularies they utilize.

(Alternatively, students could define and examine texts using their own terms of reference, determining issues for themselves and organizing their own findings.) Any of the above could be addressed using the kind of relatively simple, interrogative forms of analysis, I have outlined. A teaching of language, though, which encouraged some – even rudimentary – awareness of issues of a sociolinguistic nature, could quite easily generate the possibilities for a different kind of oral work. The kind of oral work I’ve attempted to begin defining here is practically analytic and practically active, but also has some theoretical direction and some commitment to the idea that the social and the linguistic are closely linked. The significance of this differently conceived kind of oral work is that it goes beyond the simply active models that assume, perhaps too easily, that the classroom can itself be the site for the free development of oracy.

I would consider an important aim of any attempt to redefine oral work that it be applied to, or that it address, explicitly, institutional language practices. It would then be possible to give a more specific, theoretical focus to the connections between language and the social, to address more clearly the relations between institutional structures, differ-



ent forms of language and institutional power. This might well engage debates about the issue of standard and non-standard English – but again with a more sharply theoretical edge and with the possibility of formulating a vocabulary beyond the limited scope of common-sense and established, habitual practice to deal with the issue. Even role-play, for example, an established favourite, can be redefined to take on extra dimensions and be much more ambitious in its scope; by enacting debates about issues in sociolinguistics, by framing established activities in a context of theorizing which gives them specific point and direction. Standard oral work practices may be specifically motivated and may provide a context for explicit, conscious and self-conscious understanding.

These suggestions are preliminary only. To address the issues of orality in relation to English in this manner – as though it could ever be a discrete entity anyway – is false. But given that English makes of oracy a separate – and not fully intrusive – component of the exam process, its worth considering how the practices of oral work might be transformed in the direction of theoretical awareness, in order to highlight the place of oracy and the idea of orality within the contexts of the institutions that have some fairly powerful determining force in deciding what it is, how it is to be officially described, defined and – in the end and rather crudely – judged.

So the kind of oral work described rather sketchily above is continuous with the suggestions for developing theoretical preoccupations of other kinds of work, other fundamental categories of the subject. Oral work can be undertaken in the form of a project that is specifically constructed to address issues of language and power in a general sense as with Example 5.4.

#### **Example 5.4** Language and power

In relation to class discussions about language and power, you are asked to produce some kind of presentation dealing with issues relating to the following points:

- In what different ways are language and power related? Give specific examples.
- What different languages of power are there? Give some specific examples.
- Define some different contexts where language and power can be seen to operate. Describe specific examples.
- Does language of one kind remain powerful in all contexts? Consider the question in relation to specific examples.

- Describe/define two different kinds of language in terms of the style/manner and vocabulary of the languages.

- Is any one kind of language better than another? How might judgements about that question get made? Consider the case of standard English and other kinds of English.

This investigative work could then lead into a more complex exercise along the lines shown in Example 5.5.

#### **Example 5.5** Making a documentary or presentation on language and power

To make a documentary about language and power consider the following:

- an introduction – identifying the issues in relation to language and power that you are going to try to explore, and explaining something about how you intend to begin to look at those issues, explaining what different positions might be taken;
  - an explanation of context or contexts – looking at different kinds of language and how they operate in different contexts; looking also at how different contexts position speakers;
  - different language identities – looking at how different speakers will be given identities in relation to the language they speak and the way they speak it;
  - people using languages in different contexts – bringing together both the previous sections, looking at how language identities of individuals may change in different contexts, but also considering how certain language identities will tend to be excluded from certain contexts or will be less powerful within them;
  - institutions and languages of power – looking at the way particular institutions organize different identities for people and looking at how these different identities may be expressed in different kinds of language;
  - a conclusion and concluding questions – looking at the implications of the various things you've been considering, the issues they've raised, considering what questions may be asked about language and power – and what conclusions you may want to draw.
- You need to plan out the shape of your documentary production, considering the different elements you want to include, how you will present them and how they will be put into sequence.

## CONCLUSION

Although some of the preceding drift of this chapter has been a critique of the *specific* practices of oral English, it is important from a theoretical point of view to consider oral practices as belonging to the whole enterprise of English. The daily conduct of the subject is theoretically understood in terms of its general assumptions – the principles that are consistent with the ideological bias of the subject. The history of oral English makes it a relative latecomer into the subject's constitution, as a part of a general liberalizing trend. Liberal models of the subject were partly developed in relation to various currents of linguistics that were identified as significant – while others, of course, were ignored or rejected. The writings of Vygotsky, for example, on psychology and linguistics, provide a characteristic example of the way the subject was being determined by a specific kind of liberal model. Certain strands of Vygotsky's thought were incorporated into English. Small group discussion work, especially, was given a theoretical basis in a reading of Vygotsky that adopted certain aspects of Vygotsky's ideas and rejected or ignored others, specifically those concerned with the political dimensions of language and speech. Oral English came into (official) being without any established way of addressing the political dimension of language and with no explicit aim to address it at all. Oral English was never introduced as an element of a theoretical revision of English; it was an addendum, and as such was unlikely, though ostensibly officially adding another very significant dimension to the subject, to effect any fundamental constitutional change of it.

The way that oral English was absorbed without effecting a significant, theoretical change has had important consequences and these may be seen as contradictions or difficulties that English has had to face – and which remain – in relation to the practice and the status of oral work. In the first place the liberal practice of the subject must confront the problem involved in the very *demand* for oral work from its students. The demand is of its nature anything but liberal. It necessarily involves constraint and – in the context of the school – implies assessment. The most liberal of liberal practices cannot shuffle off the determination of what it does by the nature of the institutional context in which it gets done. The explicit recognition of this is very much counter to the liberal declaration concerning oral work – where oral work, more than writing, is seen to implicate the very nature of the individual in a more immediate sense. Admittedly, this is a problem for all educational practices in schools, but liberal versions of English have

no means of addressing the problematics of the institutional power of the subject. In the second place, the liberal model of the subject must also confront the recognition that, while it may itself have argued for a greater role for oral work in official, publicly institutionalized English – in the form of what gets examined as juridically present on the syllabus – the secondary, lesser role for the oral component is clearly and unequivocally expressed in the relative weighting given to oral and written work in assessment. If speaking is really central to English, why is its assessment constructed as an affair of supplementary significance? The liberal model of the subject may feel uneasy about all that, but again has no way of explicitly and directly addressing it – either in its debates with itself or in its favoured practices.

It remains the case that oral expression, though arguably of infinitely greater significance in general, everyday discourses, is relegated in the institutional discourse of English to supplementary significance. Oral English is somehow less official, less trustworthy than written English. This relegation of importance corresponds to a general suspicion or hesitancy about the assessment of oral English. It seems there remains a general feeling among English teachers that oral English is decidedly more difficult to examine than written English. The reasons for this are varied; though many possibilities come to mind. For example, many English teachers in oral assessment meetings will express great hesitancy in assessing oral performance, and will want to know a great deal about the context of the performance in relation to all sorts of parameters that they are generally uninterested in in relation to writing. The general hesitancy and uncertainty might be traced to the residual importance of two dominant factors. The first is the idea of objectivity in examining – the notion that criteria of assessment are established as objective measures of performance. The fallacy of this notion may be self-evident, but it remains central to the possibility of assessment in English. In oral work – perhaps because of its relative newness, perhaps because of its association with what is deemed to be subjective – the established procedures of assessment enjoy a much less secure foundation. The second factor concerns social class and forms of ethnicity that operate different kinds of English from the standard form. The liberal model of the subject – just like its more traditionalist associate – cannot afford to recognize the grounding and application of oral criteria in differences of social class. While the more liberal of the liberal advocates might suspect that the whole enterprise of oral assessment is dubious, it's unlikely that their suspicions will have been translated into practices addressing the problem. To do that would necessarily involve a critique of the whole foundation of the identity of the subject,

and would necessitate a rejection of the liberal model.

So there is a mistrust of assessment in oral work. It's too slippery and too indefinite. Writing is fixed and available and the criteria are well-established. Writing can be judged according to criteria that are objective, and its conditions of production, its authenticity can be guaranteed. Oral work involves judging too many variable factors, factors that go beyond the proper jurisdiction of the subject: there's the nature of the exercise to consider, how it was set up, the personality of the speaker, the suitability of the assignment; there may be relative roles in a role-play of interlocutors to take into account – all factors, among others, that might well make teaching examiners hesitant in the face of assessment, but, nevertheless, factors which are always anyway in play in any language situation, oral or written.

Oral English has generally been conceived of as practical, but is rooted in notions of language that are quite specific and strictly limited. Theory is a necessary component in moving beyond the inertia of dominant models to realize new forms and possibilities. It is possible to begin to formulate a practice of oral work addressing theory in its activities, making explicit the issues involved in relation to the social dimensions of language in general and within the context of English and education specifically.

## 6 Literature, language, literacy and values

### THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SUBJECT

Analysis of the subject's view of literacy indicates characteristic gaps and particular mystifications. Literacy in education has been closely associated, if not equated, with something called 'reading', although the idea of reading has not been extensively analysed in English. This fundamental concept still tends to be figured naively as the individual reader alone with her or his (innate?) skills and chosen text developing happily and more or less freely through a graduated – though probably not too schematized – sequence of worthy texts. Another, and complementary, way of representing the reading process in English is to imagine the class as a body guided by the reading skills of the teacher and enthralled by the teacher's chosen text. Literacy and literature – as in both cases mentioned – have been all too simply and naively linked, with a definition of literature that has been, curiously, both remarkably narrow on the one hand, and on the other hand very much undefined. Though the approaches broadly outlined above may seem unexceptionable, they arouse all sorts of questions. Their predominance effectively displaces alternative ways of understanding and teaching reading that might be offered by a different and more inclusive notion of literacy.

The peculiar domination of fiction and the idea of poetry are only examples of the anomalies that have operated, and still operate powerfully in this context. These peculiarities, or anomalies, have been allowed to stand because they have been perfectly in accord with a specific subject ideology – a set of well established, but not always very explicitly expressed or justified, beliefs and practices. In fact, many of these beliefs and practices have become so well entrenched as to appear to be beyond question. This has certainly been the case for dominant reading practices, dominant versions of English – the kind of English you might find expressed in any official syllabus, in liberal accounts of

the subject and in countless examples of daily practice. This loosely defined notion of the subject and of its equally ingenuous model of literacy has enjoyed an almost theological status in some quarters.

Alternative versions of the subject have hitherto lacked institutional power, and have often found themselves in the contradictory position of colluding with that which they oppose. Ideas defining literacy as socially governed and reading practices as determined by institutional contexts, have not been considered within the terms of reference of established English. Even the most cursory glance through a copy of examination assessment criteria indicates that literacy is represented as a matter of individual competence, not of social construction. A historical survey of examination documents tells the same story. In the face of the power of these unconsidered assumptions, it is important to assert, or reassert, that literacy is not a self-defining thing. Literacy is not something you get on your own, or that is given to you simply by the learning processes set up in schools. Literacy is not one stable thing which you simply have or don't have. Literacy is subject to change, to redefinition and to challenge. It is, really, a scandalous fact that generations of students in state education have been taught to believe themselves to be inadequate in relation to literacy, not because they are, but because the institutions they passed through operated a strictly limited model of literacy. The literacy competences of these people were not admissible within the scheme of things. They were not the competences required by the institution. The operative model of literacy was, and largely remains, punitive and exclusive.

It was partly in the name of literature that this process of discrimination was and is maintained. Some institutions may have gone boldly against the grain of things in an attempt to give their students literature as a kind of cultural capital, in the belief that it was somehow intrinsically good for them, and that they were worthy of it, independently of their social origins. These efforts, though, in so far as they were serious, determined and democratic, were few and far between and were constantly confronted with the problem of the power of the institution – the institution of English. Literature was not alone in the process of making literacy limited and exclusive. Approaches to writing were also bound up with similarly restricted ideas about what it means to be effectively literate. Language practices – whether thoroughly mechanistic or ostentatiously creative – were embedded in a strictly qualified notion of effective literacy, a notion that – whatever else it was – was denuded of history, sociology and cultural theory. In English, the operative models of the subject, lacking social theory, lacking comprehensive theories of language, lacking any critical grasp

of the operations of institutions in education, could hardly fail to be closely tied to the most discriminatory practices of schooling. To simplify, but not to oversimplify: models of language determining practices of writing in English were broadly founded on notions of accuracy, lucidity, appropriateness and fullness of expression. It was as though these things were self-evident qualities that all intelligent people would recognize and value equally when they saw them. Failure to achieve competence in attaining these qualities could then be written off as attributable to innate deficits – either of intelligence or of inclination or of social background. At a later stage, a fully fledged idea of creativity – based on a belief in the creative intelligences of individuals, and the creative resources of language – became significant and influential in English. From this 'creative' perspective, the 'whole' person is to be engaged in writing. Writing, like reading, is a means of personal growth, a means by which the individual can explore and discover his or her own identity in the order of things. When elements of the creative English teaching fraternity discovered an (albeit partially) social reading of the meaning of the subject and saw that the models it operated were disadvantaging the already marginalized students whose class background or ethnic origin excluded them from educational success, aspects of both approaches were adopted in an attempt to equip disadvantaged students either with a purchase on standard forms and/or to grant them the freedom to freely express themselves in their own languages, unconstrained by false notions of the correct. The development of an emphasis on the value of oracy as an idea and as a kind of practice was continuous with the positive recognition of language differences – and the implicit, at least, realization of the domination of standard forms of English. The negotiation of this tricky territory, though, was never fully theorized nor effectively managed. It was partly the absence of coherent theories of the language, education and culture nexus that meant it was not possible to implement this position as a fully reformulated definition of the proper aims and objectives of English, nor of a substantially defined alternative practice. These absences ensured that broadly and structurally English remained unchanged. English was still dominated – at the level of ideas, and overwhelmingly at the level of practice – by a conceptual framework that consorted unhappily with social analysis and cultural critique.

The intentions of all the positions and projects outlined sketchily and simply above may well have been honourable. They may well have produced plenty of examples of 'good practice', and at least some had the positive virtue of beginning to address relations between the dominant institutionalized forms of the subject and its constituency.

They were, however, still purblind to the politics of the subject – to the politics of education, the politics inevitably implicit in all institutionalized practices of language and literacy. Lacking critical theories about the constitution of the academic discourses they were engaged with, lacking a critical sense of the identity of the ‘subject’ of education (and therefore unable to construct working alternative models of any power), they were lumbered with impossible contradictions.

### THE GHOST OF LITERATURE: IDENTITY AND THE QUESTION OF VALUES

Although in some very significant senses the idea of literature may be dead, or slowly dying, the ghost of the intrinsic value of literature still haunts a great deal of English teaching. Historically embedded in the constitution of the subject, literature has been and remains a determinant characteristic of the subject’s identity. The residual presence of literature belongs as much to popular conceptions of the subject as to the educational arena, implicated in popularly, professionally and institutionally cherished ideas of English. There are many reasons why the hegemony of literature in English should be considered an anachronism in need of change.

The idea of literature as a special category worthy of attention in itself, with its own special qualities and specific effects, and its very own modes of engagement is really a very dubious affair. This is a philosophical issue – in the sense that what literature is cannot be defined in terms of any essential features nor in terms of any unique qualities or effects it might have. Literature has to be maintained by specific groups in specific practices – and these tend to be minority affairs conducted in academic institutions, though often endorsed in many other contexts. In schools, the idea of literature has been generally maintained by professional English teachers whose professional identity relies on the maintenance of the special identity and special qualities of literature. Teachers of English have believed, in a necessary ideological move, that literature really does exist – *in itself*, somehow – and that it really does have intrinsic qualities that make it worthy of study in itself. They have maintained, one way or another, that literature is generally very good for you, if you’re lucky enough – or sensitive enough – to appreciate it. If you’re not able to appreciate it this is likely to be due to innate insensitivity or poor social conditioning, or maybe the general decline of culture into technological mindlessness and media intoxication. This position has been held as an act of faith, sometimes loosely as a more or less casual assumption.

sometimes fervently as a messianic project. The question of literature, then, is clearly not just a philosophical issue. It engages questions about institutions and professional identities, about ideology and culture, and about the sociology and the history of education, too.

It may well seem, repetitious to rehearse the same old questions; but there remains a case to be answered. There are a number of vitally important issues at stake in asking: What is literature? Why is literature given a privileged position? What values does literature represent? Theoretical tunnel vision to the challenging force of questions about the problem of the identity of literature, and the problem of the value of literature, has been necessary to its very existence in English. One of the major snags with the valorization of the whole idea of literature – and the same applies to the more specific idea of English Literature – as is well known, is that what exactly it is has proven to be something of a problem. In terms of deciding what’s in it and what’s not, the identity of literature has never been clear and uncontested. Nobody can say definitively and authoritatively what it is. The so-called ‘canon’ has only ever been an idea of mutable substance. Without the defining body of a canon, the idea of literature threatens to spill over into complete formlessness. The insuperable problem of defining where the boundaries between English Literature and general literature might be drawn effectively deconstructs the very foundations of the identities of both. Literature can hardly operate, then, as a defining principle. Like Wittgenstein’s beetle in the box; it’s quite possible that everyone is referring to something quite different when they invoke it. It’s consequently rather bizarre that the teaching of literature, though no-one really knows what it is, has been in places at times advocated with a missionary polemic, as though matters of theological importance were at stake. At the same time it’s perfectly obvious – given the indefinite identity of the thing – that literature should be justified with various kinds of grandiose rhetoric.

English in schools – in its traditionalist or liberal versions – has never properly sorted out its attitude towards English Literature, nor ever really clarified its attitude towards literature, while pragmatically asserting the centrality of either or both these ideas. English remains, however, saddled with the idea of literature, one way or the other. The continuing significance of the idea of literature is evident in the general practice of the subject in schools and is confirmed in plenty of documents expressive of institutional power – from examination syllabuses to government initiated reports. In spite of the contradictions and flaws of definition the idea is heir to, in spite of gestures made towards ‘cultural studies’ models of the subject, literature remains a pretty

much universally acknowledged practice, as well as a dominant concept. In a recent edition of the *Times Educational Supplement* (June 14 1991) various luminaries are cited to justify and reaffirm literature:

"The experience of literature is central to the English curriculum because it can illuminate the experiences, thoughts and feelings of students . . ."

"Of course every child should study literature because it promises practical, intellectual and personal rewards . . ."

"A nation's literature is a mirror in which its children learn to recognize themselves . . ."

Even though what's said here about literature could equally well be said about any number of things, there seems to be a general consensus at work. You can read about the 'essential' and 'central' nature of the experience of literature in official documents authorized by NATE – the body supposed to represent the interests and reflect the thinking of English teaching in a broad and general way. Claims of this kind are based on the assumption that literature exists in an unproblematic way, that it is clearly identifiable without contradiction. Actually, though, literature within the practices of English in secondary education has not really been sustained in any clear and unequivocal way. It has proven difficult to espouse the fully grown version of literature for the full range of the comprehensive constituency, anyway. English Literature 'proper' (though this has always been a changing and uncertain thing) has hardly been a category that English teachers in schools have really subscribed to – or rarely for *all* their students. Not being able to ditch the concept altogether and address a broad and inclusive textual field, English in schools has therefore had to live with an ersatz literature, the value of which has never been fully formulated, has never been very explicitly affirmed nor fully examined. What has been taught for examination at sixteen plus under the name English Literature has included many things ranging from Zeffirelli's film of *Romeo and Juliet*, to *Lord of the Flies*, *Zigger-Zagger*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and Seamus Heaney's 'Digging' along with a host of other non-canonical, marginally canonical or pseudo-canonical texts. Whatever this literature has been, it has hardly ever been thoroughly and strictly English Literature. It has more probably been maintained because it has been necessary, for the maintenance of the identity of the subject, to hold onto the notion and practice of literature as distinct from absolutely *other* forms – of popular culture, for example. At least this has had the minimal virtue of giving the subject a content all of its own, even though the content may be pretty vaguely

defined. The odd but well-established contradiction at work in all this has been central to the continuity of the identity of the subject.

In recent times, English in schools has tended to feel more comfortable with the idea of general literature. English has pragmatically, and perhaps cynically, maintained the generalized, but still very restricted idea of 'stories and poems' – ascribing (often in the form of ritual invocations of value) to these nebulous categories properties making the subject worthy of being. A host of texts – stories and poems – unlikely to find themselves inscribed in *anyone's* version of a canon – have constituted what is generally referred to and valued as literature, a substitute sub-canon without limits or definition. Justifications – and many of them have been hyperbolically grandiose – for exposure to this never defined body of texts have tended to be expressed in the terms of a vaguely liberal ideology, and are largely inscribed in established reading practices in English in schools, though not at all uniformly so. The guiding principles involved in this general nexus of ideas, attitudes and beliefs – expressed in terms like 'personal response', 'empathy', 'exploration' and so on – are drastically susceptible to serious contest by analysis of language and textuality as social and institutional practices.

The case of 'poetry' provides a classic illustration of how fundamental categories belonging to the idea of literature are bound up with mystification and confusion. Subjected to self-conscious reappraisal, the problems of definition and of value won't go away. The innumerable instances of the claim that poetry is of value rest on the assumption that the identity of poetry is a recognizable entity, for one thing, and that it is in some way bound to be worthwhile, once you can get it going. Like literature, though, the category of poetry has no beginning and no end. It can only exist as an institutionalized practice. The identity of poetry is very much a shifting one: current practices associated with the idea of poetry are very different from those now outmoded practices that had elementary school children, for instance, learning poems from *Palgrave's Treasury* by heart. The very identity of poetry has been changing ever since then, but it has never really settled into any distinctive body. What's more the special properties that might be ascribed to poetry might equally be claimed for a number of other things – such as popular music in various forms, though it has been important in the context of English to maintain a more or less clear distinction between them. What poetry is supposed to be and do, and its place in the curriculum has been completely uncertain and changing, but it rests in the end on specific and really ideological assumptions about texts, language and literacy, much of which ideology is not

subject to critical appraisal. The same kind of uncritical thinking is implicated in the idea of writing poetry. There persists the idea that poetry is an activity that students of English should be engaged in by some kind of absolute imperative.

Equally uncertain and as potentially contentious as the identity of literature is the discourse of literary study, the established form of literary 'knowledge'. Although represented as the natural and proper way to study texts, the discourse of textual analysis in the study of literature is generally quite specific and certainly very limited. It's dominant species operates an amalgam of ideas, like personal response, and yet it structures responses according to a set of quite fixed assumptions about how texts and reading processes operate. This set of notions about texts and reading gives credence to the idea that texts have intrinsic meanings, though personal response promises the adventure of thoroughly individual meanings. Personal response, though, can't really ever be personal. Responses to texts are conditioned by all sorts of impersonal factors, and responses in English are conditioned by the habits of thought that are legitimated by the order determined by the subject's institutionalized identity. Other examples of ideas that dominate are to do with things like the author's intentions, the reading of proper names as 'character', with narrative continuity, with textual integrity and many other highly questionable things. Without the dubious notions of textual integrity, though, and of intrinsic meaning, there can't really be any reason why the favoured texts of English – whether English Literature or stories and poems – should continue to hold any kind of privileged position or status. There are, after all, countless other texts and signifying practices that a subject concerned with those things might address.

The values literature represents really belong to a specific social and ethnic group. It is not necessarily within the cultural value systems of all. Its identity is quite clearly set against the identity of popular culture; and for many people, including students in schools, is therefore alienating. This can be experienced as a form of social discrimination. The culturally valued artefacts of one group are given higher status and accorded greater significance than those of other groups, who see the cultural products they value being systematically excluded as insignificant, meaningless or trivial. This is a blatant case of cultural domination. It's also unquestionably, and troublingly, the case that the idea of English Literature has been closely associated with a conception of national identity – and to a large extent this continues to be the case. There has been a great deal of writing in recent times demonstrating how the subject as part of national state education was founded on the

idea that English Literature constituted a vital element in our general cultural heritage. The idea of a specifically English culture, though, and of a literature bearing its values, is, pretty obviously, contentious. It presupposes and ignores a number of important factors. It presupposes, for one thing, some kind of commonly grounded national identity with generally common cultural experience and values. This is not necessarily the case, though. It reflects only one limited perspective on the nature of national identity, a narrow definition of culture and one quite specific notion of social structure.

To represent English as a project invoking the idea of a common cultural heritage must involve some notion of a homogeneous culture which all members benefit from and share in equally. Culture in this sense might generally be conceived of as a positive force representing the finer things, the more elevated expressions of general truths. Or it might represent the expressions of the common identity, purposes, beliefs and values of a people. These positions are bound to run into difficulties if we consider, for instance, that general truths must always be culturally specific, that the very identity of things is *not* universal, but is a culturally produced ordering, a set of symbolic meanings belonging to a particular cultural perspective. It's hardly possible, though, on any kind of modernist or post-modernist understanding to think of culture in this homogeneous sense. Culture in a modern state, in a modern society, is not something that belongs to everyone equally and always in the same way. Culture is splintered among different groups. Cultural differences are manifested by groups whose difference might be expressed in terms of age, gender, class, ethnicity, locality, employment, religion, political beliefs and so on. It's difficult to think of a cultural phenomenon that might erase all those differences in one unifying movement. Although that is what has been claimed at times on behalf of English literature – a cultural phenomenon that can hardly be said to speak for all those differences equally.

Literature has certainly not ever been something that has been enjoyed or attained or aspired to equally by all. Cultural differences may well represent positions that are likely to conflict with one another and be in a state of contest rather than of harmony. The thoroughly functionalist view of culture, represented by the idea of communicating a common cultural heritage, is the product of a specific perspective that claims its own version of culture to be culture *itself*. This is a thoroughly unsound notion, philosophically speaking. In the end, it indicates a will to promote one set of cultural experiences, values and beliefs over others – of no less merit but of considerably less established power. What's more, it's increasingly difficult to see how the notion of a

specifically national cultural identity can be maintained when so much cultural experience is transnational – when the media of cultural experience have tended to intermingle things in a post-modern frenzy of intertextual activity. The transnational, transcultural character of much of modern cultural experience has only been minimally recognized in the idea of a multicultural approach to literature.

Multiculturalism, though, may have a neatly deconstructive impact on the idea of English Literature and its predominance. If, for example, the Bengali novel might be included in English, what about other kinds of novel and what about other kinds of cultural product. The idea of a specifically and specially *English* literature breaks down. But multiculturalism remains, in its present general condition, tied to the notion of literature. The assumption, again speaking generally, is that cultural difference is explored most effectively in the form of imaginative fictions of one kind or another. The idea that there are complexities in terms of how cultures adopt other alien and perhaps dominant cultural forms is rarely explored in this context. Also the problem of how to teach multicultural literature where a culture may not have a literature in the commonly accepted sense is not confronted. Another problem in relation to multiculturalism concerns how conventional reading practices determine the kinds of reading that texts assumed to be speaking from a different cultural perspective might be given. All of this – all these difficulties – will remain unaddressed for just as long as the subject lacks a proper social theory of culture in relation to a general conception of signifying practices. Multicultural literature remains within the limited confines of the ideas and practices of literature. A more expansive concept of textuality and language might make more effective use of the varied perspectives on things that multiculturalism potentially offers. At least in its present forms it challenges the idea of a predominantly English literature.

Literature has tended to express and reflect the interests of dominant groups in the social structure; whatever its intentions to the contrary, the notion of literature has depended on a sense of textual hierarchy. The study of English Literature has tended – in the context of state school education – to represent the interests of certain groups while failing to address the interests and concerns of other groups. The modes and values of literature have been seen as being set in opposition to the values and modes of popular culture. Popular culture has frequently in the past been denigrated at the expense of a high culture that has embraced literature as an important aspect of itself. It has been one of the defining features claimed for literature that it is more subtle, more rich and complex, less crude and manipulative, less riddled with cliché

and free from the taint of commercial interests. None of these features belong especially to literature in any absolute sense. The clear opposition between literate and popular culture is only really maintained from one particular and very limited notion of what culture is – and it depends on a very partial sense of cultural identity.

The fear of the cultural melting pot is never very far away from the cry for the reassertion of common cultural values or for a reassertion of traditional literature. The very identity of Shakespeare as an idea is bound up with a sense of the national identity. The project of a specifically *English* literature at the centre of a specifically *English* schooling might be seen as the desire to sustain an ethnocentric and mythological national identity against the threatened incursions of an alien other – whether this other is the alien within, in the form of an inferior popular or mass culture, or whether it is the alien without, in the form of texts or cultural forms that express ethnic difference.

The idea of the intrinsic value of literature weighs on English, and the question about why it should remain privileged over other forms of text or language use that it isn't clearly distinguished from anyway, remains practically unaddressed, though visible in a number of forms. The values that literature and its teaching represent haven't been critically analysed. In spite of all its problems of definition and identity, literature grinds on, an odd assortment of texts loosely held together, never inscribed in any defining taxonomy, nor defined in terms of essential features. In this sense, at least, there's more hanky-panky in English than there is in Madonna.

Where does all this leave English Literature and English in schooling? If literature is merely chimerical, a nebulous category without definition, and if the rationales for its continued existence are thin, unconvincing and radically questionable, shouldn't the practice and the rhetoric of literature have done the decent thing and retired discreetly from the scene. Perhaps this is a reasonable, if not popular, proposition. For many practitioners of English, there's no doubt that a thoroughgoing deconstruction of literature does cause anxiety and concern, because the effect of such a deconstruction is to radically problematize the nature of the subject. For what groups of people does the deconstruction of the idea of literature represent a threat? In many quarters, it has would be seen as a negative thing, but there is no need to view a complete and thoroughly critical reevaluation of the special place of literature as destructive. The deconstruction of the idea of literature suggests new and multiplied possibilities, rather than the reduction involved in persisting with the limitations of literature.



## POPULAR CULTURE

One important function of English Literature has been to make a clear distinction between, for example, Madonna and itself. English has hitherto been organized around a segregation between its texts and texts of the order of popular culture. Popular culture has been denigrated explicitly and implicitly in the process. The case of Madonna, though, might provide an instance of an arguably complex and important cultural phenomenon, belonging to a complex and richly rewarding cultural form – popular music – and evidently capable of being addressed as a rich and rewarding intertext, as many feminist writers, for example, have chosen to do. Plenty of other examples of popular culture might be construed as capable of raising complex issues about a range of textual and intertextual phenomena. As an example of a mode of signifying practice, Madonna may well constitute a text, or series of intertexts, worth attending to, worth looking at from a number of different perspectives, worth thinking about and exploring. Consideration might, for example, be given to examples of videos and how they work, to the way Madonna is defined in the press, is produced and reproduced in countless different accounts. Attention might be given to different ways of reading Madonna, different reading techniques that might be applied and to different kinds of interpretation that might be made. Attention might also be given to audiences of Madonna and in what different ways Madonna might be received. Madonna might be examined in relation to complementary and contrasting kinds of texts or intertexts, connected by issues that could be interesting to define. A variety of media would need to be addressed to undertake work of this kind – and the relations between different media could be explored. A host of challenging and engaging possibilities could be constructed, dealing with texts and textual fields in a number of different ways.

In the present organization of the subject, it isn't really conceivable for Madonna to belong to English or to be part of English in the same way that Dickens is or reading a novel of your own choice might be. How come Madonna is not set on A level syllabuses, though, and is unlikely to be an examination set text? The mode of address that Madonna might get within English is likely to be very different from the special texts of English Literature. Any controversy that might be aroused by proposing Madonna as suitable as an A level set text depends on the assumption that there is a clear distinction in kind between literature and media texts. This distinction has been seen as more or less crucial in debates about literature in the public arena –

whether concerning Madonna and Marvell or Chaucer and Chuck Berry. These public representations, found recently in all sections of the press, echo institutionally critical points. The Madonna issue raises fundamental questions about the nature of literacy in education, questions about identities and values, questions about, for example, literature and gender. Look at many popular cultural forms and the issue of femininity, the question of gender roles, ideas about masculinity, significant matters of identity, are often dynamically represented, often far more likely to engage the interest and critical attention of students, frequently in forms that are more interesting and more challenging than their high cultural counterparts from the realms of literature. These judgements of value, though, are not, in the end, what is most crucially at stake. What is at stake is the restriction and limitation of a field, as well as the restriction and limitation on ideas that may be put to use addressing textual phenomena.

Cultural forms, such as rap music, tabloid newspapers, game shows and video films, constitute a significant portion of most people's cultural experiences, yet they don't figure in any kind of systematic way in the official constitution, nor in the widespread definitions of the subject in practice. This seems strange in a subject that claims to be dealing, in some fundamental and essential way, with linguistic and textual experience. To deconstruct the opposition between the category of literature and the category of popular culture in order to demonstrate that neither is self-sustaining and neither has special qualities peculiar to itself, may well be an important move in a radical review of what has hitherto been assumed to be the uncontested identity of the subject. Exorcising the ghost of that distinction may enable an approach to culture of a much more inclusive, theoretically rigorous and powerful sense. This may well entail shedding time-honoured inhibitions about dealing with cultural forms that have traditionally been denigrated by the habits of thought of the subject English.

The whole business of looking at individual texts taken out of their specific social contexts of reading, out of their various institutional sitings, though, is highly questionable. Of course, pursuing the philosophical and social implications of decontextualized reading is unthinkable in terms of the idea of literature, personal response 'theory' and all its associated practices. These practices actually depend on the suppression of the social as it bears on educational practices in the field of literacy. This is a direct consequence of the reign of the ideology of 'liberalism', of individualism with its critically limiting suppression of the social – the consequences of which are far from liberal. The failure to centralize critical issues such as race, class, and gender – their

decentralization or marginalization, in effect – means that conservative values dominate the subject's ideological constitution and its practice, even at its most apparently liberal.

There may be a danger that the substitution of the study of media texts from popular culture simply displaces one set of texts for another, without considering fully the implications of a deconstructive revision of the field as a totality. There is a point in addressing texts that would otherwise be kept away by an exclusion process that devalues the cultural experiences of so many people. The restriction of meanings to texts is a danger here and one that can be avoided by looking at language practices, signifying processes, reading practices and values and meanings as they circulate, become ensconced, get changed or contested in their many and varied contexts.

Cultural experiences do not merely reside in either literary or popular forms and texts: they inhabit many cultural practices. It's important to radically expand the notion of what a text is, to look beyond the limits of what's conventionally understood as the textual. The thoroughly intertextual nature of signifying practices in a more inclusive arena may then be contemplated and practically addressed. This implies that it is necessary to forge a model of ('popular') culture which takes into account not just the media texts that have been in some cases identified as being popular culture themselves, for that is a limited and limiting model, too, but a conception that takes into account and realizes the languages of general cultural experience, the positions of subjects, the forms of thinking, seeing and feeling in their many different contexts. It may well be as important to deconstruct the purely textual view of popular culture as it is to pretend that culture is some kind of recognized body of valued experiences caught in aesthetic forms that speak a universal language to all forever and that bear our true and common cultural heritage.

#### MODELS OF LANGUAGE

The idea that language should be 'taught' within the context of state education hardly seems strange, though the whole project can be seen as questionable. It certainly seems worth reassessing the models that inform the practice of language teaching in English, the ideas that structure it. It might be as well to ask afresh what motivates this teaching of language, what its explicit and stated aims are and how these match up with an analysis of its practices and its effects. The idea that language should be assessed is particularly subject to question. The assessment of language is implicated at all levels of English teaching. It

seems important to ask: What is the motivating force driving this assessment? What are the established criteria based on? What assumptions maintain them? According to many intellectually respectable positions, the models of language and ideas about language that have informed the assessment of the subject have theoretically deficient and, in the end, discriminatory. Rather like literature, the idea of standard English has imposed its restricted version of language on the subjects of English whose languages have been excluded by this monologic domination. What would happen if the well established critiques of language in education were written into the constitution of the subject English? The favourite practices and forms of assessment would need to be thoroughly revised, at the very least.

A critique of both traditionalist and liberal models of language entails a practical re-examination of the processes of education – at the level of daily classroom practice and of the social significance and effects of the curriculum. These two most dominant notions of language remain influential and cannot be strictly separated from one another. Both dominant models – traditionalist and liberal – have tended systematically to negate language as social practice, both being content to operate within a framework of assessment criteria that might be subject to radical critique from sociolinguistics, for example – or in fact, from any theory or set of theories engaging with language as social practice. Liberal and traditionalist forms of English still remain implicated in what ought to be recognized as the brutal and unacceptable discrimination against people based on misreadings of the meanings of language differences.

Any English which doesn't recognize and theorize its very specific social functions within its institutional context is always subject to determination by conservative forces, even when they are masked as liberal ideology. Deeply rooted prejudices about good and effective language practices are implicated in liberal and traditionalist models, because they lack – by choice or by blindness – the capacity to address, self-reflexively, how they work. The critical absence or gap in these models of language is the social, the relations between social differences and differences in language. Writing, reading and speaking subjects of English are constantly being defined by discriminatory models posing as common sense. A method of English teaching wanting to address the discrimination of dominant models would need to develop a different kind of theory and practice.

How does English explain different levels of language achievement under its formalized grading procedures? (And how do English teachers negotiate their own positions in relation to the procedures of

assessment?) If the criteria of assessment can claim – as they must, and do by implication – some kind of universal validity, how come a very significant proportion of students fail to achieve the critical grade C or above? Are different levels of achievement equal to different capabilities in some generally applicable, absolute and universal sense? Are different levels of achievement in English examinations indicative of different levels of language? Are some people's language competences, in a general way, inferior to others – less worthy of positive recognition, less close to the ideal represented by grade A? The implication of the assessment system in English is that some forms of language, belonging to specific social groups, are superior to others – and this is very obviously suspect.

The grading system can only really work if some general notion of levels of performance, distinguished by a hierarchical system of ordering, is in operation. The grading system depends on *ideas* about language, ideas informing its assessment, and the central idea that language – in its individual usage – can be assessed according to criteria that are objective and universal. This position may seem obvious and unexceptionable. On the other hand, it may appear outrageously presumptuous and unjust. It can only appear as common sense within a specific context of ideas about language – the ideas of English – that are determined to repress and exclude sociolinguistic critique. Other ideas that don't come within the compass of established English challenge the validity of all the assumptions implicated in the position.

To take grading into account means addressing the institution of English. It means, also, that English is about things other and more than creative self-expression and personal response. The institution of English – that self-avowedly delights in the wonders of human creativity expressed in poems and stories, and in the free individual responses they engender – also supervises the universal, and largely punitive, grading system that grants status to certain forms of language – the ideal at grade A, and the far from ideal at grade G. These grades, as everyone knows, carry weight in other contexts, too – beyond English and beyond the school.

The institution of English, in its present condition has no real place for sociolinguistics, or a sociolinguistic analysis of its ideas and practices. It is, in fact, necessary to keep sociolinguistics away from the central being and identity of English. Sociolinguistics is thoroughly incompatible with grading in English, in a way that individual creativity and personal response are not. Sociolinguistics operates in accordance with a principle of linguistic relativity – looking at different forms of

language in an analytic way rather than, as with English, in a hierarchical and judgemental way. Sociolinguistics looks at how some favoured forms of language may carry more power and status, in certain contexts, than others – and examines why that's the case. English blankly accepts linguistic status distinctions and construes them as universal, and somehow, as natural. Sociolinguistics is interested in examining and defining the operations of language in different contexts, whereas English tends to deny the significance of context – and denies its own very specific institutional context.

There is no reason, in an absolute sense, why sociolinguistics should not figure centrally in a redefinition of English. The implications for the grading system would be drastic; but it's perfectly possible for sociolinguistic practice of the subject to be developed. Such a practice might involve, for example, looking at ideas about different kinds of language, different kinds of language contexts and how these relate to specific social groups and specific social practices. Teaching might deal explicitly with different kinds and styles of reading, writing and speaking. Ethnographic projects could address a range of language institutions and differences. A practice of a subject conceived of in this way would be far removed from what English has been.

Ideas associated with the term post-structuralism could also furnish a basis for the production of models and practices in relation to language, undercutting the false certainties that hold English together. A post-structuralist reading of language can be envisaged as directed towards an emphasis on culture, on the social and the political aspects of linguistic practices. All of these are currently banished by official and dominant models of English. A post-structuralist practice could involve looking at sign systems of different kinds, how they operate general cultural meanings, how general cultural meanings circulate, hold power, are contested and how they operate differently in different contexts. Deconstructive ideas about mobility of meanings are likely to mean that the ideas keeping English in place can no longer pretend to their innocent neutrality. Psychoanalysis, for example, proposes a completely different model of the relations between language and the individual – incorporating phenomena conventional English cannot address.

In all of this are a host of productive possibilities. In the end, the precise source of ideas hardly matters. It is important to retain the idea of theory as being the kind of self-conscious awareness that brings into the field of the subject's sense of itself – and into its practices, into its rhetoric and into its very constitution – an explicit awareness of the social dimension of language.

**LEARNING TO BE LITERATE**

Definitions of literacy in English are frequently laconic, as though the word 'literacy' always referred unwaveringly to the same thing. It seems symptomatic of English that it should lack any coherent theory of what literacy is, or might be. English blithely eschews theoretical definitions of literacy, relying on the authority of the subject, rather than on the arguments for particular models or positions. The implicit definition of literacy at work in English is consequently exclusive and limited. It practically denies different ideas of literacy. Different literacies, different kinds of competences framed by different practices, operating within different arenas are barred from current definitions and practices.

Different notions of literacy are produced by different conceptions of culture. Dominant notions of literacy are, historically, at least, associated with ideas of national identity – as may witness the literature surrounding the foundation of the subject and the frequent attempts to increase its emphasis in state education. Numerous publications in the public sphere – in newspapers of all casts, for example – testify to the conflation of literacy with culture and national identity. The tendency of the association of literacy with national identity is narrowing, moving towards exclusivity rather than inclusiveness. Dominant cultural forms are likely to predominate, and are likely to exclude or marginalize those that are different and less powerful. Liberal versions of English, versions that might feel uneasy about its association with notions of national identity, are still unlikely to address the politics of this issue, being unequipped to deal conceptually with the politics of literacy.

There is a politics of literacy, a politics constantly at work institutionally and ideologically in the daily practices of schools. Literacy is not a space that can claim to be free from the operations of power. In English the ascendancy of certain ideas ensures that certain groups are identified positively, and others negatively on the basis of language differences. This is the politics of literacy at work, organizing the identities of its subjects into a hierarchy of differences defined on the basis of a dominant conception of literacy.

The national grading systems of English might be represented as the agreed criteria for assessing levels of literacy. And yet it would be difficult to indicate how and where and by what processes agreement about what literacy is was ever achieved. In the end, it would have to be conceded that whatever the process involved in defining dominant, institutionally powerful definitions of literacy, it never had anything to

do with democracy, and it produced a definition that has been sure to exclude the majority of its subjects – subjects who, with or without a national curriculum, must pass through its filtering system.

In public debates the question of standards of literacy frequently arises, though how it would be possible to measure standards of literacy is difficult to imagine, except by reference to the most banal conceptions of the idea of literacy imaginable. What kinds of questions would have to be formulated to address the matter? Are standards of literacy rising or falling? How could you tell? Would more people reading more Wordsworth, in their places of work or in their front rooms, indicate greater levels of literacy than before? What would be the meaning of literacy in this case, and what positive inflection could it be given? What about people who might display an addiction to the writings of John Wilmot, *The Earl of Rochester*? Are they more literate than readers of Jackie Collins novels? Is there more or less computer literacy now than before? Do more people spell more words right when they write Christmas cards than previously? Is the general populace any less sloppy than before in its command of grammar and pronunciation, or are the kinds of errors English teachers have traditionally enjoyed mocking as howlers just as common as before? Are there more people with bigger vocabularies deploying a greater range of complex sentences than in the old days? Or are people these days making sharper use of smaller vocabularies, cultivating an un-Shakespearean economy in their choice of words? Is there now more or less media literacy? Are people developing more canny ways of reading media texts? Is there generally more deconstruction of common cultural stereotypes going on? And so on.

Of course, different groups of people and people engaged in different kinds of activity may well construe literacy quite differently. English has continued under the assumption that literacy is one thing, albeit vaguely defined, but in the end reducible to sentence structures, vocabularies, accuracy of spelling and punctuation – all in relation to a quite restricted model – and to a few limited kinds of responses to a few limited kinds of text. The notion of different – let alone conflicting – literacies is not allowed, an exclusivity that can hardly be consonant with the idea of a democratic society. What conception of a democracy is operative where the notion of conflicting interests is suppressed? A large and complex issue is opened in relation to this question about the identity of literacy. It is an issue of great importance in so far as it reflects gaps in the constitution of the curriculum and in so far as it represents possibilities for a different conception of educational processes.

## VALUES

The issue of values can't be avoided by any subject dealing with language and textuality. Any pretensions of English to have been or to be neutral or value-free are untenable. The grading system clearly expresses values concerning reading, writing and speaking. No self-respecting theory or model of language would deny that all language is always already value-laden. It's a condition of language to be loaded with values. The values of English have been either entirely unspoken or, rather, concealed. In the obvious case of examination assessment criteria and exam syllabuses they have exposed themselves as being implicitly laden with all sorts of assumptions that most models of language and culture would find objectionable. In the context of a society claiming to be democratic, English and the values it represents seem to be a glaring anomaly. English, at the heart of state education, is fundamentally anti-democratic in its values and practical application of them.

Race, class and gender are issues deconstructive of the subject's founding principles. Race, class and gender are centrally relevant to any conception of English in relation to the idea of democracy. (It must be said that the issues of race, class and gender make the idea of democracy problematic and suggest that the idea be aligned with a more deconstructive theory of what it might be.) They're issues that do not currently have a fundamental and centrally informative role in the constitution of the subject. They appear, when they do appear, as other facets in a structure whose main interests are elsewhere. This means that, within the structure of English, issues concerning race, class, gender and questions that might raise the problematics of democracy are marginalized. English does not, as it might, address issues of race, class and gender as part of its fundamental and central structure – nor are concerns of democracy written into the fundamental and central constitution of the subject. Most attempts to address these critical issues in English have systematically marginalized them. Liberal practices of English, for instance, have been systematically and essentially depoliticizing, and therefore aligned with conservative values and position, associated with ideas about the individual and the personal.

A conception of literacy is required which recognizes differences, different conceptions of literacy, and the different forms of literacy people live by. To begin to attempt to understand how different literacies may be organized within communities might mean to begin to operate against the systematic discrimination which, in the name of English, officially denigrates what it doesn't recognize as identical with

itself – the punitive grading system, for example, that depends on the domination of a monologic conception of literacy. To deconstruct the dominant conceptions and the practices that go with them might well enable other literacies to enter the field of address, other possibilities to be written into the constitution of the subject.

## 7 Aspects of English

against alternatives. It's not difficult to see how the perspective of the sociology of education, then, presents a harshly uncompromising critique of liberal pretensions. If the system systematically discriminates against *groups*, addressing individual cases and allowing class distinctions to continue to operate, this can only be regarded as tinkering with structural effects.

The sociology of education has suggested that one important structural function of schooling is to inculcate the acceptance of hierarchy. It's easy to see how the workings of any school – with their necessary emphases on certain kinds of discipline and self-discipline with reference to different hierarchies of attainment and different powers assigned to subjects – are implicated in the process. It's also easy to see how the acceptance of grading practices might have similar effects. The legitimization of inequality is another dominant theme announced by the sociology of education. On this kind of sociological reading, schooling is concerned to establish, and actually to *construct*, certain kinds of inequality – academic inequality for instance – and to make inequality seem to be a function of the qualities of the individual concerned. Students who fail, therefore, may be categorized as being of low ability or of poor inclination to take full advantage of the opportunities for academic success ostensibly open to all. The illusion of equality of opportunity is conceived by the sociology of education as one of the central myths of education in the kind of society characterized as western liberal democratic. Students confronted with an establishment culture ensconced in the academic curriculum, established in its languages and procedures, feel alienated. Already in a state of cultural exclusion, they cannot effectively partake of school culture without having to renounce important elements of their own, different, cultural experiences. Within the context of the school this may produce a counter-culture operating a value system at odds with the value system of the school. While groups resisting dominant values may well be expressing their own rights to maintain a voice, in terms of the social prestige granted to educational attainment they will lose out.

The sociology of education has sought to explain different kinds of attainment in education by using other criteria than the difficult notion of intelligence. It has sought to describe the relations between culture, class and educational attainment. It has also put language into the centre of discussions about matters like the effects of pre-school socialization and speech patterns on educational attainment, looking critically at ideas like cultural deprivation and compensatory education. Some versions of the sociology of education have maintained that what education has to offer is a kind of cultural 'capital'; they suggest that

The subject – English or any other – is not just what gets taught in classrooms or what's written down in syllabuses. The identity of English is caught up in a network of aspects, some of them briefly addressed below, all of them of significance in any attempt to theorize the subject in its institutional and social contexts.

### THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Sociology offers a salutary challenge to simplistically positive claims of liberal education. The sociology of education represents a very different view from liberal versions of English – with their emphasis on the development of the individual – addressing matters that English has largely chosen to ignore: the structural effects of educational practices. Taking a general, analytic position, the sociology of education has far-reaching implications for English, having a critical effect on any content, including the present one, to offer a transformative subject or transformative of the person, as in the liberal model, or transformative of the identity and orientation of the subject generally, as with the model proposed by this book.

The sociology of education would generally tend to suggest that schooling is designed – and very effectively organized – to reproduce particular patterns of social organization. To put it another way, the function of schooling is to produce and reproduce particular forms of subjectivity useful to current forms of social ordering and maintaining social difference. Some sociological studies take a special interest in examining how groups of students in schools are – by culture, inclination or class – disbarred from effectively participating in the education system. The general trend of the case established is that school culture – in its official versions – effectively operates in favour of established values and powerful groups, that it effectively operates

differential achievement depends on how much capital you already have to invest in the system. Schools are seen as sites of cultural reproduction, where dominant cultural values are established, maintained and replicated within the identities of individuals and groups. Sociological accounts of education based on this kind of model might emphasize the social function of elimination, identifying as important elements in educational processes typing, labelling and the general production and reproduction of social roles and identities. Centrally important in many sociological studies of educational attainment and in the study of structural inequalities are issues of gender difference and ethnicity. Studies of educational attainment, educational values and practices have indicated clearly that schooling is implicated in fundamental inequalities associated with these issues. In terms of the dominant language and culture of education in schools, it has been possible to identify inherent racism naturalized as knowledge. The sociology of education has explored the idea that knowledge and power – including the kind of knowledge purveyed as the curriculum – are not strictly distinguishable. Knowledge represents and colludes with power – replicates and produces differences in power – in the institution of the school in the processes of schooling. This critique extends from the academic curriculum to educational vocationalism.

As far as the teaching of English in schools is explicitly concerned, the most strikingly significant areas of the sociological analysis of education concern language. Whichever way you look at it, at the very centre of educational practice is language. Although English teachers may have seen their functions more positively, sociologists have suggested that language assessment criteria are related to social stratification, equating language teaching and assessment with the operations of power and discrimination. While many different positions have been taken in relation to language and the sociology of education, there has never been any doubt that the language of schooling is central to its operations – that language is very much an issue of cultural difference and identity. To continue to pretend that the criteria of assessment in English examinations and the way that they are characteristically interpreted, for example, represent some natural and inevitable order of things, represent a proper and objective framework for assessment, is either to ignore or to deny that there is a sociology of education.

The role and function of English can be reinterpreted in the light of this social analysis – furnishing a critique of the established beliefs and practices. Sociology is a very powerful form of theoretical critique. Other elements of theory might provide the means to pursue the

critique in relation to fundamental concepts and particular practices, giving a means by which these can be viewed afresh, from a different – and more inclusive – vantage point. An important aspect of any attempt to instigate a more conscious and self-conscious theory of English teaching would need to address the sociology of the education, re-examining the functions and identity of English in relation to it.

## HISTORIES OF ENGLISH

The history of English has received attention in recent times. Academic studies have appeared charting the progress of the subject through various phases of its changing identity. One thing these studies have in common is the idea that English has always been – and was founded as – a kind of ideological project, crucially bound up with ideas about culture and society. Since its, relatively recent, origins English as a school subject has been represented as significantly related to the cultural well-being of its subjects. Accounts of this history have concentrated their different kinds of interest on public documents and ‘debates’ that have been taken to represent the significant trends in the history of the teaching of English. Tracing the development of the idea of English, and its inception in state education, from the ideas of Arnold, through the Newbolt Report (1921) and beyond, these studies indicate how certain individuals and institutions sought to determine the identity of English. The development of the identity of English is clearly aligned in these accounts with the imperative of social cohesion. English is represented as a technology for the management of the personal development of the individual subject – intellectually, emotionally, ethically and spiritually. Following the story of the birth and growth of English, language and literature became the grounds for creativity and self-expression, but were also understood as the grounds for forging a common idea of a culture allied with national identity for the masses coming under the authority of state education. Both personal growth and moral management are identified as features of the publicly formulated purposes of English in schools. The history of the subject is seen as the development and refinement of these processes, with the tendency of the personal growth model to gain ascendancy in its later phases. This development is perfectly compatible with the development of an ideology of individualism, but an individualism that still wants to appeal to a sense of common cultural interests, common cultural heritage and identity.

There exists no full account of the history of English in schools as a

history of specific practices. These specific practices are unlikely to have followed the clear and even development figured in most histories of English. The differences represented by different practices, differences that have fissured the subject remain – in various forms – operative even now, though their particular forms of expression may have altered. Any serious effort to challenge the hegemony of the subject's dominant modes and forms must address these other aspects too, because they are essentially implicated in the subject's composition as part of its effective working identity. They belong to the archaeology of the identity of the subject as unwritten elements in its history. It would be difficult, of course, to define all of these things and impossible to survey the various movements of the past in detail. The difficulty of the project, though, doesn't discount the significance of the recognition that any account of the history of English in schools that regards only published materials, government sponsored reports, and so on, must be partial to the extent that it doesn't take into account the majority of the practice of the subject.

It's probable that a great deal of the unwritten practices of English have been and remain deeply conservative in their ideological bent and in their effects. Unquestionably, the majority of the subjects of English have, historically, been defined negatively by the subject. It's significant that this aspect of the history of the subject remains unwritten – and remains unwritable by conventional histories and by post-Foucauldian genealogies alike.

English has characteristically tended to take an ahistorical view of things, representing values as transcending historical time. But there *is* a history of meanings, a history of changing identities for things linguistic and textual, and a history of a subject fissured and changing in its ideas, practices and effects. This history itself might profitably be addressed by a redefined subject, aware of its own history and changing identity, conscious of its orientation into the future. If history – deconstructively speaking – is a rewriting of the past, then it might also be a rewriting of the present moving into the future. What this implies is a conscious appropriation of a redefinition of the history of English – one that necessarily projects a different kind of future for the subject, one that opens the institutional space for the possibility of such a future.

### THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF ENGLISH TEACHERS

For English to function effectively as a social practice engaging ideas about language, literature, other cultural forms and the nature of

society, particular kinds of professional identity have been called for. It would be important – for any account of what English has been, is, and is to be – to examine how the teachers of English have seen their roles and functions. It would no doubt be useful and revealing to examine particular ideas of English teachers concerning language, literature and other cultural issues. Questions could be asked about these ideas and the professional practices they've informed. How have professional educators explained to themselves the significance, or otherwise, of what they have been doing as teachers of English? Other questions might be very revealing – about, for example, how English teachers have seen their professional role more generally, what contradictions as English teachers they may have had to negotiate, as well as questions concerning their sense of what the subject is, what its purposes and effects are and should be. Teachers of English are subjects of its institutional being just as much as students are, though in different ways. Any serious attempt to investigate the identity of the subject, to explore the history of the subject, or to project a redefinition of the subject, would need to take this crucial factor into account.

### SPECIFIC INSTITUTIONS

There are obviously both general trends and the play of differences at work in the way particular institutions of education operate. Schools that follow general trends in terms of ideology and practice may differ considerably in many particular respects. An account of the identity of English, or a history of the subject, would need to explore the localized situations of the subject, the nature of similarities, general trends and differences in the way schools have operated and in the way they have thought themselves to be operating. This kind of investigation could include, for example, a consideration of management systems, attitudes towards classroom management, staffroom identity and staffroom culture.

An investigation into the particular institutional identity of any school might also include some analysis of financing, the policies of the local authority, the location of the school and the social character of its constituency. The history of the school and its changing culture as an institution would also be factors influencing its particular identity. An approach to the identities of the school as mediator of cultural experiences would need, then, to take into account the common structural characteristics and its particular, specific configuration. Staffroom culture, ideas and ideals, details of curriculum and constituency would all come into play.



## CHANGING DEFINITIONS OF SCHOOLS

Schools have had their own history. Various reorganizations of secondary education have impinged significantly on the identity of the institution of the school. Grammar, secondary modern schools and technical schools stood for a different notion of the purposes of education from comprehensive schools. In more recent times LMS (local management of schools), GMS (grant maintained status) and a host of other measures have made their different impacts on the way that education and schooling been defined and practised. The deconstructive effects wrought by these initiatives on hitherto dominant notions of the purposes and functions of comprehensive schools are very much in progress. Other changes have been effected by evolving ideas and practices of management, by developments in attitudes towards processes of learning and by the pressures of the various initiatives of central control.

The definition and delivery of the curriculum have not been unaffected by these changes. A history of the identity and meaning of any subject would need to take into account how changes in the organization and definition of schools had determined the nature of the specific educational practices within them.

## DEFINITIONS OF THE CURRICULUM

If the National Curriculum was instigated as an attempt to make uniform all the thinking and all the practices of English in all schools across the nation, it can hardly be reckoned to have been a success. If the intention was ever there at the outset it was certainly foiled by the published materials. The statements concerning the nature of English, for example, in the official documents allow for considerable variation. The prescriptive elements in the National Curriculum concern only assessment in relation to the notion of stages of development and achievement. The tone and manner of the documentation of the National Curriculum in relation to English suggested proposals for consideration rather than prescription – allowing for different attitudes and practices. The English curriculum has always tended to allow for a good deal of variety; its definitions have always been characterized by degrees of variation. Given the nebulous content of the subject and given the way that it has been differently interpreted by practitioners, the meaning of English within the general curriculum – from the level of the individual schools to the national level – must have been similarly fractured and inconsistent.

Though no doubt important general trends will have prevailed, the curriculum in operation is not simply what it is claimed to be in official publications, nor what its more vocal representatives have described it as. The shifting nature of the curriculum and of the way that English has been configured within it – in other words its history – demand a clear conception and exploration of how the English curriculum has operated at all levels, and demand also an understanding of the identity of English within the curriculum as implicated in more than simply its avowed tenets. In other words, English needs to more consciously and fully theorize its particular forms in relation to the forces determining its meaning within the curriculum; if, that is, it is to be a meaningful practice at all distinguished from the general processes of schooling. Although the criteria of assessment have remained largely unchanged by recent curriculum developments – both in their form and in the way they get interpreted – the subject's gaps and vagaries offer the potential for radically different practices, and in the end, for radically different attitudes towards assessment, towards the purposes and the meaning of the subject generally.

## POPULAR CONCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH

Popular conceptions of the subject are clearly appealed to in countless press articles, dealing, for example, with so-called debates and differences about the proper contents and direction of the subject. Canny ministerial moves have been made to address public concerns over issues like standards and notions of cultural heritage. Television programmes are broadcast to present the issues and to represent the various positions that are thought to exist. English is the subject of concern for that rhetorically, politically significant body referred to as parents. English must be the subject of innumerable 'popular' discourses on the subject taking place in a diversity of contexts. As a central, core element of the curriculum in state education, English is a topic engaging attitudes that reflect significant perceptions about the nature and functions of education. In popular discourse a range of different attitudes are bound to be expressed. Most English teachers are familiar with the attitude expressed as the unease that can come over people when they discover what you do for a living. This unease reflects how English places and has placed its subjects.

An account of popular attitudes towards, notions and representations of English would be more than simply interesting for whoever has a stake in the identity of the subject. It could reveal a great deal about the perceptions different groups of people have of their educational experi-

ences. It could indicate important things about the varied practices of English, about the sense of people's relations with their own languages and the official language of schooling and certification. It could follow through the development of national consciousness of ideas about culture and language, the national literature and other kinds of cultural experience which continue – whatever position is being expressed – to be perceived as significant.

### ATTITUDES EXPRESSED IN EXAMINING PROCEDURES

Public examinations in English have changed through the subject's history. English was an important component in the eleven plus exam, and was implicated in the academic and social divisions it enacted. Although the eleven plus no longer exists, the kind of task it was set to do may now be carried out by tests undertaken in the name of the National Curriculum. This will certainly have a determining effect on the nature and direction of the subject, English, just as the definition of GCSE English, supervised by the controlling body, SEAC, has affected the practices of the subject at that level.

Clearly the subject English in schools has been partly determined by exam processes, and these have had a history of their own. The kinds of questions set for formal exam papers, the criteria of assessment in operation and the ideology of the subject embodied in teachers of English exams and examiners – have all had a bearing on the identity of the subject. Lists of set texts studied at A level now and the kinds of paper on offer will differ markedly from the lists and papers of previous times. What is the meaning of this difference and what is the meaning of the shifting trends it may represent? What are the implications of the changing identity of the subject on the idea of the subject's integrity? Obviously, detailed work – examining documents precisely and also taking account of less tangible and theoretical considerations – would need to be done to find answers to these questions.

In the case of exam syllabuses, for instance, the kind of writing submitted for coursework during the history of the exam's progress is likely to indicate trends, persistent tendencies and shifts in the identity of the subject. It might be revealing to have some account of its variations and some account of its generally conformist trends. Questions about different and similar positions that get expressed in coursework topics might indicate the static and the changing features in an ever shifting configuration. Exam papers might be analysed also in terms of their contents and how they get marked, how the markers

understand the processes of assessment. This kind of account of the identity of the subject may be related to larger movements and features of the education system.

The meaning and 'results' of exams in English might also be viewed in relation to changes in ideas and social patterns outside the immediate context of education – changes in the larger political and social context.

### THE HISTORY OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

An important correlation might be made by examining the idea of English in relation to larger notions of Englishness. This would probably entail some kind of study of national identity as perceived by different groups positioned differently by the idea.

The centrality of the ongoing and current debates about the nature of English are closely connected to ideas about Englishness in the larger sense. The connection, in fact, is frequently made explicitly. The significance of the subject is frequently figured as a kind of national cultural practice – engaging fundamental aspects of cultural identity, partly embodied in national literature. The maintenance of 'proper' standards of language, the maintenance of the idea of the English Language in some pure and absolute form is also significant in this context. Nostalgia for a time when standards were high and the language was robust and fundamentally *English* obviously reflects other kinds of national nostalgias about a more properly and robustly English past.

Both the national language and the national literature have been represented in various – thoroughly reactionary – contexts as under threat from dangerous tendencies. At the present time English remains very much the focus of media coverage that often attempts to reaffirm the cultural centrality of English as a national pursuit, a pursuit engaging very significant questions of national identity, often attempting to resuscitate the debilitated and discredited notion of cultural heritage. From other quarters other pressures and voices can be felt and heard, challenging the most precious and favoured assumptions of the subject, including its affiliation with ideas associated with the nation and national identity.

### THE CONSTITUENCY OF THE SCHOOLS

Significant social changes have determined the nature of both the organization and the constituency of schools. Demographic shifts, some seismic and obvious, others more gradual and subtle, must have

affected the nature of the constituency of schools, and of the subjects of English. English – what it is and does – can't be understood without some reference to its constituency. The impact of the subject – its reception, its meaning – is bound to be affected by the ideas, aspirations and attitudes of its subjects. This constituency is, obviously, different according to many factors, including local social and demographic conditions.

The orientation of any community towards education must shift in relation to economic changes. The nature of any community might also be affected by ideas and processes of education implemented by the institutions of education. To examine the necessarily complex relations between these factors could indicate important facets of the conditions in which English is doing its work, the kinds of receptions and meanings being made of it, and its various effects. The meaning of English can be understood, at least partly, by reference to how it addresses and defines an audience. Some awareness of the audience and its various receptions of English might be of great theoretical interest and significance. Examining how contentious issues in English may or may not have implications for the subjects of English must be of considerable significance in any attempt to understand, define or redefine the subject.

### THE SPECIAL SPACE OF ENGLISH

The *idea* of English has been an especially potent force in the liberal and more progressive conceptions of education. This is to do with the way that English has been conceived of as a liberal discipline within the general curriculum. This kind of perception of English – as pre-eminently representing certain values and modes of operating in schools – has worked in collusion with what might be called the self-conscious identity of the subject. English has – at certain times and in certain contexts – been represented as *the* liberal discipline, pre-eminently humane and humanizing.

It is important, though, to reconsider the role of English within the curriculum as a whole. It might be reasonable to claim that for the past thirty years or so there has been a general tendency, in many institutions, to associate English, especially after Bullock (1975), with creativity, with the arts, with production. A self-avowedly creative, workshop model of English taking shape in Mode Three coursework schemes has strongly influenced its specific identity within the range of curriculum subjects. English has, albeit unevenly and disparately, been associated with having quite special functions, being seen as especially

distinct from other areas of the curriculum. The notion of the special space of English belongs to a specifically liberal set of assumptions. Associated with this notion would be the idea of language as self-expression: entailing the encouragement of the individual's use of language in many (or any, really) situations, but might especially belong to the "expressive" forms – story writing, poems, descriptions, personal experiences, personal opinions. (Though why these should be deemed to be more expressive than others is not certain, except as a function of the domination of a certain model of language and identity.)

Another main strand of this – probably still dominant – general model of English would make special claims for the role of literature in the shaping of the individual consciousness. At the core of this privileging of literature lies the idea that education – at its best and most humane – is the ground for personal growth, and the idea that literature can play a crucially determining role in the process of the development of the individual. Literature does these things as an element in the curriculum, founded on notions of development and progression, but also, of course, constantly assessing and defining its constituents in a strict hierarchy of value.

English has at the same time been held to represent traditional values – sometimes this conception of English has been at odds with the more liberal versions, and sometimes it has been in alliance with them. In some of its various forms English has represented an amalgam of traditional and liberal, progressive values – with the general function of maintaining itself as a focus for a humane and enlightening experience of language and of literature, being at once free and open and, at the same time, ordered and ordering. The chaotic nature of personal experience, for example, has been seen as subject to the precise orderings of language, and the education of the emotions and of attitudes has been part of this. Literature has provided the means for the inchoate individual to discover an identity reflected in its universal themes and interests, and has been the grounds for the discovery of others' experiences of the world – thus empathetically ordering the individual's own.

This general idea – of the special place and functions of English – is highly contestable. In the first place the idea of English as language development fails to take into account a number of important considerations about the place of language within the institution of the school, and of the subject within the school, and about the regulatory function of schooling. Literature, of course, does not exist on its own, and its effects belong to a narrow conception of culture that really excludes large groups of people from its special humanizing qualities.

## THE POLITICS OF THE SUBJECT IN THE PRESENT SITUATION

At no time in history has there been more active political concern over education. Among the most crucial issues of debate are many closely related to the identity of English. Successive reports have been authorized by the government. Innumerable articles and features have appeared in all sections of the press. The concern these various texts express with issues such as traditional literature versus popular culture touch upon very significant issues to do with public values and the proper functions of education. They touch upon vital matters of definition – concerning not just the classroom habits of English teachers, but the nature of society, and the particular kind of ordering we live in. Formalized, centralized statements on education, some produced by officially appointed bodies, some produced by government ministers, have proliferated in recent times. DES reports, many contradicting one another, have represented many different positions. These texts all belong to a discourse of considerable political significance.

In all sectors of the press, in TV and radio programmes both national and local, English has been given a thorough airing. All this media activity might be seen as the textual manifestations of general public concern about the proper scope of a subject felt to be central to the well-being of the nation's education system. On the other hand, it may be seen as part of the production of a discourse concerned to promote certain kinds of values, to promote a particular ideological position in regard to things educational and other things, too. The idea of a debate itself indicates a crisis of confidence in the functioning of education in the social order. It speaks of a kind of crisis of values, loss of a centrality and purpose that was probably never there. The idea of a golden age of universally high standards, nevertheless, motivates certain powerful positions in the ideology of education.

With a tendency in some quarters to emphasise vocational educational projects, there is likely to be a consequent emphasis on the harder elements of the subject's content, as is reflected in Keystage Four documents – documents, incidentally, that would be laughable for their simple-mindedness, if it weren't for the crude institutional power they also represent. In times of uncertainty and in a context of political reaction, a utilitarian model of English is more likely to emerge as dominant, a model based on naive notions of order and discipline in the field of language and of mythical, traditional values dressed in the dangerous idea of cultural heritage in the field of literature. The

utilitarian and the idealistic go curiously together in this peculiar concoction at the centre of the new National Curriculum.

The present public concerns with identity reflect what has, rather politely, I believe, been referred to as a 'crisis' in English. Issues discussed in relation to the ideology of English teaching are part and parcel of other concerns and interests. Arguments about Chaucer and Chuck Berry are about more than those things. They may serve as useful reminders that education is an ideologically loaded field, a site for the exertion of influences, struggles for power and control – struggles implicated in the very nature of society.

All the aspects mentioned above are elements in the identity of English. English is not reducible to its apparent content, to its visible rhetorics or to its officially stated purposes. English is not reducible, either, to the terms of public debates that set one limited vision of the subject against another. What English is reaches into many domains. Any attempt to understand English to change it, or to displace it – needs to be aware of the various locations of its being.

- What aspects of sociolinguistics are there in English? What might English look like given a more central interest in sociolinguistics?
- To what extent is literacy a self-defining thing? How does literacy get defined in schools? What is literacy? What notice has English taken of changing ideas of literacy?
- Why is English so preoccupied with reading and writing stories? Are stories *really* a category in themselves?
- What is poetry? What special qualities does poetry possess? What special benefits does poetry confer? How is poetry distinguished from popular music lyrics, for example, or from TV advert texts? What is the special value of reading poetry, or of writing responses to it?
- What is the greatness of *King Lear* founded on? Would it be possible, in the context of English, to challenge the greatness of *King Lear*? What about any other texts classed as literature? What about *all* other texts classed as literature?
- Is *The Color Purple* as good as *Boyz n the hood*? Is *Romeo and Juliet* better than *Thelma and Louise*? Is Marvell better than Madonna or the *Daily Mirror*? In what ways are any of these things the same as or different from one another?
- Is studying *The Tempest* more useful than studying *Twinkle*? What might be the criteria of usefulness that operate in relation to this question? Are texts ever really studied on their own? Is it ever possible to address single texts in isolation from their (various) cultural contexts?
- What values does English Literature support? How were they established and by whom? How are the values of English maintained – by whom, in what institutional contexts? Do the values of English Literature depend on a body of texts or a body of ideas? Do the values of literature address different groups of people in different ways?
- What ideas about culture are promoted by the values and practices of English? Does English explicitly acknowledge its position in relation to ideas about culture? How might cultural differences be addressed in schooling?
- Where does English stand in relation to questions of race, class and gender? Could those issues be central to English in its present forms? What ideas and practices might make those issues central?
- What different positions could all these questions be approached from? What explicit allowance does English – in present forms – make for different positions? What kind of institutional power is granted to different positions regarding the identity and practice of English?

## QUESTIONS FOR ENGLISH

This book has attempted to explore and question the identity of English. It's attempted to take an interrogative approach to how English works and what it is by applying a certain kind of reading of post-structuralist theory and comparative sociolinguistics to fundamental ideas of English. Looking also at practical classroom activities, the book has attempted to offer some initial moves towards transforming the practical identity and meaning of the subject. The general argument has been that the identity of English is untenable, that English has, in fact, been founded and remains dependent on quite deeply contentious premises, posing as enlightened common sense or as culturally enduring obvious truth. The upshot of this is that the subject is open to complete redefinition.

To go back to a point of beginning, these are some of the questions that might be posed by a revaluation of the subject, English, attempting to operate a theoretical self-consciousness about its constitution, attitudes and practices:

- How are criteria of assessment constructed? What notions of language do they operate? Who are they written by? Who maintains them, in what institutional contexts, and by what procedures? How might they be changed?
- How is a grade A student different from a grade F student? What different kinds of 'subjects' does English claim and in what different ways does it identify and speak to them?
- Why does English give unequal recognition to the languages of its subjects – the students who are subject to its systematic processes of ordering? On what authority is the ordering done? What ideas about language are at work in the process? Are those ideas based on universal truths?

- What possible futures are there for English in schooling? How might any future for the subject be constructed? What would need to be addressed to intervene in the history of the subject to construct a different future for the subject – based on democracy and equality? What would these things – democracy and equality – mean, though, and how would they operate? What specific kinds of institutions and institutional practices might they entail?

The questions, general and specific, clearly don't come within the well established constitution of the subject. Taken seriously, their implications threaten to sink its confident assumptions.

### THE MEANING OF THEORY

The identity of theory has, conventionally, tended to be associated with *academic* discourses about language, writing, culture and society. It has been considered remote and inaccessible, arcane and irrelevant. What's more, theory is also, so the story goes, foreign, radically un-English. Deconstruction – the writings of Jacques Derrida, for example – operates a language far exceeding the limits of common sense. The comprehensive secondary school hardly seems the most likely context for the introduction of theory – given its commonly perceived identity.

If theory, the questions it poses and the issues it's capable of raising, seem far removed from the everyday concerns of English teachers, it is also partly because the routine practices of schools and regular habits of thought – the general culture of secondary education – have tended to displace theoretical reflexivity, the kind that demands self-conscious reappraisal. The process of reappraisal and redefinition is not generally what liberal educational reform has aimed at – teachers of English becoming more active in the constitution of their own practices, the meaning, direction and assessment of their work, in relation to values they've consciously considered and configured within a general understanding of the social processes of education, educational institutions and discourses of learning.

Theory, though, represents potentially a powerful body of ideas and practices, capable of disturbing the foundations of English and the special kind of complacency English has been founded on. Theory puts the authority of the subject in question: its ideas, its practices and its institutional definitions are all subject to serious and powerful critique. But theory, is no more than a kind of self-consciousness – an awareness of the ideas informing what you do and the way you do it. Theory makes alternative positions explicit. But theory has also come to mean

a certain *kind* of theory, associated broadly in the context of English with post-structuralism. Post-structuralism itself is a loosely defined thing and might include many different kinds of writing and different ideas. It's possible, though, to identify particular ideas and trends of thought in post-structuralism that provide the basis for an unqualified critique of English, at the same time proposing more powerfully explanatory models of language and textuality. Post-structuralism itself, however, doesn't propose a coherent social theory of meanings to complement its powerfully deconstructive ideas. Social theories of meaning might be usefully provided by sociolinguistics and other elements of sociology, social theory and cultural theory. (They certainly won't be provided by English.)

Semiotics and post-Saussurian linguistics, for example, can be made to take the familiar stuff of English beyond the level of assumption and assertion. Semiotics and linguistics provide theoretical groundings for understanding basic and complex operations of language. Semiotics is capable of addressing the changing nature of languages within specific historical and social conditions. The kinds of ideas expressed in, for example, English examination assessment criteria, or in liberal practices of English, are hardly able to even begin to address these issues or take them into account. Loosely formed notions of the individual and the individual's relations to language inform characteristic English practice. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, as a general theory of meaning and culture, commands powerful ideas of subjectivity and language. Practices of English as we know it have no way of addressing the structural relations of language and consciousness. Nor do they have any way of examining the relations between cultural norms and the individual's perceptions of the world – and the way these are implicated in conscious and unconscious aspects of language.

A crucial effect of deconstruction has been to address our most fundamental habits of thought at the level of familiar and deeply rooted ideas embedded in forms of expression. Deconstruction has suggested, and demonstrated, that these forms of thought and expression are not in any absolute sense identical with the truth of things; that all forms of thinking, all forms of expression are bound up with and determined by specific ways of perceiving the world, particular ways of thinking about the world. Deconstruction suggests that, in the case of our own experiences, we see the world and construct meanings within the limits of a general system of thought and perception that is culturally dominant, that tends to be patriarchal and ethnocentric. Writing, according to a deconstructive position, is perceived as a general system of meanings and ideas – a system of established forms and constraints

that organizes thought and perception. Writing extends, in this sense, well beyond its common-sense definition.

A deconstructive position would also suggest that all meanings and systems of reference are ultimately relative. Historical shifts bring new discourses of knowledge into being, and new forms of social organization related to new and different forms of knowledge. Discourses, in this sense, do not simply provide a means for understanding different aspects of the world. Discourses bring new ideas, terms and ways of perceiving things into existence – organizing their subjects differently too. Discourses construct identities and manoeuvre meanings – but not in a neutral way. Discourses are always caught up in contexts of power and ideology. If deconstruction is a relativist theory, denying the claims of any discourse to the absolute authority of truth, it means that the confrontation with ideology and power is unavoidable. Ideas, meanings and ways of seeing are caught up in networks of power and constructed ideologically. As teachers, perhaps uncomfortable choices – ethical choices, political choices – are involved in all our attitudes and actions. To rely on the notion of the simply practical is to allow powerful institutional forces to determine choices. Theory is a necessary component of choice: you can't choose if you're blind to alternatives, if you're locked into one monologic, monolithic – or common-sense – view of things

Theory is not merely abstractly concerned with general issues of language, subjects and discourses. It has in recent times, in academic and non-academic contexts, explicitly addressed particular social issues. Feminism, for example, has operated at the level of high theory, but has also addressed specific social contexts and practices. Not surprisingly, feminism has had a great deal to say about language, discourses and the operation of patriarchal power. Feminism has sought to conduct specific cultural analyses of the representations and positions of women in society. Feminism has been political in a very broad sense, examining signifying practices and cultural experiences as they determine people's daily lives. Feminism has also attempted to theorize and realize challenges to existing conditions. Much modern feminism has drawn on ideas from post-structuralism, from psychoanalysis, for example, but has also maintained a steady regard for the politics of daily life. It hasn't seen the two – theory and the real world – as distinct realms, mainly because they are not.

Theory potentially proposes redefinitions by examining existing ideas and practices. Theory has the power to challenge the authority of discourses – examining practices and institutions where discursive authorities are maintained, identifying institutional systems of difference

and authority. Theory – in a newly-defined context – is the proper process of questioning, of calling to account, of re-examining; a process essential to the health of any cultural practice. This interrogative function has the effect always of sharpening awareness, refusing to be content with what is established simply because it is established, or because it works. Essential to the process of theoretical enquiry, is the examination, re-examination and representation of values. Questions about what English is, for example, are also questions about authority and about institutions. Questions of literacy clearly relate to questions of social identity. Within the field of education, it isn't really possible simply to theorize the academic subject, whether English or anything else, without also theorizing the institutions of education. In this sense, theory is about moving beyond the apparent limits of the subject, beyond the limits of the school, in order to get a perspective on both subject and school within the social formations enmeshing them.

Theory often deploys a language alien to the established vocabulary of English, often offends by addressing notions characteristically left alone. Of course, everyone knows the difference between literature and popular culture: it's obvious, common sense. It's silly to treat popular entertainments, trivial as they are, with the serious and overloaded vocabularies of semiotics, or psychoanalysis, or deconstruction, for example. This commonly expressed attitude is deeply conservative, thoroughly anti-intellectual and anti-theoretical. It avoids asking questions of the familiar and established. If the vocabulary of post-structuralist theory, for example, is thought to be alien and long-winded, it's no more alien and difficult to get hold of to the general constituency of students than the vocabulary of established response to literature, or the vocabulary of geography, or of nineteenth century novels, or of maths and chemistry. The reason for the acceptance of one set of vocabularies and the hostility to the other is that everyone has a stake in popular culture and in literature, too. This is particularly the case for English teachers, of course. It's assumed that these identities are self-evident. Their relative value is placed and fixed. It's assumed that popular culture – and other kinds of everyday discourses – clearly don't belong to the arena of academic discourses with their distinctive vocabularies. Ideas about metonymy, for example, might well prove illuminatingly useful in relation to forms of representation and generally current cultural meanings; students are often likely to be more receptive to ideas like metonymy, though, than English teachers who might feel their professional being is undermined, or who have been trained to exclude unfamiliar ideas from the limits of their thought.

The identity of English on the curriculum is – theoretically at least – eradicated by awareness of the social, political and cultural nexus. English, as it has been predominantly, can survive only as a kind of blindness, suppressing, excluding, censoring and denigrating the theory and the innumerable social, signifying practices that don't come within its very limited scope and forms of thought. This must be a thoroughly anomalous position for a subject still claiming in some contexts to be empowering or liberating.

A redefinition of the discourse and culture of English in schooling implies a redefinition of many things, including, among others, the general idea of what schooling is for, the relation between subjects and institutions, authority and social constitution. Theory, of one kind or another, is the only way of making and understanding these connections.

### A MORE INCLUSIVE CONCEPTION

There is more to the identity of English than its definition as a curriculum subject. Historical and sociological factors, for example, are also implicated in what it is; beyond the notion of a discrete and self-contained English, may be placed the subject, its ideas and practices with and against a larger, more inclusive understanding of education and society.

To pretend that English is simply about learning particular kinds of skills, or that it is simply about what happens within classroom walls is either to be naïve about the identity of the subject and the discourse of education in society, or to choose a position that is content with the anomalies, gaps and contradictions of the conventional and dominant modes of the subject. To continue to teach literature, for example, without challenging the idea of literature, to continue to promote stories and poems without reflecting on what these are and why they should be done in English, seems to be merely cynical. To continue also with the established practices of teaching language in English seems thoroughly compromised, too, once you've applied a theoretical – social, political, cultural – analysis to it all.

Both sociolinguistics and post-structuralism dislodge the limited ideas of language promoted by English with powerful and more inclusive alternatives. Theory is likely to promote a very much more inclusive conception of language and textuality – capable of addressing history, discourses, culture and society, a range of social practices and institutional contexts – than English. The dominant practices of English are limited; applying theory to the field of the subject's concerns is

likely to open up many more possibilities, to be much more inclusive both in terms of texts addressed and ideas utilized – as well as in terms of modes of assessment and attitudes towards the jurisdiction of the subject.

### NEW BEARINGS

Conceptions of literature and language in English have masked the importance of the general field of culture – and the functions and effects of signifying practices within them. A subject addressing general textuality and language cannot remain separated from media studies, for example, cannot continue to ignore issues of culture and politics, and cannot continue to marginalize questions about language, texts and values in the way that English has. The significance of signifying practices in general cultural and linguistic life needs to be realized in definitions and practices of a subject redefined. Discourses in social contexts, the forms they take and how they operate – daily life conversations, for example – all these things might be brought within the scope of the subject, and all are things that oral work in English has never really examined. Different kinds of linguistic rhetoric – at work in many fields in many ways – might be brought within the scope of a differently conceived and defined subject.

Literature and its modes of thinking have operated according to ideas about reading, meaning and interpretation remarkable for their narrowness. English Literature has been a kind of textual extremism, powerfully and ideologically exclusive, and remarkably restricting. Personal response and associated attitudes to things textual have been similarly narrow and exclusive. English generally has neglected all modern thinking associated with linguistics, sociolinguistics, theories of discourses, semiotics and its deconstructive offshoots. The social, ideological and political dimensions of language and textuality have been excluded, if not negated by English. English cannot plausibly remain simply what it has been. New dimensions must come into play, new bearings must be found. Gender, race and class as issues express a powerful critique of English, but also provide a basis for considerable extension of its scope. New modes of thinking are required to address the problematic relation between subject English and democracy and equality. A deconstructive approach to these issues would be quite different from, and necessarily more mobile and productive than, the present failure to approach them at all.

I've proposed changes: different directions and different fields in a general redefinition. This need for redefinition comes not simply and



not only from realization of flaws, but also emerges from the awareness afforded by the kinds of theory I've been advocating, by theory as a necessary self-consciousness of purposes and practices opening up social, cultural and political dimensions of language and textuality. Opening up necessarily involves the redirection of attention to much more general and significant cultural phenomena than English has been prepared to address. If this means that the subject of English is no longer recognizable as itself, then so be it.

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## Key Stage 4

### Back to the future?

Nick Peim

#### THE STATE OF ENGLISH

The loss of 100 per cent coursework assessment in English at KS4 has meant a very significant shift in the practices of English teachers: 100 per cent coursework assessment schemes had become the norm in English teaching. One exam board, for example, reports that for English Literature alone they now have something in the region of 85,000 candidates for external assessment, now dominated by timed examinations, whereas previously they had something in the region of 5,000. Schemes of work, now much more an explicit requirement, have been adjusted to meet the needs of the newly defined set of parameters. With both English and English Literature, the new form of examination has been very much more clear about what the subject should assess, about what the subject effectively consists of. The identity of English, problematic throughout its history, had never been clearer.

The Dearing Report, in response to the outlined structure for KS4, has done little to change the fundamental reassertion of the central features of English. It has perhaps helped to soften the transition, from the very much more freely defined 100 per cent coursework schemes, which might have included all sorts of things, officially and unofficially. The Dearing Report, though, still refers to 'the correct use of standard English' without embarrassment; in the Dearing Report English Literature is still defined by exemplary texts – without addressing any questions about how texts get to be – or not to be – exemplary. Included, for instance, at KS3/4 in 1994 were Leslie Norris's poetry, the writings of Stan Barstow and Berlie Doherty as well as the non-fiction of Winston Churchill. Literature is laid out for you, along with the more familiar names and texts – so familiar perhaps that we no longer think even to question why they are there, let alone what we do with them and why we do it. Not that I am complaining about any of these particular inclusions, nor do I have anything against any of the above-mentioned writers or the texts associated with their names. It is how they became installed and then demoted from the range

of exemplary texts that is of interest. How do they come to be English Literature? The process, if there is one, remains hidden and mysterious, perhaps decided on various committees or 'quangos', in accordance with the reading habits and predilections of a minority?

There can be little doubt that the effect of the recent changes in English at GCSE/KS4 has been very significant in terms of the detail of what gets taught, in terms specifically of limiting the range of texts taught at what is now KS4 in the name of English Literature and its public assessment and in the range of legitimate approaches to texts. It is likely to be universally conceded, whether for ill or for good, that the subject at this level in schools has become much more strictly defined and that the options open to teachers, and for students, have been much more strictly delimited. Although the assortment of texts that may be studied on any KS4 English Literature syllabus may hang together rather oddly, there is no doubt about what kind of thing they are, nor is there any doubt about what is an appropriate approach for this subject to take to the texts it deals with.

Tiering – another innovation of the new order – has serious implications, too, and represents a serious attack on one of the fundamental tenets of liberal English: that students are not predetermined as to their levels of attainment. The tiering of exam papers suggests strongly that results are in some broad sense at least predetermined and that whole groups of students are necessarily excluded from the higher levels of attainment, or suggests that whole groups of students will find certain texts or certain questions on texts beyond their reach, and that this unreachability may be predicted in advance. This is an uncomfortable position for a subject that has largely and publicly tended to find its relations with examining and assessment problematical, claiming to represent differences but being open to them at the same time. Tiering has been particularly problematic for the liberal vanguard (though may one not wonder that negative grading on an A-G scale – coursework or no coursework – never aroused the same degree of dissent?)

The teaching of English has changed in terms of quite specific writing skills that now need to be given new emphasis. Writing was being taught and assessed in coursework, but now it is clear that certain types of writing have to be taught. It is no longer possible to claim with such certainty that the writing done in English is good for the soul, or that it is a preparation for real writing in real life. Now it is at least partly a training in writing for the exam, and this applies also to other elements of the subject, including reading, but also including general meaning/sense making processes of interpretation. These have been significantly reduced to a training to perform certain readings in the reined-in context of the exam. In both English and English Literature the exam questions, and the kinds of response they have generated, have been lamentably predictable.

The choice of texts for KS4 literature examinations has had serious resourcing implications for departments struggling on limited budgets, but has also meant a shift in the approach to reading and textual analysis. The form of the literature exams tends to encourage the study of the single texts around which wider reading may be organised. But the approaches to the reading and interpretation of those texts, in so far as they are examinable, are more strictly delimited – explicitly, anyway – than with 100 per cent coursework schemes where it was theoretically possible, at least, for a vast range of texts to be addressed according to a range of approaches and principles.

English teachers may be left wondering how the new order can allow for the kind of good practices of English teaching that had become standard with 100 per cent coursework schemes. The hardening of the boundaries of English and English Literature is likely to have meant a restriction of practices; more significantly, though, it seems to me, the hardening of the boundaries of the subject has meant a crisis in terms of the identity and constitution of English, in ways that are revealing about the limitations, the inadequacies of the dominant models of English that went before. The traditional model has been found to be palpably restrictive and to fail even to fulfil its apparently utilitarian functions; the liberal model has been found to be less liberal, more compromised than before, if only by the ease with which it has slid into the present order of things.

#### MAKING SENSE OF THE CRISIS: AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL

The coming of KS4 has powerful implications for the idea of the history of English as progress. In my view this myth of gradual and necessary progress has been compromised by the transition from previous models of an expansive, inclusive subject to a restrictive, strictly bounded set of practices. In spite of nominal protests by various bodies representing English teachers, the transition has been smoothly effected. This easy reversion itself seems to me to comment on the nature of changes and shifts in English that had been heralded, often by their own liberal instigators, as the road to liberation. How much, we may ask, had the professional identity of English teachers been disentangled from ideas centred around Standard English and Literature, for example? We may ask what the position was of those who were clamouring for more media studies to be included within English while they remained silent about the compromised category of literature, for example, a category that media studies itself would have difficulty entertaining as a textual body with special properties. These same advocates of an expansive English have also had little to say against the supremacy of Standard English as the model of excellence in 16+ assessment.

The critical reading I propose is informed by my own constructed

version of 'critical theory', pieced together from materials that are and have been for a long time now freely available and that do have a significant place in other subject disciplines: an alternative set of ideas about language, texts and institutions. These ideas come from what has been loosely called post-structuralist theory, allied with well-established positions in the sociology of education and sociolinguistics and with developments in cultural theory.

This perspective effects a departure from the ideas that have, historically, dominated the subject, and have provided the terms for discussion and debate about its function, about what it is and about what it should be: ideas about texts, about language and institutions, specifically educational institutions, emerging from this perspective, are likely to undermine the established and taken for granted authority of the subject. In the realm of the humanities these post-structuralist discourses constitute something in the nature of a 'Copernican revolution'. While the position I attempt to describe here – drawn partly from this perspective – is highly critical of what English has been, it will propose that these radical theoretical developments may very positively provide the occasion for redefinition and reorientation of the institutional identity and practices of English. This position is critical of the traditionalist, back-to-basics account of the subject *and* is equally critical of more liberal accounts based on ideas such as creativity. In place of these notions, though, may be installed a range of productive ideas for dealing with language, texts and textuality.

#### THE MYTH OF PROGRESS AND THE PROGRESSIVE MYTH

The recent history of English – with its series of governmental interventions, governmental control of the curriculum being made explicit – is sometimes represented as the triumph of the powers of darkness over the forces of enlightenment. English teaching – in the past aligned with progressive and liberal, liberationist ideals – now faces a dark age. Many teachers now experience their professional status as diminished in the light of what they describe as unwarranted government intervention in the details of the curriculum.

Precisely how far this gloomy view of the present state of English is entertained by English teachers across the nation is at the moment unknown, though. It may be that the majority of English teachers are unaffected by or indifferent to the loss of 100 per cent coursework schemes, for instance. There is, in fact, no readily available mechanism that might give us access to such knowledge. What we do know for sure is that the same body of teachers – represented as resentful of the new set of restrictions of the subject – is now actually teaching the new order. Whether this is being done with the same degree of commitment, energy, enthusiasm as

ever, or whether it is being done in grudging bad faith, must also currently be largely unknown. This seems to raise the questions about how English teachers perceive their role. Do English teachers as a uniform body, subscribe generally perhaps to broadly agreed, even though implicit, principles? However you answer these questions a problem remains of how to speak for a disparate body, but one united in its continued practice of a scheme of work that some are claiming is against its better professional judgement and that contravenes its essential principles.

The uncertainty here about the nature of the English teaching body indicates clearly that the myth of the progressive history of English has been rudely interrupted. The National Curriculum, welcomed once, even by many liberals, as the final phase of the proper rationalisation of the properly progressive values of English, and their proper institutionalisation, has, it seems, turned against those who were once prepared to give it good entertainment. A government apparently unsympathetic to liberal ideals in English teaching has been intent on closing down options and restoring a rigidly limited version of language and literacy. Is the best future that can now be hoped for the nostalgic dream to restore what was?

I would argue, though, that any nostalgia for past schemes of English is misplaced. The recent series of government interventions in the details of curriculum does not seem to signal the fatal blow to the myth of the natural progress of the subject. The myth of English as enlightenment and as progressive in itself has always had to deny significant aspects of the subject: for example, that it has been content to endorse a limited range of texts that do not correspond to most people's cultural experiences, that it has continued to be involved in making negative judgements, via examination systems, about people's languages. The demise of the myth of progressive English means that the subject's relation to government can no longer be hidden and that the subject must acknowledge its relations with powerful forces and institutions. It must face up to what it has been in spite of the liberal rhetoric of the subject.

The rhetoric of the natural, inevitable progress of English has ignored its more illiberal practices, including the institutional function of English to act as a kind of cultural filter in relation to issues of language and textuality. This rhetoric has been implicated in the continuation of a subject valorising a limited set of linguistic and textual competences and knowledge. Not only have the texts of English been notoriously limited in range. Reading and writing practices have been limited, too. Reading through character, for example, a cornerstone of both liberal practices and the new KS4, is a quite restricted and restricting reading practice. Personal response engages a very limited set of techniques for engaging with texts. And personal, imaginative writing, seen by some as the very heart of

English, represents only one, relatively narrow mode of dealing with the massively diverse field of writing.

The sociology of education – largely banished from discussions about English – may coldly remind us of some of the discriminatory functions of English in secondary education, in relation to grading and the chances for educational success. To claim that the loss of one form of examining this subject – which is likely to replicate identical processes of distinction – represents the loss of a significant component of secondary education at its most adventurous and far reaching – as has certainly been implied by many of the appointed spokespeople for English – is to fall simply for the progressive myth. Now English teaching may have to confront the impossibility of representing the subject as offering a uniquely progressive set of practices and ideals on the curriculum. This loss of innocence, though, need not necessarily be cause to mourn.

### REDEFINING ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS

Clear directions exist for a future of a subject encompassing language and text, like English, but unlike the present form of English. This subject would be differently constituted, taking on those broad categories in a far more theoretically explicit and aware manner, a subject recognising that there are (many, various) ideas about reading and writing, that different positions and approaches may be taken in relation to those apparently natural activities. This means deconstructing the favoured categories of English – like literature, like personal response, creativity, imaginative engagement, for example – to open up a realm of possibilities at present excluded by those favoured categories.

The present version of the National Curriculum with its particular form of KS4 assessment is indicative of the identity of the subject. The changes introduced by KS4 in 1992 have been quietly accepted. The relatively easy switch to KS4 assessment itself may serve to remind us how English has functioned – and what habits of thought have been steadfastly embedded in its continuation. It seems also indicative of some hard truths about professional identity: what it is that English teachers are contracted to do and to be. The switch from 100 per cent coursework GCSE to KS4 – with its terminal examinations, its set texts, its limited range of writing, all so apparently and radically different – has been effected, after all, with remarkable ease. The criteria of assessment have not changed that much. And the kinds of writing, the kinds of reading responses which will get rewarded, are highly likely to be all too predictably familiar. Maybe the scandal here is not so much the new forms of assessment, but that they will simply replicate the old forms, continue the same processes of discrimination on the same or all too similar grounds.

Although the end of the palmy days of 100 per cent coursework and



the rewriting of the National Curriculum have been met with some public hair-tearing by English teachers, the changes they have wrought need not necessarily be the occasion for mourning. While KS4 could hardly be the occasion for unconfined joy on the part of committed English teachers, for English teachers wanting to explore new possibilities, interested in exploring the question of the constitution of a subject in the realms of language and textuality, theoretical reflection might be more useful than either dispirited resignation or cynical compliance. The theoretical awareness – afforded by a post-structural radical re-reading of language and textuality and all their massive implications for institutional practices – may point forwards to a new and different future for English, rather than looking back on the suspect glories of a mythic past.

### A SITE FOR CONTEST

One important and very positive consequence of the recent government interventions into the English curriculum could be to reconstitute the subject English as an arena for contest. Easy liberal confidence in progress – and the ensuing despair when that myth gets shattered – may be displaced by a more sharply critical awareness of issues, providing the impetus for a more theoretically charged and challenging view of the subject and its potentialities than we are used to hearing from either liberals or traditionalists. This latter position might signal the opportunity for a reconstruction of the professional identity of English teachers, actually enabling them to be active agents in the construction of the subject.

After all, some important points may be seen to emerge in recent public debates about English. It has been generally conceded that there are different versions of the subject; this has given rise to a more or less explicit kind of conflict about what English should be. Second, the subject is now clearly seen to be the bearer of important cultural significance; that the form of this significance might be contested has become widely acknowledged in the public arena. Third, governmental intervention, while illustrating, negatively, the political and intellectual disarray of the English teaching body, positively demonstrated that the constitution of the subject could be changed – one way or another – at a stroke by a critical and determined intervention.

### LITERARY EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE PRACTICES IN ENGLISH – THE LIBERAL/TRADITIONAL ALLIANCE

A brief vignette of a new realm of possibilities may be gleaned from examining some examples of textual reading practices in relation to the established idea of literature in English. Before making some sketchy

suggestions about how this might be done, I would like to go over some of the arguments about the idea of literature in English in schools.

English and English Literature have been seen in close association. Some versions or accounts of the subject have held them to be necessarily intertwined – including KS4. Progressive English, while at times prepared to challenge some of the presumptions of canonical English Literature, has nevertheless always remained bonded to the idea of literature as a special and uniquely productive textual field. The uncertain status and being of the literary text – a primary object of English – raises in turn the problem of the identity of the subject. The identity of English has been to a significant extent founded on the idea of the literary text, and on the related idea of the value of a literary education.

One interestingly provocative thing about this, though, is that the literary text has changed its identity through the years. In effect, it is notoriously impossible to define what literature is – or what the limits of literature might be. Another interesting fact is that the contents and purposes of a literary education have been – historically, at least – equally unstable. Literature has been advocated in the name of traditional values, but also in the name of the more liberal idea of the exploration of individuals and their world. The function of literature, and the idea of literary education, has changed in accordance with changing discourses about learning, changes discourses within education. Literature has been remarkably accommodating in this sense. It has been prepared to change itself and to allow itself to be moulded by different sets of ideas and different cultural imperatives at different times. This protean quality may in one sense indicate an admirable flexibility. It indicates quite unequivocally, on the other hand, that any claims that may be made on behalf of literature to be or to represent anything specific must be abandoned.

The recent restoration of the set work at KS4 leaves English with the embarrassing necessity of specifying particular examples, where previously with GCSE it was possible to make vague gesturings in the direction of texts of literary merit, trusting that everyone knows what that means anyway. The texts proposed in 1994 for study at KS4 have no unifying identity and are never individually justified as objects of study: they appear without explanation or justification as *faits accomplis*. Looking at one syllabus on offer, texts for study at KS4 may be selected from a fairly bizarre range: *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, *A View from the Bridge* by Arthur Miller, *Sumitra's Story* by Rukshana Smith. 'The Individual And Society' option offers *The Friends* by Rosa Guy, *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* by Mildred Taylor, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Add a touch of Shakespeare and a bit of pre-twentieth-century literature done for coursework (though why either should be compulsory is mysterious, surely) and you may have the grounds for attaining an official, state-registered qualification in English Literature.

There is not much canonical literature in the set text lists; the canonical and non-canonical consort together oddly here. What might be the parity between *Great Expectations* and *The Friends*? (What exactly is the literary merit of *The Friends*?) *Sumitra's Story* and *A View from the Bridge* make strange bedfellows. The inclusion of American literature, for example, may be read as a concession to significant trends. Is English Literature being redefined? How does this process occur? Who decides that *The Friends* is in, that it is comparable with *Great Expectations*, that *The Stud* or *Hollywood Wives* is out? Are the texts that are in chosen for their special merits, or are they chosen as especially illustrative of particular themes? Or are they chosen as especially relevant to the study of English Literature at this level?

From what perspectives, informed by what, other than certain, very limited reading techniques, is 'The Individual And Society' to be pursued? The criteria of assessment do not really offer very much to go on. There is no indication that theories of individuality, whether psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity or sociological material exploring the relations between the individual and society, or studies from a legal or historical perspective are to be favoured. The criteria of assessment put the emphasis rather on certain well-worn textual features, setting and character, for instance, rather than inviting a discussion about how texts might be seen to engage with these categories – the individual, society – from a number of different perspectives.

It seems clear that the notion of 'literary' education is questionable, where the literary refers to an uncertain but very limited body of texts. It follows that the idea of the set text in English is dubious. Why might we ask students to read *Great Expectations*? Because it is somehow worthy in itself? This is a philosophically very dubious notion. Because it reveals something about the time it is written in? Well, a minefield opens. In English justifications for literature are characteristically thin or non-existent. The value of literature – or what goes under the name of literature in English – is not argued for, questioned and is never the explicit focus of recommended modes of study.

The question, crucial though it may be – why do we require students to read and study *Great Expectations*? – has no clear answer. Answers that are offered – for example, that it is worthy of study in itself – are hollow. The point is, though, that *Great Expectations* is established and that simple fact of presence may be its use for an alternative, and deconstructive, practice of the subject.

The relation between literature – as a form of cultural experience signifying a certain kind of cultural identity – and other popular forms strikes immediately as a possible point of entry. This interface – still relevant as long as English claims the category of literature in the way it does as a special/distinct textual category to be valued in itself – may be

usefully and extensively explored even under the new regime, perhaps more so when the category of literature is being promoted as an unproblematic category.

For many students literature represents an alien textual field. The way it is used means that it works as a kind of cultural filter sifting attitudes and responses – advocating some, encouraging others, dismissing these, excluding most and prohibiting still others. Literature represents the textual tastes of some but not of others, probably not most – and so many students stand disadvantaged culturally in the face of *Sumitra's Story* as much as in the face of *Great Expectations* or *Henry V*. Those, perhaps, who stand to gain from the education system's filtering processes are likely to feel much committed to it, or are likely to feel its intrinsic merit. Others may be positioned to experience their indifference to Literature as a lack, a personal or cultural deficit. For me it is the inadequacy of the category of literature that demands the production of new ways of dealing with texts. While literature remains in place in English the authority of the subject demands deconstruction, too.

#### LITERARY EDUCATION: BREAKING THE MOULD

Questioning the centrality of literature, a practical programme offering a redefinition of reading practices might address the following points, might put them to use in particular teaching strategies and classroom practices:

- a phenomenology of reading: examining fundamental processes of reading; looking at what texts are, how they function; looking at the relations between texts and readers; (this may be one way of positively redefining what 'back to basics' might mean);
- definitions and categories of texts: how texts get categorised, different ways of categorising them, different institutions involved and their different constituencies: for example, popular culture, English Literature, TV soaps, adverts, Shakespeare and newspaper articles on football;
- contexts of reading: institutions of reading, and their effects on reading practices and reading subjects; examining how people read and what forces determine the way they may read in different institutional contexts;
- conventional/alternative ideas about reading: looking at different conceptions of reading, how it works, what it is for, and so on; teaching explicitly that there are different theories about all this, that literacy is not one simply defined thing that all can aim for;
- ideas for textual analysis: for example, genre, codes, contexts, time, identities, gender, gaps, ideology; introducing alternative ideas and modes of analysis and understanding from the limited range conventionally proposed by English;

- ideology and interpellation: looking at how ideas about the world circulate in texts and discourses that position reading subjects – in many different contexts – differently; proposing ideas about how texts are caught up in social and political questions and issues; looking at how texts may influence individuals, how individuals may use texts – and what forces may be at work in all this;
- redefining the textual field: defining readers, within the educational context, in different ways; looking at how educational institutions have operated with very limited notions of literacy – and working to see how changes might be wrought in how schools, for example, teach and administer literacy competences.

The established use of the set text in English teaching is a far cry from all this. The reaffirmation of the set text, though, in KS4 signifies the impossibly limited scope of English – as well as its ideologically loaded nature. Contradictions and holes in the subject have simply been amplified by the recent government intervention re-establishing the set text, Shakespeare and pre-twentieth-century literature.

Deconstructively speaking, the set text may offer more the occasion for a new set of procedures for reading texts. This is likely to be far more inclusive of varied techniques for reading than the limited range of practices associated with English and clearly inscribed in the national criteria for formal assessment and in the attainment targets of KS4. Deconstructing English, though, is about more than finding new ways of reading or dealing with *Great Expectations*. About more than finding new games to play with *Henry V*, say, offering the same old outcomes. *Great Expectations* may be used, rather, to furnish the occasion for a deconstructive exploration of the very idea of textuality itself and – by examining how English has dealt with it, by looking at other possibilities – may actively challenge the existing authority of the subject.

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

*Great Expectations* may provide as good an illustrative instance as any for an approach to textuality and textual issues. What follows suggests different approaches from those traditionally associated with ideas about textual authority (we read *Great Expectations* because it is great) or with those associated with personal response (we read *Great Expectations* to explore our own selves). Textual interrogation may be a more appropriate way of describing the approach offered here. It might be useful to consider *Great Expectations* as a starting point, if only because it is one of the exemplary texts of English.

*Great Expectations* may be questioned on a number of grounds. The identity of *Great Expectations* may furnish the occasion for a questioning

of the traditional notion of an essentially significant or intrinsically valuable canonical literature. The idea of the universality of *Great Expectations* – and of the broader notion of literature loosely subscribed to by more recent, institutionalised (in exam syllabuses) ideas of English – may also be scrutinised. In the context of English Literature as an examined subject, critical theory may shift the ground of textual encounters: where the textual field is strictly under control, as in the case of KS4. Shifting the ground in this case means that *Great Expectations* cannot assume the stable, singular identity it may have done. Shifting the ground may also mean that reading techniques and practices that English does not embrace may come into play. In contrast to the limited scope of the reading practices of hitherto powerful models of English – the more liberal, avant-garde and traditional – the following textual issues may be addressed:

- The context of texts, the limits of texts and their meanings cannot be singular and assured: everything *Great Expectations* refers to must exist outside and beyond the text. Orlick, for example, is produced as a type, or stereotype: creative production actually selects from pre-existing ideas embedded in language.
- Textual identity and textual meanings are not self-producing. All texts relate to, are read against, other texts: *Great Expectations* cannot be understood in relation to itself alone; it has meaning only in so far as anything in it is recognisable as an example of a known textual form.
- Textual meanings are plural: there is no single reading of any text that can claim superior merit above any other; dominant readings may exist, but even these are likely to be incomplete, selective, and will often contradict themselves and one another. *Great Expectations* may be read as an indictment of social conditions in nineteenth-century England, or may be read as an example of the positive merits of nineteenth-century English culture.
- There are quite different ways of reading texts, and quite different perspectives: English deals with but one established mode of textual analysis, one that has been recently, systematically, challenged by a number of theories relating to textual fields, readers and reading instructions, for example.
- Texts belong to specific discourse which helps more or less to stabilise their potentially divergent, contradictory meanings.
- Discourses are related to social practices, and to specific institutional contexts. People are often organised differently in relation to these discourses and their texts, education being one powerful instance of such a practice or set of social practices within its own various, powerful institutions. *Great Expectations* 'belongs to' the discourse of literature; but it is shot through with innumerable other discourses, the discourse of personal identity, for example, and may be given a different inflection

if transposed into a different discursive arena – media studies, for instance.

This approach to the literary object does not entail a loss for students of access to knowledge they need for exams. This knowledge, though, may be framed and set against other knowledge. Deconstruction in this sense understands what it deconstructs – better than it understands itself: it deals with the very terms of the discourse it addresses. It enables consciousness of reading positions and affirms the constant interplay of culturally significant ideas in any reading event.

Here are examples of ways of interrogating the text which fulfil such a deconstructive approach:

Proper names/agents/identities	Objects	Places
Pip	bread	the cemetery
Joe	brandy	the forge
Magwitch	file	the hulks
Miss Havisham	hammer	Little Britain
Orlick	anvil	Jagger's office
...	...	...

Identify which of the above are *in and not in Great Expectations*, and which are only in *Great Expectations*.

For those that are both *in and not in Great Expectations*, what do they mean in *Great Expectations*, and not in *Great Expectations*?

What do we need to know about already in order to make sense of any of the above textual components?

What significance/function do they have in the text? Can any of them be given a single meaning or function?

What assumptions do we need to make about any of the above for them to operate within the narrative of *Great Expectations*?

What sort of gaps or questions are we left with in relation to any of the above?

Textual data: we may interrogate this endlessly: for example, what do we know about the hulks, the transportation system – how it worked (Magwitch's career, for example. Is it plausible?). Estella: what precisely do we know of Estella from the text? What information are we given, what clues, what certainties? But a more thoroughgoing critique of the claim that the text contains information to be interpreted may be undertaken.

Even if we take for our focus what we might assume to be in the text, its constituent element, as it were, the contexts are not quite so secure as the authors of the examination of English clearly assume. In what sense the character of Estella may be said to be within *Great Expectations*, then,

can be seen to be a problematic question. Estella is not a 'character' in a fully embodied sense, any more than Orlick or Pip is – or President Kennedy or Eric Cantona, for that matter. Character is really just one, limited, way of reading certain textual clues and data. Estella is the product of a great deal of inference, embodied, in the main, by assumptions that any reading brings to the text. All sorts of cultural knowledge and assumptions about women, for example, all sorts of half-guesses must be made, all sorts of gaps must be left unfilled for Estella to 'function' in a coherent reading of the narrative of *Great Expectations*.

Estella is never fully present before us but must be read off from a gathering of textual clues. May we conclude that Estella is in *Great Expectations*? If Estella is a product of the imagination's interpretations of clues, it is perfectly possible to suggest then that Estella is merely the function of individual interpretation. And yet the clues given, linguistic clues, surely cannot be subject to the vagaries and differences of individual consciousness.

#### The Intertextuality of *Great Expectations*

List texts that have a range of female characters in them: for example, TV soap opera and films.

List the different types of femininity and their different functions within the texts you've listed.

How would Estella fit into any of the texts you've mentioned? How might she be written into any of them? Sketch out some examples.

This kind of work may be developed in many ways. The point is to illustrate how our reading of Estella is constructed, not simply from the textual clues that *Great Expectations* offers, but also from our knowledge of other texts, and form our habitual ways of reading the signs they offer us.

### GREAT EXPECTATIONS TEXTUAL IDENTITY AND TEXTUAL STATUS

#### Textual identity

Compare *Great Expectations* with the following texts:

*The Daily Mirror*

*Home and Away*

*Terminator 2*

A Madonna video

Sketch out some ideas for how *Great Expectations* might be transposed into other textual forms:

- A Terminator film *Home and Away*
- A Madonna video

What would be the effects of these transpositions?

**Textual status**

Consider the texts you compared with *Great Expectations* above.

Is *Great Expectations* more complicated than any of them?

- Is it more relevant?
- Is it more interesting?
- Is it more full of useful knowledge?
- Is it more beneficial to study?

In what different circumstances might you make use of these different texts?

Our understanding of texts depends to a large extent on our understanding of many, perhaps innumerable, other texts. If this is true, then *Great Expectations* cannot be distinct from and uncontaminated by the order of text it is institutionally determined as being beyond or different from: narrative texts of popular culture. The general principle of intertextuality raises the question of the identity of this text: where does it begin and end? What are its limits? How can meanings be fixed and determined?

It also raises the further question of the identity of the text as a special kind of cultural object, possessing special value, questioning its being and place on the curriculum at all.

**DIFFERENT READING OF GREAT EXPECTATIONS**

Is *Great Expectations* always the same

- wherever it is read?
- whoever reads it?
- whenever it is read?

Consider how changes in location, in the reader, in time might change *Great Expectations*. Give some instances of how changes in these might make *Great Expectations* different.

It may help to propose different locations, identities and times for the reading of *Great Expectations* to work out how readings may differ according to these variables. If it can be demonstrated that readings do differ – as they must, surely – according to them, then the idea of the stability of

*Great Expectations* as a signifying unity cannot be sustained. The idea of there being a single, stable or universal *Great Expectations* cannot be sustained. It is the case that no text can guarantee the conditions of its reading. We may then ask, 'Well, what does guarantee the conditions in which *Great Expectations* will be read?'

**TO SUMMARISE**

One thing that remains certain about the new orders for English is that the reaffirmation of the central concerns of the subject is formulated on well-established lines. Literature remains defined as literary texts and the examination of language is constructed around the traditional categories of comprehension, letter writing and creative writing. All of these are based either explicitly or implicitly in the traditional practices of teachers and examiners. These are ideas adhering to such central assumptions of the subject as the notion that standard forms of response to texts are the response itself; or that 'grammar' and appropriate forms of writing can be defined as good or bad according to universally established criteria. The new orders are merely the old order.

The criteria of assessment in literature remain constructed around the familiar categories of character, particularly, plot and personal response. It is as though there were no other ways of reading literary or any other kind of texts. Criteria of assessment in English remain tied to categories like accuracy, sentence structure and vocabulary, as though these elements could themselves determine the quality of a piece of writing. Standard forms dominate as ever.

There is in all this much less space for the discourses that had appeared mainly on the established element of the periphery of English teaching, certainly in its more avant-garde quarters. Ideas and practices based on sociolinguistics, on media studies, on deconstruction, and even elements of the subject addressing political issues informed by an understanding of class differences, racial inequalities and gender bias have largely been excluded from the central definitions of English as a curriculum subject. They have been in effect banished from the core. That they were on the periphery, that they had not invaded the core of the subject, reflects the identity of English and the professional investments of those who operate within its bounds. Some English teachers implementing the new National Curriculum may be left with the uncomfortable sense that they are doing governmental work, presiding over domains they may have to recognise are ruled by powers beyond themselves. Those powers include the very discourses they have themselves lived by.

Post-structuralist redefinitions of language, discourse and cultural practices along with sociological and sociolinguistic critiques of schooling, and the lessons of recent public events in education, have both

conspired to deconstruct the progressive model of the subject. Recent developments in cultural theory have rendered problematic the very idea of a stable and self-evident identity for English. English as we have known it, in its characteristic modes of organising ideas about language and about textuality, can only be described as an anachronistic institutional practice: not, in fact, as essentially progressive. The centrality of the idea of literature clearly illustrates this. The slipperiness of this apparently essential category has not prevented its remaining central to both traditionalist and liberal versions of the subject, those two 'poles' which may claim to represent different positions, but which have contested with one another merely to enable the continuation of a deeply anti-theoretical, and (therefore) ideologically conservative, subject.

English has been used as an element in the contest for certain ideas to dominate the field of mass education. The imposition of an apparently traditionalist and restricted model – as in current KS4 – may have the positive virtue of foregrounding the question about the proper domain and regime of the subject. This might positively be construed as a moment for redefinition, for the emergence of a consciousness, on the part of English teachers, of what they are about, of their relations with the various institutions within which their work is framed, of their relation to the politics of education, both in the immediate sense of intervention in the politics of change (via resistance of edicts, for example) and also in the sense of a wider political awareness of issues, including the politics of literacy, of language and textual matters. Such a redefinition of professional identity would be essential to the construction of a subject dealing with language and textuality that would be founded on theoretical awareness and that would be aware of its institutional functioning.

What has been explored here indicates, perhaps, how English, having failed to question its textual dealings, was open to the kind of reinstatement of set texts that we now see – with all the limitations of ideas and scope that implies. But it may also serve to show that this may not need to be the end of the story. Deconstructively speaking, the limits cannot be inscribed and alternative practices may flourish.

After all, it is the reading practices it is subjected to that determine the contents, identity, meaning and function of *Great Expectations* – or English.

#### FURTHER READING

For an introduction to 'theory':

Richard Harland (1987) *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Post-Structuralism*, Methuen, London

Chris Weedon (1987) *Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford

For an alternative view of language and language practices:

Fairclough, N (1989) *Language and Power*, Longman, Harlow

Trudgill, P (1974) *Sociolinguistics*, Penguin, Harmondsworth

For an alternative view of the functions of English in education:

Hunter, I (1988) *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education*, Macmillan, London

For classroom materials in the area of fiction:

Mellor, B, Patterson, A and O'Neill, M (1991) *Reading Fictions*, Chalkface Press, Australia (distributed through NATE, Sheffield)  
(*Reading Non Fictions* is forthcoming.)

For a more full presentation of the above case with reference to classroom practices:

Peim, Nick (1993) *Critical Theory and the English Teacher*, Routledge, London