

Poetry Ideas in Teaching Literature

and Writing to Foreign Students

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The scarcity of references to poetry writing in ESL/EFL literature suggests that little has been done by either literature or writing teachers to tap this potentially valuable resource as a means of directly and actively involving foreign students in communicative, creative uses of English. In this article I draw upon the experience and insights of Koch (1970, 1973, 1977) to illustrate a way of adapting two poetry ideas for use in teaching poetry writing to a group of intermediate level Thai secondary teachers of English. Rather than subjecting model poems to extensive analysis, or selecting poetry for imitation based on strict attention to formal elements like rhyme and repetition--as is often the practice in literature and writing classes--poetry ideas are designed and presented which allow students to find and recreate within themselves the main feelings of the poems they read (Koch 1973). By providing students with a vehicle for participating in the process of poetry writing, opportunities are made possible for enhanced literary appreciation, fresh self conceptions, and creative language responses.

Introduction

Very little has been written about teaching poetry writing to foreign students. I find this surprising and unfortunate, considering the possibilities for creative and communicative language use that poetry offers to teachers in ESL/EFL situations who find themselves assigned to literature and/or writing courses. For the teacher of literature, poetry writing can be a direct and active means for foreign students to experience--rather than merely to analyze or critique--one important literary genre. In the case of the writing teacher, poetry can provide a creative supplementary option to the more common controlled, structured writing class--one that gives students

a welcome change of pace (i.e., away from a focus on language as form/grammar), and an opportunity to use the second or foreign language to compose and communicate in an original and imaginative way. A look at some of what little there has been written about the use of poetry writing in foreign language teaching underscores the notion put forth here that much more can be done to exploit this largely ignored yet potentially relevant and useful resource.

Poetry Writing and the Literature Class

Widdowson (1975) points out that it is a common practice in literature courses for a teacher to tell students what to see and how to feel about a given work, denying them any opportunity to experience it for themselves. Although he feels that students need guidance in their approach to a genuine experience of literature, Widdowson opposes the kind of passive, single channel academic spoonfeeding that removes students from direct, active participation in discovering "the way language is used in literary discourse for the conveying of unique messages" (1975:76). While stopping short of specifically advocating the teaching of poetry writing as a way to enhance a student's appreciation of literature, Widdowson's arguments implicitly leave this option open as a relevant and viable one:

This does not mean that what teachers and critics say about literature may not reveal a good deal of meaning but only that the full impact of the work can only be recognized by the individual's direct experience of it (1975:75).

Spencer (1979) argues that literature can play an important role not as "an end in itself" to be analysed as an ordinary type of factual information, but as a "means of beginning a creative process in the minds and emotions of the students" (1979:46). In order to stimulate such a creative process, a teacher must select and present literature that contains some common emotional and experiential element(s) with which students can actively identify. For Spencer, getting students to intellectually understand a piece of literature is insufficient: "Students...become frustrated, by being able partially to understand but unable to respond. I believe this frustration is the by-product of non-involvement; the students are static participants in a one-sided process" (1979:45).

Another critic of such one-sided emphasis on literary analysis at the expense of literary experience, Donen (1974:331) notes how this practice can give foreign students a decidedly negative attitude toward poetry:

...when poetry is approached from a merely analytic point of view the pupil is burdened with far too many technical literary terms. . . .This in itself suffices to bar the reader from experiencing what is beautiful, let alone from enjoying a poem.

Poetry Writing and the Teaching of Writing

Considering the plight of the ESL/EFL writing teacher, similar arguments have been raised concerning the need for ideas and materials that can stimulate and actively involve students in the actual process of writing, rather than passively limit them to focus on form and structure. McKay (1979:73) makes the point that "very few writing texts provide students

with an opportunity to base their writing on direct perceptions and actions." Describing her experience with native speaking children in England, Langdon (1961:4) makes the following observation about traditional writing techniques and materials:

I felt that the children were using a medium which was unnatural to them--a stultifying, deadening medium, which made all their expression come out as a sausage machine, in a string of dull, stodgy sausages of things which they thought they ought to write and say and think.

Dissatisfied with more conventional ways of teaching writing, Langdon was able to identify poetry as "the natural medium of emotion in writing" (1961:5) and subsequently develop techniques for introducing poetry-based writing (she prefers the term "intensive writing" to avoid possible negative reactions to the word poetry) to her students. In contrast to her previous remark, the following observation concisely conveys Langdon's pleasure in assessing the change in her students' writing brought on by the use of intensive writing: "The words, chosen quickly and emotionally were firm, descriptive and real" (1961:11).

Taking a cue from Langdon, Grayshon (1965) applied elements of this intensive writing procedure in a course with ESL Commonwealth teachers in England. After preparing taped recordings of a variety of poems--"I had to know and like them; the poems had to be within the cultural experience of the students and also be likely to appeal to their emotions" (1965:80)--Grayshon played them a number of times without

discussion, interrupting the taped readings only where necessary to clarify an unfamiliar word or difficult line. This procedure was in accord with the belief that "in revealing poetry to people it is of no value to analyse the content, or the rhythmic or rhyming structure" (1965:80). Grayshon did, however, have the teachers react to the poems in impromptu writing exercises aimed at preparing them to write their own poems. As a final exercise in the course, Grayshon "without any notice" had the teachers "write a poem on any subject they liked." Pleased and surprised by the results (a selection of which are included in an appendix to the article), Grayshon concludes by noting that the intensive writing techniques "confirmed my view that poetry must be first enjoyed, then written, and never examined" (1965:91).

Ostojić (1973) reports success using poetry writing with secondary students in Yugoslavia. Contending that "poetry can be an essential element of creative foreign language teaching," Ostojić talks about his own introduction of exercises in poetry writing, including rhyme, repetition and imitation, designed to "bring out in his pupils an appreciation for the creativeness of others and at the same time help them to be creative themselves" (1973:8). Ostojić maintains that "these two processes of appreciation and creation must not and cannot be separated, for they are constantly interweaving." In addition to helping students appreciate poetry, Ostojić argues that poetry writing can have beneficial effects on the development of students' prose writing:

We can enrich and improve the creative teaching of prose writing by some attention to the composition of verse. Such work will enlarge the pupil's capacity to admire great poets and their works and, at the same time, help them to use English more easily and to manipulate it in a more skillful and original way (1973:8).

Problems in Teaching Poetry Writing

Although offering evidence to support the notion that poetry writing has potentially important implications for the teaching of literature and writing to ESL/EFL students, none of the above references provide particularly clear and specific information about how to actually teach it. Both Grayshon and Ostojic, for example, are rather vague on how they use poems as a vehicle and catalyst to get their own students to write poetry. In both cases it appears that it is sufficient merely to read model poems, perhaps pointing out difficult vocabulary words and or a few literary devices, and then turn the students loose, trusting in their innate creative ability to react with their own poems. Even Langdon, who uses some positive and productive techniques to get students involved with poetry, sometimes lacks in her intensive writing ideas a specific, concrete focus on the elements in a particular idea or poem that she expects will trigger her students' creative instincts:

I read the poem through, explaining nothing, hoping that the rightness of the words would be enough. . . .I said to them, 'You have all had some experience with a bird or animal or insect. You have stood and looked as that man did at the snake. Write down what you saw and thought' (1961:33).

While one might want to argue that all students have the basic creative ability to produce poetry, a case can also be made, along the lines of Widdowson's argument (1975), that a certain amount of guidance beyond mere exposure to a relative sampling of the genre is necessary if students are to have direct experience and active involvement with the poems they are being exposed to and asked to write.

Another Point of View: Koch's Poetry Ideas

Three books on poetry writing by Koch (1970, 1973, 1977) offer teaching ideas that provide focus and guidance to students without telling them how they ought to analyse poetry or how they should write it. In his first two books, Koch explores different ways of teaching poetry to elementary school children; in the latter work, he uses many of these ideas as a basis for teaching poetry writing in a nursing home. While Koch's ideas are aimed at an audience of English native speakers, his frequent insights--drawn from experience as a poet and teacher--are well worth considering for the added scope and relevance they offer to foreign language teaching.¹

¹There were in fact some bilingual speakers among both Koch's younger and older groups of students; too, the idea that both children and elderly people receive from adult speakers a kind of modified speech input--i.e., caretaker speech directed at the former and, if you will, geriatric speech directed at the latter--raises the possibility that Koch's modified poetry ideas may well function as an analagous source of comprehensible input to ESL/EFL students (See Krashen 1980).

If I may stretch the term children in the following quotation to include intermediate and advanced level ESL/EFL students, for example, Koch's thinking here provides a concise review of my basic position set forth thus far:

The educational advantages of a creative intellectual and emotional activity which children enjoy are clear. Writing poetry makes children feel happy, capable, and creative. It makes them feel more open to understanding what others have written (literature). It even makes them want to know how to spell and say things correctly (grammar). . . . Learning becomes part of an activity they enjoy (1970:54).

Having used some of Koch's ideas in a teacher training course with secondary school English teachers in Thailand, I found that poetry writing can indeed be an equally enjoyable, creative and productive learning experience for foreign language students. In the remainder of this article I will discuss some of what I learned from Koch by describing the use of two poetry ideas adapted from his books. With the additional use of poetry samples written by the Thai teachers, I hope it will become clear first, why I view Koch's poetry ideas to be an improvement upon some other techniques previously cited and second, why I feel they are a valuable resource for ESL/EFL teachers looking for ways to make poetry accessible to their students.

Koch in a Thai Context: Two Poetry Ideas

The thought of trying some of Koch's poetry ideas occurred to me during a nine week teacher training course in which I was responsible for teaching the writing component. I wanted to

give the participating twenty-four teachers another, more creative way of handling two rather standard controlled writing assignments they had just completed--describing a person and describing a place. Such assignments occur in any number of ESL writing texts and usually include model paragraphs which the students are told to emulate and or a series of grammar pattern exercises which, when worked through, purport to provide a structural framework for the students' own independent writing on a given topic. As the teachers had done reasonably well (in an ordinary, rather unimaginative way) with these short prose descriptions, I wanted to see how they would react to another entirely different form of language input--poetry, when asked to produce new descriptions based on their direct experience of it. I was influenced by Koch's description of his own aim in selecting and presenting poetry to students, young and old: "I wanted my students to find and recreate in themselves the main feelings of the...poems" (1973:16).

The first step was to identify some poetry that would serve as a model and catalyst for generating the kind of imaginative experience that would enable the teachers to write poems describing people and places. Discussing his own criteria for devising a workable poetry idea, Koch writes that "a poetry idea should be easy to understand, it should be immediately interesting and it should bring something new into the children's poems. This could be new subject matter, new sense awareness, new experience of language or poetic form" (1970:14).

For a poem to use in describing a person, I chose excerpts from The Song of Solomon in The Bible. Though nowhere suggested in Koch's own selected anthology of poems, The Song of Solomon had long been a personal favorite work, and one which I felt would (as in Grayshon's criteria for selecting poems) fall within the cultural experience of the teachers (in terms of its theme of love) and appeal to their emotions. Moreover, parts of it were readily adaptable to one his poetry ideas concerning comparisons. In a chapter called Comparisons, Koch describes how he was able to stimulate elementary school children to write lines of poetry using metaphors and similies:

Comparisons are something children enjoy, and they are a natural and important part of poetry. Children are very good at them once they feel they are free to say whatever comes into their minds. Their perceptions haven't been...conditioned by the sensible and conventional, and if the sky looks like a white mouse they are capable of seeing it and, if they feel uninhibited, saying it. . . .I asked them to compare little things to big things: a mouse is like an elephant; and things in school to things outside school: the blackboard is as green as the sky. I asked them to compare two things that they thought were not alike at all and then see what they felt about it: rain is like a cemetery (1970:105).

Many parts of The Song of Solomon are rich in the very comparisons Koch alludes to in the poetry idea above. By selecting parts of it to read, I felt the teachers could be stimulated to respond to the different metaphors and similies and to create similar comparisons of their own by writing poems to describe an idealized person/lover. Using the poetic lines for a model, I hoped to "give the students a way to experience, while writing, some of the main ideas and feelings in the poem

we were studying" (1973:13).

In selecting lines from the Biblical poem², I wanted to expose the teachers to a full variety of its lyric and sensuous (e.g., "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies" 4:5)--and, at the same time, exaggerated and grandiose ("Your hair is like a flock of goats moving down the slopes of Gilead" 4:1)--imagery. Moreover, I hoped that the particular style and organization of the poem--i.e., comparing different parts of the body to various natural elements--would inspire the teachers and give them a vehicle for capturing their own imaginative comparisons in poetic form. As I had anticipated, the teachers were indeed moved by the lyrical, sensuous quality of the model comparisons. What I hadn't anticipated was the degree of personal involvement and accompanying quality of poetic imagery that the teachers were able to bring to their individual responses to the poem.

My original idea, taken from Koch's technique of class collaboration poems (1970:56-66), was to have the group select individual comparisons from each other's poems and put together a single class poem based on a collection of their many images. This was done, and a sample of the resulting collaborative poem gives clear evidence that the teachers had--consistent with Koch's statement of what a good poetry idea should evoke--

²I selected lines from verses 4 and 7 in The Song of Solomon from The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version. 1952. New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons.

"brought something new" in terms of "subject matter, new sense awareness" and "new experience of language (and) poetic form" (1970:14) to their experience of poetry.

Some of the lines show a distinctly Thai perspective-- alternately comic, serious and sensual--in the choice and feel of the imagery:

You are beautiful, my love!
Your face is like a durian.³
Your hair is like Thai silk,
which is soft and very valuable.
Your breasts are as fair as the lotus.

Others show the capacity to play upon some of the more hyperbolic comparisons in the model, extending them to new extremes of outrageous fantasy:

Your nose is like a volcano
that breathes ashes and lava out.
Your teeth are like a piece of wood
that is cut by a blunt saw.
When you smile, my heart shakes
and shakes like thunder.

Still others reflect a remarkable sensitivity to the underlying mood and flow of the Biblical lines, and illustrate Koch's point that, rather than limit the students' imaginations, poetry ideas can in fact stimulate whole new tangents and digressions of independent and creative thought:

The poetry idea, which helped so much to make learning poetry possible, didn't seem to limit our students' imaginations. And, when ready to do so, people take off from them to find new ideas of their own (1977:48).

³A durian is a kind of Thai fruit that is green and has a hard outer shell, with very sharp, spiked thorns protruding from it.

Or, as the Thai teachers translated the above point into verse:

Your eyes are like the bright eyes of a deer,
that looks around in the forest.
Your eyebrows are like a cock's tails,
that make a pretty curve.
Your smile is like a beautiful peace,
that comes after a serious war.
Your steps are gentle,
like a cat's on a roof.
Your life is like a tramp,
travelling from one place to another.

In addition to the above collaborative class poem, several other individual poems were so well written that I separated them to be read and appreciated in their full form. Reading these poems, in conjunction with the previous lines, one can identify with Koch's sentiments regarding the poetry of his own students: "I was surprised, and moved, at discovering feelings and perceptions in strange perspectives, in lines and situations where I wasn't in the habit of thinking they were" (1977:53).

You are so beautiful, my love.
Your eyes are like little stars
that shine brightly in space.
Your lips are like a kind of sweet
that everyone wants to taste.
Your teeth are like the bones
of a small fish in the deep sea,
where no one wants to go.
Your ears are small and thin,
like some thread of a spider
who works all night.
Your cheeks are like the snow in winter,
as white as its white color.
Your face is like a small ball
that children like to play with,
and remember always.

--Wannaporn Yutisri

His words are like the rain
that falls on the dry grass:
I feel the freshness of them.
His touch is as gentle as grass
that waves when the wind blows.
His white teeth are like pearls
when he smiles at me.
He is so smart and has dignity,
like a horse that the king rides
passing through the rows of soldiers.
All beautiful girls are upset,
for he never looks at them--
only me.

--Kesorn Chumwiriyasukkul

Your eyes are like the stars
shining in the sky.
Your hair is like the silk
of famous Thai clothes.
Your teeth are very, very white--
like tusks.
Your cheeks are like the surface
of sweet apples.
Your mouth is lovely as a waterchestnut.
Your eyebrows are like the tapered
edge of an arrow.

--Sirinat Boonyuen

In the second poetry writing class, I chose an idea from Koch based on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Kubla Khan. This is a complex, mysterious and beautiful poem, with unusually dense and provocative imagery. I made no pretense of understanding or trying to explain in detail to the teachers what the poem was about in a strictly analytical, critical sense. What attracted me to it--and what I hoped would, in turn, attract the teachers--was a combination of the hypnotic, dream-like feeling it evoked, Coleridge's obvious delight in the sounds of words--together with the exotic, mysterious names of people and places in the poem (Xanadu, Kubla Khan, Alph, Mount Abora),

and its fragmentary, elliptic form. I saw this poem as a chance to discover whether foreign students would, when presented with a difficult, challenging poem, relate and respond to its basic ideas and mood without the kind of heavy-handed literary analysis that has been criticised by Grayshon, Donen, Widdowson and Spencer.

Koch's poetry idea for Kubla Khan is attractive and simple. Emphasizing the essential dreamy mood of the poem, his idea is to

Close your eyes and try to get into a dreamy state of mind yourself. Picture the strangest, most beautiful place you can possibly imagine. Make it so beautiful you can hardly bear it. Then shut out all other thoughts and try to feel that you are really there, in that place. Write a poem describing the place. You can put in fantastic buildings, fountains, rivers, oceans, mountains, "pleasure domes," "caves of ice," anything (1973:244).

Before introducing this idea and having the teachers write, however, I wanted them to get a feel for the way Coleridge was using words and images in the hope of generating a sense of mystery and excitement. Having passed out copies of the poem, I read it through so the teachers could listen to the sound of the words and the flow of the lines. Then, I asked them to try to visualize the place described in the poem and to help me sketch a picture of it on the blackboard. As they called out details of the poem that interested and/or puzzled them-- e.g., the pleasure dome, Alph the sacred river, the caverns, the sunless sea, the garden, incense-bearing trees, etc.--I quickly and clumsily sketched a picture. It immediately became clear how much of the beauty of the poem was lost in any such

attempt to render it pictorially. The drawing proved more useful as a way to quickly represent some unfamiliar vocabulary items: "sinuous rills," or the "chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething," and to get another perspective of the vast descriptive scope of the poem. By reading the poem and sketching out some important details, I was trying to follow Koch's notion of keeping poetic analysis simple:

Unfamiliar words...and odd syntactic constructions
...I treated as small impediments in the way of
enjoying the big experience of the poem. . . .I
didn't think it necessary to teach every detail of
a poem, just those that would give the children a
true sense of its main feeling (1973:18-19).

The above procedure took about twenty minutes. For the remainder of the class hour, I presented the poetry idea, then let the teachers write. Before they wrote, I pointed out that Coleridge's poem was a fragment and that they needn't worry about producing a complete poem themselves. What was important, I said, was to try to emotionally/imaginatively connect with some aspect(s) of the poem and to use this identification to describe another mysterious, beautiful place. Well aware that I was confronting them with a difficult poem this time, I felt nevertheless that with the aid of the poetry idea--combined with the beauty and magic of the poem itself--the teachers, like Koch's students, would be moved enough to make their own responses:

By reading or hearing the poet's work before they wrote their own poems on a similar theme, they could enjoy it and learn from it; some if its remoteness would be removed by its being a part of something they themselves were going to do. . . .

Just as it is easier and more natural for children to write as if they were the snow than it is for them to describe it, so it is easier for them to participate in a difficult poem (that is to enjoy it, get lost in it, be moved and influenced by it) than to describe or criticize it (1970:40).

The teachers' responses to this poem and poetry idea speak best for themselves. All of them display exciting and creative insights; many, as with the previous assignment, show remarkable depth of feeling and imaginative power. What is impressive about these sample poems is the variety of particular aspects of Coleridge's poem that different teachers chose to identify with and recreate, emphasizing Koch's point that "poetry gives a person a chance to be, surely, himself, but different from the usual conception of himself...and to say things he would not ordinarily be able to say" (1977:48).

Marvelous Castle

Deep in the middle of the endless ocean
A vast, immense castle stands lonely
among the magic trees.
Around the castle many fantastic fish move by.
Without hesitation, I walk towards it.
Oh! How wonderful it is!
From the entrance through the mink carpet way
are countless diamonds reflecting against my eyes.
Down from the ceiling hang a number
of shiny silver lanterns shining all day long.
The whole place is so bright, like a sunrise.
No life here except the statue of a Lion
with closed eyes lying solemnly.
I am excited with pleasure, then gather a few
precious stones.
Suddenly seeing the Lion open his eyes and stare at me,
I'm shocked. . . .

--Pimonchaya Kunkaew

My Heaven

A lovely house (like a hut in my mind),
The roof is brown, in the sun it shines.
It's set in the field that's green and wide,
A long canal also flows nearby.

The sky is turning gray and red,
Birds are flying back to their nests.
It looks lonely with beauty and peace,
Quiet and wet with a full moon soon.

Golden waves are rolling by the blowing wind,
The trees are trembling, but standing and still.
No one is there, but I am in.
Oh! My heaven, if I could, I would be there until. . . .

--Thanu Boomprom

Strange Land

In the excellent land, Voiletta,
A waterfall was falling down the stones;
It's sound was similar to little rain.
Beside, it had a huge jungle.
Many animals lived together peacefully
and small, beautiful insects flew
over me into the clouds slowly.
I listened to a pretty bird,
and it sang a song sweetly.
A lot of pretty flowers there;
They had such a fragrant smell.
I was sitting there alone for a long time,
but there wasn't a terrible thing that happened.
There was no one there;
I liked it very much, although it was the lost land
for everyone, except me.

--Sirinat Boonyuen

Doi

Doi is a wonderful forest in the north,
Where fresh, beautiful and terrible,
the mountains are like giants.
The leaves of the trees are unnatural
with terrible colors: they are black and blue.
The wind blows like a cry of evil.
For just a moment once I saw and heard
Lovely flowers, pretty animals
and the soft voice of the wind blow.
I would be happy and thrilled there.

--Orawan Chongprakobkul

Waterful of Wonder

Flowing from afar, so far--
Too high for an ordinary mind to keep;
Running deep,
Into Naive canyon.

Cool as if to touch dry ice,
Straight clearly to out of sight.
If only it was within easy reach,
I'd be the first to search.

Puf--pa--dee, Puf--pa--dee, Puf--pa--dee,
What I see makes sense of its call.
Puf--pa--dee, Puf--pa--dee, Puf--pa--dee,
I can only hear the rhythm of the falls.

--Somchit Rataneeluck

Although Koch did not edit any of the poems written by his child or elderly adult students (he did advise them while they were writing), I did suggest some postwriting changes-- e.g., to make a subject and verb agree, to choose another word when I couldn't make any sense of an item a teacher had used-- but never anything that I felt would alter the person's own essential meaning or sense of identity in the poem. The important point here is to get the teachers to write; therefore, grammatical considerations must be dealt with later--after the poems have taken shape, if at all. Grayshon relates an experience about teaching poetry writing where some students (also nonnative English teachers) actually criticized themselves for being too stilted in their attempts at poetry: "They said they were too conscious of trying to write; their years of training in grammar and analysis had put a strict limit on their reactions" (1965:83). In order to help students free themselves from being overcritical about the form of their writing at the expense of its potential content, Koch writes:

I asked them not to worry about spelling, punctuation or neatness. De-emphasizing these mechanical aspects of writing makes it easier for everyone to write and make it possible thereby for some (students) who would not otherwise have dared to write poetry to write it (1973:22).

One teacher who I'm sure would not otherwise have dared to write poetry was Banjong. Considerably older than the other teachers, he probably had the lowest level of English proficiency in the group. Since he was also the chairman of the English department at his provincial school, Banjong had to constantly risk losing face when his performance in the different components of the course was not up to the level of his younger, lower-status colleagues. His poem, more than any other, convinced me of the essential value of poetry in an ESL/EFL setting:

The Strange Mountain

Himapan was a very strange mountain.
It stood in the western part of the world.
There were seven high mountains around it.
Living in the seven mountains were
a lot of strange and fierce animals.
Some of them lived on living things,
and their bodies were huge and their voices
were as loud as thunder.
There was a very large ocean near Himapan;
Its water was clear and there were
a lot of fierce fish and crocodiles living in it.
Anything that fell into the water sank down at once.
At the top of Himapan was the living place
of the huge birds we call Kroot--
Their bodies looked human.
All trees there were fragrant.
We, who are human, cannot go there
because it is a strange place,
and there are many dangers, too.

--Banjong Wongsyara

Banjong responded with quality writing, going beyond his usual strained and forced efforts at controlled writing assignments, and lending credence to Koch's sentiments that:

Degree of literacy makes a difference in a child's ability to write easily and confidently, but it does not form his imagination. The power to see the world in a strong, fresh and beautiful way is a possession of all children. And the desire to express that vision is a strong creative and educational force. If there is a barrier in its way...the teacher has to find a way to break that barrier down, or to circumvent it (1970:47).

Aside from capturing an eerie mood of mystery and foreboding, Banjong brought to his response to Coleridge some elements from his native language and culture. As a part of Koch's poetry idea, I encouraged the teachers to use unusual, fantastic names for people, places and things in their poems. In Banjong's poem, Himapan is the name of a mysterious, imaginary place in Thai folklore, while Kroot is drawn from Hindu mythology (via Thailand) and corresponds to Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu, represented as half-man and half-bird.

Conclusion

I have saved until last two poems that best sum up and express all the arguments that have been presented in this article in support of Koch's technique of teaching poetry writing, and its potential for application with foreign students. In the quotation from Koch that follows, one need only substitute the words Coleridge for Blake, teachers for children, and pleasure domes for tigers to read a concise and telling concluding statement about what poetry writing is

capable of providing ESL/EFL teachers and students alike:

For the space of reading the Blake poem and reading Blake-like poems of their own, the children were confronting tigers; they were talking to nature: they were lifted out of their ordinary selves by the magic of what they were saying; the fresh power of their feelings and perceptions was, for a moment, a real power in the world, . . . All of these are good experiences to have. When a child has had a few of them, he may begin to anticipate finding more of them in poetry and want to read more of it, rather than being cut off from it, as so many school children now are (1973:24).

Lest one feel that Koch is waxing overly rhapsodic here, I will let Ampan and Jeerapa have the final word. It seems only appropriate that an article about teaching poetry writing to nonnative speaking teachers of English should conclude with a poem (or two) by such teachers/poets. For the bottom line in determining whether poetry writing is indeed a useful and valuable resource for the ESL EFL classroom can only truly be found in the lines and verse of the second and foreign language poets themselves.

At the most comfortable house,
My sister's husband gave me a golden cow
which made noises loudly, and told me
to get a very beautiful red car.
If I could drive that vehicle, I would.
Another nice, dark house within a jungle;
Along a mountain,
falling water made me feel so wonderful.
Swimming,
a huge fish in silver clothes
asked me if I could help it.

--Ampan Chareonroop

Flanto

In Parascotopetl, Flanto saw
many kinds of flowers and trees.
A big perfume tree in the middle of the garden;
Twelve branches of that tree bent to the edge.

If you fly above the garden,
You will see: it's like a flower.
On each branch there are twelve angels;
They dance and sing every day.

Sweetest voices come from the tree.
Whitest of clothes the angels have.
It is a rare tree:
You should try to find one.

--Jeerapa Wisuttipat

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