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***READING LITERATURE IN SCHOOLS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF GREECE AND ENGLAND***

by

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Abstract

In this project, the discourse of literature teaching is studied as it is constructed in a range of texts, different in function, that come from England and Greece. Starting with the English paradigm, I make an analysis of four versions of the National Curriculum and then look at a series of interviews with English literature teachers of secondary education. Replicating this in the Greek context, I study first a number of official policy documents of the 1990s and then a set of interviews with Greek teachers of secondary education. At the end of each paradigm, a comparison is made between the official documents and the interview-texts from each education system. Texts from both countries are put in a historical perspective, since traces of the past can be 'read' in the present. Finally, the discourse of literature teaching in England is juxtaposed with the one developed in Greece. Overall, the comparison is along two axes: first between teachers' interviews and official policy documents, and then, between the English and the Greek paradigm.

In my analysis of all these different texts, I focus on specific aspects of the discourse of literature teaching. In particular, I look at the conceptualisation of textual meaning and the relation between referent, text and author, at the issue of text selection, at the aims set for this area of the curriculum and how they are translated into practice, and finally, at the presentation of all those who are involved in literature teaching, i.e. the teachers, the students and the central authorities.

From the comparison, the image of a school subject as a natural process that draws on neutralised and rationalised knowledge is called into question. Literature teaching emerges as a discourse full of contradictory trends that are constantly negotiated and reshaped in localised configurations.

*To my parents,
Anthie and Oumverto*

*Στους γονείς μου,
Ανθή και Ουμβέρτο*

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Chapter 1

Raising questions

PART 1.A. – AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE QUESTION¹

There is a picture from my childhood that has been indelibly printed on my memory. A hot summer midday, and I sit on the shady balcony of our summer house. As it is the time of the siesta everybody else is asleep, lulled by the rhythmic song of the cicadas. And yet, I cannot sleep, absorbed by the book I have been reading. Time passes and the afternoon sounds unfold lazily. There is my brother going out to play with our friends, my parents having coffee and leaving for a walk. I hear all these comings and goings as if from a distance, but I do not move an inch, still lost in the pages of my book. When I finally come back to the world, darkness has fallen, bringing with it the distinct sweetness of a summer evening. This scene, or variations on it, has been repeated in various settings and times. And as my children's books were not enough, I would gorge on my parents' library, reading indiscriminately anything within reach and without any regard for genre. Ever since I learnt my alphabet, books have been precious little treasures for me, entire worlds that are and are not, at the same time, alluring products of the imagination that have the power to magnetise me. Was it escapism or maybe a curiosity for life and its possibilities that made me behave as if I were going into a trance whenever I started a book? I have often tried to articulate the feeling without being able to produce a coherent and definite description. From the books I have read it is mainly drifting, disjointed impressions that stay with me, while sometimes I might even forget their title, author's name or storyline, stripping the experience of any pretension to knowledge or prestige.

While I would be engrossed in the reading of literature in my spare time, I also came into contact with it as part of my school studies in the Greek education system of the 1970s and 1980s. Even though literature was the focal point in both contexts, the two sets of experiences differed strikingly. At home I could hardly put down a book, whereas reading at school was rarely enjoyable or gratifying, a difference that has often set me thinking. In class we would read mainly extracts from whole works and then we would dissect them, discussing their characters, themes, structure or

¹ A version of this section has appeared in my article: Zervou, E. (2001) 'Moving ground: some thoughts on literature as a school subject', in *Changing English*, 8 (1): 7-16.

style.² Sometimes, we would assume the role of sociologists and historians identifying likely evidence in the texts under study, while at other times we would treat texts as monuments of aesthetic perfection in the art of writing, analysing and paying tribute to their stylistic achievements. Often, we would look into texts for timeless and universal values that would help us comprehend the Greek nation, humanity, its relations with nature or its course through time. Authors were seen as enlightened individuals who reflect on people, life and its mysteries and communicate their understanding to us through their writings. Knowledge about their lives was seen as crucial to our grasp of their texts, since a reciprocal relationship was assumed to exist between their personal life and their work. Thus, images of authors were constructed in school discourse, which we were then expected to use in order to explicate their work. However, in these constructed images of their life, their political ideology or sexuality would be left hazy as a result of censorship and taboos and as if these aspects of their life were irrelevant to their work.³ As for us, young apprentices in reading, we had to read, understand, analyse, admire and learn from these worthwhile exemplary texts. In class discussions as well as in our homework tasks, we were taught to speak in the name of 'he/man' or 'we/humanity', always guided by the authors' insights. The use of the first person singular was discouraged and so was the employment of a literary form in response to a text under study. The 'I', this eluding self with its resonance of a puzzling and even frightening unconscious and its disputable relationship with the social 'you', had to be subdued to common sense and respect for a set of timeless universal values, all notions that would be left undiscussed.

My sense of a disparity between the activities of reading at home and at school persisted even when my position changed and I became a teacher myself. At home, reading does not have to follow any conventions, and response does not have to be structured, shaped in an orderly way, or even consistent. There is room for exploration of feelings and ideas, in discussions or in solitude, in a serious or playful way. There is not even a need to articulate your response and to put your impressions into words. On the other hand, my experiences of literature teaching in school are of an institutionalised set of practices, whose assumptions are often, albeit not always, left unquestioned. As a pupil, I resented the deadening and stultifying feel of school reading and imagined that there must be a 'better' way, an 'ideal' way of doing literature at school. Later, as a student and a teacher, I gradually came to realise that it is a chimera to strive for the 'perfect' lesson plan and

² In Greece, in the subject of Modern Greek literature at both primary and secondary level, pupils make use of anthologies that contain short poems and stories, as well as extracts from novels and longer works of poetry. In the majority of cases, they study only extracts without any sense of the whole work.

³ For example, all the teachers I had at secondary school would keep silent about Cavafy's homosexuality or the fact that Ritsos was a dedicated member of the Greek Communist Party. I do not want to sound critical of them, since I realise that this silence was partly a result of the historical conditions of the times,

there are far too many factors that come into play in the shaping of the subject. Over the years, I have become familiar with literature teaching in three different settings: in the Greek education system, in the English education system and in the Greek community schools of London. My perspective on each setting has been different, ranging from that of a pupil to that of a researcher, and finally, to that of a practising teacher. What unsettled any received preconceptions I had was the comparison I attempted to make between the first two settings in the course of this project, as well as my experience of teaching literature in the London Greek community, in those schools on the margins. The dislocations I had to face shook the assumed naturalness that justifies and upholds our understanding of literature in an educational context. Thus, instead of reaching a hard place, I would be led deeper and deeper into a labyrinth of questions, whose answers depended more on a setting's contested discourse than on some definitive universal values.

In all three contexts, literature has a long-established right to a place in the curriculum compared with other genres, on the assumption that it has a formative, lasting and overwhelming influence upon readers.⁴ For a long time the view has dominated that literary texts assist young people's cognitive, affective as well as moral development, infusing socially acceptable and beneficial codes into them – an argument that has supported the idea of a good knowledge of literature as a means of social progress and personal advancement, no matter how these notions might be perceived. It has been assumed that literary texts have such a power that by simply reading them young people gain an enlightened understanding and desirable character qualities – notions whose ideology remains ambiguous and undiscussed, as, for example, is the case with Matthew Arnold's writings. In the Arnoldian framework, the reading of literature has a moralising influence upon readers, as it instils 'sweetness' and 'light', that is, love for beauty and truth, and guides them towards salvation and total perfection. (Arnold, 1948 [1869]) This view of literature as the distillation of human experiences, thoughts and feelings, that has the potential to humanise and initiate readers, while uniting them under a shared national culture, can also be read in later texts such as the report *The Teaching of English in England* (1921, also known as the 'Newbolt' Report), Leavis' writings etc.⁵ In general, such a view of the teaching of literature is part of the liberal humanist tradition that

in the early years after the 7-year-long dictatorship (1967-1974) when the traumas of censorship and oppression were still fresh.

⁴ A number of theories of literature have elaborated the idea that literary discourse is different from the non-literary, such as Russian Formalism (see their concept of 'defamiliarisation'), structuralism (see their interest in poetics), or the New Critics (again arguing for the different character that poetry possesses from that of ordinary discourse). In the terrain of education, classic literary texts have been used for the moral and spiritual instruction of the young since ancient times, while national literatures took the place of classical literatures in the newly-founded national education systems of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁵ In the Newbolt Report (Board of Education, 1921), literature is discussed as "the most direct and lasting communication of experience by man to men" (Section 5, p.9), by which "the dull and superficial sight of the multitude is illuminated and helped to penetrate in the direction of reality" (Section 11, p.17).

has shaped and upheld national education systems in Europe, a tradition that has associated literature with the shaping of character, the formation of aesthetic judgement as well as the development of ethical thinking. The particular powers of literature are endorsed even in oppositional approaches, whereby literary texts are thought to influence readers, their character and system of values by fostering the questioning of dominant rules and values or by putting forward an alternative iconoclastic discourse. This is the case, for instance, with feminist texts that challenge and subvert patriarchy. In this framework, the educator's role is to encourage children to make critical readings of canonical texts, deconstructing the representation of subjectivities, or to bring children into contact with texts which derive from cultural difference.⁶ The primacy of literature in the curriculum has been questioned, though, and the view is put forward that texts are created and used in acts of social interaction, where meaning is constantly negotiated in a semiotic process. According to this approach, rather than looking at texts in isolation, pupils should make a critical study of their function in discourse, under the guidance of their teacher, while emphasis should be placed not solely on literary texts but on different genres. Leaving aside the reverential attitude to texts, pupils should be taught not only to 'read' texts, whereby they follow their narrative and submit to textual authority, but also to 'interpret' them, thematising their narrative and connecting it to ideology, and finally, to 'criticise' them, freeing themselves from the power of the text, analysing and challenging it (Scholes, 1985).

Even when one accepts the particularity of literary texts unquestioningly and the need to include such an area of study in the curriculum, a whole range of debatable 'what', 'who' and 'how' questions is raised with regard to the seemingly straightforward proposition of 'reading literature at school'. First, there is the issue of the texts that are fit to be studied in schools and the selection process to be applied. Should children read only texts from a national corpus or should texts from other cultures be included as well? Should it only be texts in the original or could it also be texts in translation? Should we talk about 'literature' or about 'literatures' in the plural, and what is the relationship between the artistic creations of different peoples?⁷ Is it better to study whole texts or

Similarly, Leavis insisted on the wide-ranging effects of 'good' literature, as it helps people gain a better grasp of human nature, society and civilisation, as well as giving them an "insight into the relations between abstract or generalising thought and the concrete of human experience", without which their thinking does not "have the edge and force it should" (Leavis, 1952: 194).

⁶ Feminists have made significant contributions to the educational praxis and our understandings of it, ranging from critiques of the literary canon and its construction and of the texts included in it (e.g. Hunt *et al.*, 1988; Gilbert, 1989, etc.) to suggestions of a pedagogical framework that would give rise to relationships and writings of a different economy (e.g. Cixous & Clément, 1986; Thompson & Wilcox, 1989, etc.).

⁷ We should not forget that, since ancient times, the Western world shared to a great extent a range of texts that were considered worth knowing, whether this included ancient Greek and Roman texts, theological treatises, philosophical texts etc. It was in the nineteenth century that emphasis was put on national literatures, as opposed to this common tradition; a trend that coincided with the emergence and growth of national education systems and the Western nation-states.

does the study of extracts suffice? For example, in Greece children study mainly extracts, but to what extent can poetry or prose be adequately taught from extracts? Should children come into contact only with the 'best' texts, and if so, then against what criteria would their quality be measured? From past centuries the notion of the literary 'canon' has dictated the imperatives, to the exclusion of popular genres, of texts written by women, or of those giving voice to the Other, with the excuse that they are texts of mundane and inferior quality.⁸ And yet, the indisputability of such a canon has been strongly challenged by critics working from a feminist and critical viewpoint. Challenging the discrimination and the silences that such a distinction between a scholarly literary tradition and popular culture imposes, these critics have argued for more openness, making a strong case for the inclusion of texts representative of different perspectives.⁹ So, should the selection of texts be made on the basis of their representativeness, and if so, then how would one determine the social groups or literary genres that should be covered in a syllabus? Should pupils study older as well as modern texts and cover all periods of literary production, in which case the history of literature becomes part of the curriculum? Conversely, should we leave aside the criteria of exemplariness and representativeness and try to include texts that are relevant to pupils' experiences, texts that interest them and excite their attention, in which case the notion of a uniform 'national curriculum for all' is out of the question? Finally, should the texts under study be our prime concern or are texts secondary to other issues such as the process of reading, pupils' responses etc.? Should the study of literary texts occupy such a major part of the timetable, next to language studies, or should it form part of a more inclusive 'textual studies'? Do texts function in the same way in different contexts, and if not, then shouldn't their study take into account their contextualised function?

Even if the issue of text selection was resolved, another set of questions opens up concerning the reading subjects in a class: teachers and pupils. How do we understand subjectivity or a subject's relation to cultural codes? Are the experience of reading and the outcome of reading a particular text the same for all those involved, pupils and teachers alike, or not? Should reading be treated as an individual affair, whereby each pupil enhances her knowledge of texts and progresses as an

⁸ The rationale behind such exclusions is sometimes made explicit, while sometimes it is left unacknowledged. Otto Jespersen's discussion of women's and men's language is a good example of such a view made explicit, as he argues that "most of those who are in the habit of reading books in foreign languages will have experienced a much greater average difficulty in books written by male than by female authors, because they contain many more rare words, dialect words, technical terms, etc." (First published in 1922; extract reprinted in Cameron, 1990: 212-213) Thus, he suggests that beginners should read 'ladies' novels' because they have "just those everyday words and combinations which the foreigner is above all in need of, what may be termed the indispensable small-change of a language." (*ibid.*, p.213)

⁹ This distinction between scholarly and folk texts has a long history. Ever since the Middle Ages, literary education has been associated with formal literary texts, to which only the literate had access, whereas folk texts, such as folk songs or stories, were seen as being indifferent and second-rate, devoid of higher meanings.

individual, or as a collective process, whereby many agents contribute to the elaboration of meanings? And what are the roles attributed to pupils and teachers in the context of a class? In educational discourse, all children attending school are treated as a genus, sharing certain attributes and being expected to go through the same developmental stages. And yet, should pupils be seen as a homogeneous group, without any consideration of their gender, or cultural and social background? Should the educational establishment regard children as *tabulae rasae* and treat them on an equal basis, assuming that they leave their home culture at the school gates and forget everything about it? Quite apart from the question of pupils, what is a teacher's role in the reading of a literary text with a class? Is it the role of a master of knowledge, of a guide in the path to discovery, or of a facilitator in the creation of multiple meanings? Interestingly enough, teachers do not feature in educational discourse as readers, as if their own response to a text does not interfere with their teaching at all, with the exception of the occasional observation that teachers are more successful in their teaching when they do texts that they themselves like. However, could we suggest that all teachers read at all times in the same way irrespective of their background or of the context? And what are pupils expected to do with their teachers' readings?

A third set of questions opens up focusing on the process itself and what it involves for readers. Does the reading of literature come naturally or is it a learnt process with a set terminology, methodology and outcome? Should the emphasis be placed on pupils getting to know as many texts and authors as possible, or as many 'good' texts as possible, assuming that the very contact with these repositories of timeless and universal values will benefit them? Or should the stress be on pupils learning how to read, a skill they will be able to apply to any text they might encounter? What does reading entail: the uncovering of meaning(s) to be found in a text, the sheer experiencing of pleasure, the creation of personal or social meanings, using a written text as a starting point, the transformation of a reader's character and outlook? Should texts be treated as sacred, subject to learned men's exegetical methods for the discovery of the intended infallible meaning?¹⁰ Or is there no unfailing meaning hidden in a text and many different readings can be made of it? If we accept that multiple readings can be made of a text, are there some that conform to the dominant discourse while others are resistant to it? Are these meaning(s) dependent on authorial intention, on a text itself, on the way of reading, on context and cultural codes, on a reader and her identity? Consequently, should emphasis be placed on authorial intention, on a text itself, on cultural codes and social ideologies, on the skill of reading, on a reader and her response as an individual? And even if one distinguishes between the three components of the reading process, that is, between text,

¹⁰ This is a tradition of literary criticism that has deep roots. Both the Bible and the Quran, the sacred texts that constitute the cornerstones of two major world religions, have been open to numerous interpretations and exegeses through the centuries, in an attempt to discover – or maybe, to construct – the intended divine meaning, the truths and values that the faithful ought to obey and adhere to in their lives.

author and reader, is it possible to determine the relations between them? For example, what is the relation between a text and its author, or between a text and the world? Is a text the expression of its author's purposeful exertion and an outcome of her life experiences, or even a register of her unconscious? Do texts stand as referents to reality, offering, thus, a better perception of it to readers, in which case, a more discerning interpretation also renders a clearer and more accurate view of reality? Or, should our starting point be that there is nothing outside discourse, and thus, readers rewrite texts and create their own meanings out of them, by using linguistic and cultural codes? What are we to do with a literary text in a class: should a teacher stand at the front and expose 'the' meaning(s) of a text to her attentive audience, or should pupils engage in activities that will encourage them to create their own meanings from the texts under study? Hence, should pupils be expected to respond in the same way to a literary text, or not? And if pupils' response to a text can be personal or creative, then how is this 'personal' and 'creative' to be understood? On an individual basis or as relative to their sociocultural position, their gender, ethnicity, class, social group, home culture, etc.? How 'personal' or how 'original' can something that we create be, when we use language that is a social medium of communication? In the context of schooling, literary appreciation needs to be expressed in an articulate way and a pupil's reading of a text is appraised in terms of her writing – and, in some contexts, speaking – about it. So what form should a reader's response take: the cool and distant manner of formal analysis, with its claims to objectivity, or the impressionistic and self-expressive style of an artistic piece created in response to textual stimuli?

What happens in a literature class depends upon the stance one takes on the above issues. And yet it is not entirely up to teachers and pupils to decide about them, since they are expected to operate within a given framework that is determined by a national curriculum and established practice. None of these questions can be dealt with in isolation, as they are intrinsically interrelated and form a labyrinth of threads that lead off in different directions. Views on the reading of literature in schools are shaped at the intersection of many terrains, such as literary criticism, sociology of education, theories of learning and assessment, developmental psychology, linguistics, cultural and feminist studies, and are affected by changes in these. Notwithstanding the insights we might gain from approaching the subject from any of these standpoints, when we grapple with these kinds of questions we should take into account that they refer to a process taking place not in a void but in schools, in nationally organised systems, where centripetal and centrifugal tendencies are constantly being negotiated. In principle, education, especially in its national systematic forms developed in the nineteenth century, has an interventionist function, seeking to mould the younger generations and determine their future, as part of an ordered and controlled societal organisation. At the same time, though, a number of other social forces exert their influence upon educational processes, and these forces may be at odds with the dominant approach and interests. Various agencies, with

different agendas and ideologies, such as teachers, politicians, examination boards, the media, parents, social groups etc., have a vested interest in education, and consequently have a say in its being and becoming. This struggle between dominant and resistant forces over the educational arena results in constant negotiations and shifts of practice, while the notions of authority and power become central in a consideration of education as an institution. Even though a clear-cut distinction between dominant and resistant positions might make things easier in terms of analysis, power is still dispersed, and opposing trends are not often clearly distinguishable and personalised in different agents.¹¹

However, as I intend to show through this study, educational discourse tends to silence its own inherent conflictual nature, presenting a façade of harmony and naturalness. Thus, when one reads official policy documents or talks with educators about their thinking and practices, the first impression is one of rationality and the self-evident, an impression that is shaken at a closer look by the contradictions and compromises that undermine – or maybe, underpin – such texts. This appearance of consistency and obviousness could be seen as part of the process of ‘denegation’ that Althusser introduced in order to explain people’s resistance to acknowledging the ideological nature of their subjecthood, believing they are outside ideology – a position which is simply unattainable as “there is no practice except by and in ideology” and “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects”. (Althusser, 1971: 159) Foucault also drew attention to the veneer of naturalness that surrounds our practices, concealing the power relations or strategies of domination, and argued that it is necessary for an intellectual:

to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions. (Foucault in Kritzman, 1988: xvi)

The naturalisation process at work in the definition of literature teaching becomes more pronounced when one puts some distance between oneself and the practice established in a certain context, either by looking at texts of the past or by comparing its position in diverse educational settings. Then, a different light is shed on any claims made with regard to a natural way of reading or to a canon of literary excellence, and the workings of different ‘technologies’ become clearer as they determine the institutional definitions of literature and our understanding of it.¹²

¹¹ Writing about the formation of ‘English’ studies, John Dixon points out that they should not be seen “entirely in terms of ruling-class ideological goals, or of institutional pressures on a national scale.” (1991: 4) Instead, “the coexistence of contrary – even contradictory – traditions and movements in the society has to be recognised.” (ibid., 5) Similarly, Doyle argues that English “had to be worked for, constructed, forged out of struggles between differing lived meanings and cultural forms.” (1982: 19)

¹² I am here using Foucault’s term ‘technologies’ in the sense of the “joinings of knowledge and power” that contribute to the shaping of a docile body “through drills and training of the body, through standardization of actions over time, and through the control of space.” (Rabinow, 1984: 17)

PART 1.B. – ABOUT THE CURRENT PROJECT¹³

These reflections have led me to consider the teaching of literature, looking in particular at the aims set, the objects of study, what counts as knowledge about literature, and the methods and relations that compose its position in a school curriculum. People usually treat school subjects as natural indisputable entities, without questioning the currently prevalent conceptions or their inception. However,

most subjects derive their existence more from the ways in which we organise knowledge, or have in the past organised it, than from any reality which that knowledge represents. (Michael, 1987: 382)

School subjects are ‘arbitrary territories’ with artificial barriers, constructed through a selective process in which cultural meanings and expressive acts are contested, and the struggle of their construction is related to wider social conflicts.¹⁴ Literature is written and read in various contexts, for a variety of purposes and in a number of ways, while we do not all share the same views on what counts as literature. Accepting this diversity and localised function demystifies the model of literature reading promoted by school and makes it essential to think about the mechanism that bestows more value on certain practices rather than others.¹⁵ Having as my starting point that curricular subjects are not ethereal absolute concepts but are realised in discourse, I have looked at various images of literature teaching as these are constructed in a range of texts. In particular, I have studied a number of interviews I conducted with literature teachers of secondary education on their theory and practice and have made a reading of these interviews alongside the image of literature teaching constructed in official policy documents referring to the same age group. Looking solely at official policy documents was not regarded as an adequate way to study the construction of the area of study called ‘literature’, for it would render a depersonalised account,

¹³ Some first results of this project have been published in Greece in my piece: Ζερβού, Ελένη (1999) ‘Το μάθημα της λογοτεχνίας στο πλαίσιο της αγγλικής δευτεροβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης’, στο Αποστολίδου, Β. & Χοντολίδου, Ε. (Επιμ.) *Λογοτεχνία και Εκπαίδευση*, Αθήνα: Τυπωθήτω – Γιώργος Δαρδανός [Zervou, Eleni (1999) ‘Literature as an area of the curriculum in English secondary education’, in Apostolidou, V. & Hodolidou, E. (Eds) *Literature and Education*, Athens: Tipothito – Giorgos Dardanos.]

Regarding references to the Greek bibliography, authors’ names are written in English followed by their names in Greek in square brackets. A list of the full bibliographical references can be found in a separate section called ‘References in Greek’, where both the Greek references and their English translation are included.

¹⁴ I am borrowing the term ‘arbitrary territories’ from Michael (ibid.). This view of a subject “not as an abstract intellectual conception but as a changing body of knowledge produced by a social collectivity” (Ball, 1983: 62) has been put forward by many educators. (E.g. Doyle, 1982) Some, like Heath (1996), even suggest that the old subjects should be replaced by ‘areas of study or projects of learning’.

¹⁵ As Antonio Gramsci wrote while arguing about all men being intellectuals (1971: 9), one should look at “the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations” (ibid., p. 8), instead of trying to identify the intrinsic nature of literacy activities. It is with reference to power relationships that we realise how a certain conception of literacy is granted with authority through the school mechanism while others are completely disregarded as inferior or even non-existent. This treatment is not limited only to literacy practices but relates to all knowledge. As Freire puts it: “outside of academia there is no knowledge, or the knowledge that exists is believed to be inferior, to have nothing to do with the rigorous knowledge of the intellectual.” (1987: 77)

carrying many silences. Such an approach would not include a consideration of the way these texts are experienced by the people involved in the educational act, of what is registered and what is refused. (Morgan, 1990; Goodson and Walker, 1991) Both sets of texts, the interviews and the official documents, are set in the 1990s, as the second millennium was drawing to a close.

Instead of looking at literature teaching within a single paradigm, I opted for a comparison between two different education systems, as I hoped that this would illustrate the importance of context and of the locality in its shaping.¹⁶ With this in mind, I have looked at the understandings that have developed in two settings, in the Greek and the English education systems. There are a number of reasons for choosing to compare the teaching of literature in these particular settings, apart from the obvious one, that these are the education systems I have experienced.¹⁷ Both countries belong to the European Union, albeit they are subject to strong centrifugal forces, with England having close links with the USA and Greece being part of the Balkans. It seemed interesting to consider the treatment of literature in the education system of two countries that take part in an enterprise to forge a European community, while at the same time, there is strong pressure for the safeguarding of their 'national' identity.¹⁸ Similarly interesting would be to consider how the two countries, which are both multicultural societies, treat the issue of culture in the teaching of literature. Another reason for attempting this comparison was the different history they have, concerning the power relations in education. In Greece, the education system has by tradition been very centralised, with government bodies deciding on virtually everything, from school building facilities to curriculum details, and Greek teachers being involved only in the application of education policy, having no role at all in the process of designing it. On the other hand, England had a long tradition of decentralisation and teachers were granted a high degree of autonomy with more responsibility and power, especially in curricular matters. However, following the 1988 introduction of the National Curriculum, England has gradually moved towards reinforced central control of the

¹⁶ In this I had in mind Foucault's view of the role of theory: "The role of theory is therefore not to formulate a global analysis of the ideologically coded, but rather to analyze the specificity of the mechanisms of power and to build, little by little, 'strategic knowledge'." (Kritzman, 1988: xiv)

¹⁷ My familiarity with literature in the Greek education system comes from my years as a pupil and a student in the 1970s and the early 1980s, from the contacts I have had with Greek teachers, and from my readings into the topic. I have also interviewed nine Greek teachers on their personal history, teaching practice and theoretical framework. Regarding literature in the English education system, I have experienced it in my years as a student at postgraduate level, in discussions I have had with English teachers, and through relevant readings. In the English setting, I have interviewed seven English teachers, have had discussions with seven applicants for the Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course in English and have carried out forty hours of classroom observation of literature classes in five schools in Inner London. See Appendix 1.A for a list of the English schools visited in the course of this project and Appendix 1.B for the timetable of the interviews.

¹⁸ Despite the similarities in their relative positions, 'national identity' has functioned rather differently in the two countries, considering that in England it has been built on the past of a powerful world-wide empire, whereas in Greece it has been employed as a claim to the right to exist as an independent state in the face of various existing or imagined threats.

educational processes, and so English teachers find themselves in a position where they have to follow directions rather than make decisions. Irrespective of the present situation, English teachers have traditionally more experience in debating educational matters than their Greek colleagues. Thus, I wanted to look at how teachers react to a centralised education system depending on their past history of autonomy or of strict external control, as are the English and the Greek paradigms respectively, and to this end I expected the analysis of the interviews to be illuminating. So my project consists of a comparison along two axes: first, between teachers' interviews and official policy documents, and then, between the English and the Greek paradigms.

There has been only one such study comparing the teaching of literature in secondary education in the English and Greek education systems made by Eleni Hodolidou. (1989) In that study, first there was a general presentation of the structure of each education system, which was then followed by a discussion of literature as an area of study, regarding the aims, teaching materials and programmes of study, as these are described in various DES and HMIs documents for England and in the National Curriculum for Greece. Finally, Hodolidou made an analysis of the questions set in past examination papers in English¹⁹ or included in two of the Greek compulsory literary anthologies used in secondary education.²⁰ The examination questions were classed in the following categories: (1) country (Greece, England), (2) Examination Board (only for England), (3) examination type (CSE, GCE O-level, GCE A-level) or textbook (year 1 or 3 of Lyceum), (4) literary genre (novel, short story, poetry, play, critical essay, etc.), (5) origin of texts (national literature, European literature, North American literature, other literatures), (6) literary period, (7) content of question (knowledge, application, response, expressed response).²¹ A number of tables were produced where the frequency of each question type can be seen.²² Among other things, Hodolidou concluded that

¹⁹ In particular, Hodolidou looked at papers set in examination periods from 1984 to 1986, for the CSE, GCE O-level and GCE A-level examinations, by five Boards, namely the London Examining Group, Midland Examining Group, Northern Examining Association, Southern Examining Group and Welsh Joint Education Committee. (1989; chapter 3.2)

²⁰ She had to use the questions included in the Greek set anthologies instead of examination papers, because at that time there was no Pan-Hellenic examination of literature and the subject was assessed only internally at school level. (1989: 64) In particular, Hodolidou looked at the textbooks for Years 1 and 3 of Greek Lyceum, which are used with 16 and 18 year olds respectively, as these would correspond to the material used with pupils taking the CSE/GCE O-level and the GCE A-level examinations. (1989; chapter 3.3.)

²¹ The classification system used for the content of examination questions was the one devised by Dill, Purves, Weiss and Foshay, and presented in BLOOM, S.B., HASTINGS, J.T. & MADANS, F.G. (1971) *Handbook on Formative and Summative Evaluation of Student Learning*, New York: McGraw-Hill. It had been amended to suit the needs of the study. The four basic categories had subcategories. For example, the 'application category' was further split into the following: (1) comparison or contrast between two texts, two authors, two movements, (2) application of biographical information, (3) application of history of literature, history of culture, social/political history or history of ideas, (4) application of literary terms, (5) application of the author's theories, (6) application of cultural information.

²² Data was systematised in two ways: either in a combination of two features (e.g. literary genre – country, literary genre – pupils' age, question content – country, question content – literary genre etc.), or in a combination of three features (e.g. literary genre – pupils' age – country, question content – pupils'

literature is approached differently in the two countries, as a result of their political and social differences, as well as of the differences in the nature and type of their education systems, in teachers' training programmes and union representation, and in the prioritisation of the aims set for its teaching. In England more emphasis is given to pupils learning a critical way of thinking about literature, whereas in Greece the focus is on the transmission of national culture. Similarly, in England examinations aim at testing pupils' critical approach to a text, whereas in Greece they assess pupils' familiarisation with the content of texts. Generally, in England literature in education has a higher status than in Greece.

I thought that a further comparison of literature teaching between the two education systems would be fruitful for a number of reasons. First, the introduction of the English National Curriculum in 1988 has changed the topography completely, bringing it closer to the Greek system as far as power and control is concerned. Writing in 1989, Hodolidou partly justified her decision for a comparison on the grounds that the English education system was highly decentralised and teachers were, to a great extent, the decision makers. This made the two systems "radically different" (*ibid.*, p.6), a situation that has changed since then. Second, Greek society of the 1990s is very different from that of the 1980s, when Hodolidou made her study, as a large wave of immigrants and refugees has accentuated its multicultural character, an issue that has a much longer history in England. One would expect this change to have a bearing on the school curriculum as well and will be one of the aspects I will try to consider in relation to literature teaching. Third, the 1997 Education Reform in Greece and the 1988 introduction of the National Curriculum in England have both resulted in the production of a substantial number of official documents that try to standardise the theoretical framework and teaching practice. These texts, published by central authorities in the 1990s, will be some of the materials analysed in my study. Finally, the comparison I attempt to make in this study is of a different kind, being based more on discourse analysis than statistics, as I also examine interview-texts and thus the voices of practitioners are to be heard alongside official policy documents.

In reading the interviews and the official policy documents from the two paradigms, my first aim has been to look at how the particular aspects of literature reading are conceptualised as it becomes an established area of study in schools. Thus, I make a close reading of the texts under study so as to identify the projected understandings of textual meaning, of the relation between texts and authors, of the reading process as well as of text selection. Secondly, I look at the objectives set for the area of study called 'literature', which, when put together, give shape to the image of the 'ideal'

age – country, etc.) The independent variables were the categories country, examination type, pupils' age and Board, while the dependent variables were the literary genre, national origin of texts, literary period

reader of literature. Then, I explore how power and authority are understood and treated in these texts, and, in particular, how the roles are pictured of the agents involved in the educational act, that is, of teachers, pupils, central authority bodies etc. Another issue to be considered is the way pupils and their identity are presented in the studied texts, with regard to their significance in a literature class. In a world where globalisation poses a challenge to our notions of state, nation, borders or world community, and where the intake of schools is to a great extent no longer homogeneous and mono-cultural, one would also expect approaches to literature teaching to change, being informed by renewed understandings. So one of the issues I will be looking at is whether this transformation has had an effect on teachers' and policy makers' conception of literature teaching. In my study I have focused on secondary education and in particular on Key Stages 3 and 4 for England and Gymnasium and Lyceum for Greece, but I do not consider the issue of development in pupils' response to literature, as this would make the comparison between the two settings very difficult. Overall, the orientation of this study has been twofold. On the one hand, it is descriptive, as there is an attempt to unfold the images of literature teaching constructed in a range of texts, and on the other hand, it is methodological, as different discursive positions are considered in the way they function.

As part of my research I moved in and out of various educational settings. At one moment, I visited English schools for classroom observations and interviews with English teachers; at the next moment, I talked with Greek teachers about their theories and practices. Even though my position in each context was different, both in the way I experienced it and in the way I was seen by the others, a feeling of alienation stayed with me always. As a researcher in an English class I felt a stranger even in those schools where I had become familiar with the place, the people and the proceedings. I am a foreigner with a foreign accent who has not been educated in the English education system. Even though I have read about its history, I have not lived through it, and thus I do not have a nostalgic attachment to any of its aspects. Back in my home country, where I was with Greek literature teachers, asking them about their views on the subject, I again had this feeling of being close and distant at the same time. We shared a language, a culture, a system of reference etc., and yet I could detect a slight restraint in their behaviour, as a result of their consciousness that I came from a foreign institution and my perspective on education was not similar to theirs. In all contexts, this coexistence of estrangement and familiarity was not paralysing as would be expected. On the contrary, it has proved fruitful and rewarding.²³

and question content.

²³ At the same time, as a teacher in Greek community schools in London, I also had a strong feeling of displacement despite a sense of closeness and ease. Although teaching Greek language and literature is a very intimate thing for me to do, it would be in a place where the prevalent language and culture is English. More importantly, my pupils had a very different sense of Greekness from me and there had to be constant exploration and negotiation of meanings.

PART 1.C. – INTERVIEWING: AUTHORSHIP AND POWER

During this project I interviewed seven English teachers and nine Greek teachers, all of them working in state schools.²⁴ The interviews with the English teachers took place in two parts, four of them in June 1995 and the other three in May-June 1998, while the Greek ones were conducted over the course of four months, from late October 1998 to early January 1999. At the time, all the English teachers worked in schools in the Inner London area, while all the Greek teachers taught literature at secondary schools in Attica.²⁵ In the Greek setting, interviewees were randomly selected from teachers I happen to know or were introduced to me by other teachers. With regard to the English respondents, I came into contact with them through the Initial Training Office of the Institute of Education or through my supervisor. The interviews with the English teachers took place at their schools, when they were free from any teaching duties, whereas the Greek ones were conducted at my home or at the interviewees' homes. The two sets of texts that came out were rather different as a result of these different conditions. In the Greek interviews there was no pressure from a school bell that could go off at any time or from other duties that could call on their attention, and so the atmosphere was rather relaxed and cosy with coffee and biscuits around. On the other hand, in the English ones there was always an awareness that time was running out. As a result, the Greek interviews were longer and there were fewer interruptions compared with the English ones. Each session lasted approximately forty-five minutes to an hour and a half, during which time I tried to speak as little as possible and never made an interruption. In all cases, there was no one else present.²⁶ At the start, I would ask them whether they had any objections to my recording the exchange, to which most said they did not mind. Only two of the English teachers did not want it to be recorded, and so I took notes as they talked.²⁷ For the recording, I would use a very small tape recorder and microphone so that they would be as unobtrusive as possible. In the beginning they seemed to be conscious of the microphone but after a while they were oblivious of

²⁴ See Appendix 1.B for a timetable of the interviews with English and Greek teachers, Appendix 4 for a short presentation of interviewees and Appendix 5 for the full text of the interviews.

²⁵ Attica is the district where Athens belongs, something like the Greater London area.

²⁶ There was only one exception to this. In the interview with the Greek teacher Stella another teacher, Nefeli, sat in on part of the interview and towards the end it changed into an open discussion with both of them contributing to it.

²⁷ While visiting schools in England, I would talk with various teachers about the issues that formed the main axes of my project and at the end of the day I would take notes of what they had told me. These informal discussions did not differ much from the 'real' interviews, especially those that were not recorded and during which I would take notes. The end-result seemed more or less the same, and yet, the two events were completely different. In the interviews, I was the one who asked the questions and interviewees thought carefully before they answered, whereas the informal discussions were more interactive, as the teachers would also ask me what I thought and I would tell them my point of view. In both contexts, I went away with a text on some English teachers' views on literature teaching, and yet it seems that the interviews would be accredited with more 'value' and 'validity' than the informal discussions that enter into the domain of the anecdotal and personal.

it.²⁸ I also make it clear to all of them that instead of their real names I would use invented names to ensure anonymity.

I had not discussed the topic with any of them beforehand, not even with those from the Greek set whom I already knew. Prior to the interview I would only explain that I was interested in what they thought about the teaching of literature and that I did not expect them to have anything prepared. English and Greek teachers reacted rather differently to the experience of giving an interview. The teachers in Greece seemed unaccustomed to having researchers or outsiders in school looking at their practice and talking with them about it – or at least, these particular teachers had not gone through a similar experience before. It is interesting to note that, at the end and after I had switched off the tape recorder, many of them said they had enjoyed talking to someone about their experience of teaching literature, and one of them, Kostas, even said that he had found it a relief as it gave him the opportunity to voice some of his concerns, his doubts and explorations, an opportunity he does not often have. So it was confirmed that “the process of being taken through a directed, reflective process affects the person being interviewed” and might even help respondents gain new ideas and fresh insights. (Patton, 1987: 140-1)²⁹ On the other hand, the English teachers seemed used to talking about and explaining their working framework, and thus came out very confident and assertive. It appears that English teachers have a greater involvement in research practices and curriculum design processes than their Greek colleagues, and are accustomed to elaborating on their practices and theories. In all the interviews, I emphasised the informal tone I wanted these sessions to have, which proved particularly useful in the Greek interviews as a way for them to overcome their reluctance and uneasiness. This was also one of the reasons why I chose to start with a question on their childhood memories of reading literature at school, so that they could make a confident start and get over their initial suspicion that I would see them in a judgmental or discriminatory way.

An interview is a social event that takes place in discourse and so its writing is determined not only by the context of the exchange but also by the participants’ identity, a multifaceted notion that we tend to conceptualise around variables like race, gender, ethnicity, age and so on. Shared factors might function as ties that encourage empathic understanding, while differences might arise as barriers and sources of tension. (Johnson-Bailey, 1999) In the case of this study, there was no issue of race or class and I did not feel gender was of any significance. However, it is interesting to look

²⁸ The observational data, such as where the interview occurred, who was present, how interviewees reacted to it and so on, can be found in Appendix 5, preceding each interview.

²⁹ Oakley also comments on respondents being affected by interviewing in the sense that it makes them reflect on their experiences more than they would otherwise have done. (1981: 50)

at the function of age and dress in the dynamics developed in the interviews.³⁰ Most of the interviewees are older than I am and only a few are of my generation, in their early thirties.³¹ In the Greek interviews, this difference of age can be seen in the way we addressed each other. With the exception of the two younger teachers, I addressed them in the second person plural, which denotes respect and courtesy, whereas they addressed me in the second person singular, as is common when talking to a younger person. The age difference and the social conventions that mark it bestowed authority on the interviewees. Moreover, my appearance and the way I was dressed were informal and casual which gave, as a result, an informal tone to the whole exchange. Had I shielded myself behind a formal suit and an austere, withdrawn tone, I might have bridged the gap that age difference created. Alongside the age difference and the informality of the exchange, the fact that I came from a 'different' context conferred authority on both the Greek and the English teachers. The Greek interviewees assumed that I was not particularly familiar with schooling in Greece and the teaching of literature in it, since I came from a foreign institution and had been living abroad for a long time. Similarly, the English interviewees treated me as a foreigner with no experience of English education. The fact that they would sometimes give me very basic information on the curriculum reinforces the idea that they all saw me as a complete stranger to their country's education system.

All the above determined our relative positions in the dynamics developed in the course of the interviews. They were older than me and knew more about the topic as they saw it from the inside, while I knew less and was an outsider. They assumed the role of expert, while I had that of a person who does not know. As time went by, even the Greek interviewees would gradually sound more confident and would speak their mind more freely. On the other hand, I was the one who made the questions and directed the discussion. They could answer my questions but could not be sure about my motives or what I was thinking, since I did not speak much. Half of the Greek teachers asked about the teaching of literature in Britain, but that was only after the end of the interview, as if they had willingly accepted that their role was to give answers and not to ask questions.³² We were all present but we still functioned in reference to an absent reality: they to some distant literature

³⁰ As Hitchcock and Hughes observe: "'Seniority' and 'youth' are factors that do seem to have a particular significance in schools. Teachers' attitudes towards each other are often based upon the age of the respective parties concerned." (1989: 89)

³¹ Four out of the seven English teachers are older than I am while three are my peers. Seven out of the nine Greek interviewees are older than I am and only two are of my generation. In general, the population of Greek teachers working in Athenian schools is older than those teaching in London schools. This is due to the fact that they need to spend many years teaching in village or town schools before they manage to get a placement in Athens or any other big city.

³² Unlike those Greek teachers who would ask me about the British education system, none of the English teachers asked about the teaching of literature in Greece. This might have been due to the time pressure they were under. Still, I got the impression that they were not really interested in what might be going on in settings other than their own.

classes and I to a distant educational setting and the world of research. They had reasons to feel empowered and I earnestly tried to make them feel this way, and yet, at other times, they could not be so sure about what I knew or was aiming at. My experience of a different education system and setting added an aura of mystery and strangeness to my presence. As for me, I was in the position of a guide, a role that bestowed power on me, and yet I depended on them to acquire the knowledge they had. So power was shifting and contestable all the time, and it was not clear which position each of us occupied. What held true both for the interviewees and me was that neither was detached or passive; instead, we were all involved in the process, actively participating in it. The outcome of our joint efforts was the writing of the interviews, texts whose authorship belongs to both interviewer and interviewee.

I decided that the most suitable research method would be qualitative interviewing rather than closed interviews, tests or questionnaires, as it would “provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms.” (Patton, 1987: 115) Considering that interviews can be ranged on a continuum from the very formal and strictly structured to the informal and conversational ones, the interviews I had were guided or focused, conducted on a one-to-one basis.³³ I made use of an interview schedule that provided only the point of departure for the questions to be asked and gave me the opportunity to follow the trail of their thought. I was not strict about the sequence of the questions or their phrasing, which were as open-ended as I could make them and did not aim at checking on their knowledge. Interviewees could answer every single question I put to them and the reason why I phrased them in such a way was because I wanted them to feel empowered. There was no trick built into the questions that would make them fall into contradictions, because I was mainly trying to understand their working framework. A problem seen as associated with interviewing is that respondents might try to show themselves in a ‘good light’. (Cohen & Manion, 1989: 319) However, the questions my interviewees had to answer were so open and general that there was no way they could figure out what would sound ‘good’ to me – precisely because I do not think there are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ answers to these questions. While they talked, I would listen attentively and at the same time would note down everything they said. Interestingly, interviewees seemed to be more aware of the fact that I was taking notes than of the interview being recorded. I found that taking notes during the interviews – and despite the fact that I was recording these – helped me follow their train of thought, think of the next question and make references to points that had already been made. Often

³³ I have in mind Bell’s description about the guided or focused interview: “No questionnaire or checklist is used, but a framework is established by selecting topics around which the interview is guided. The respondent is allowed a considerable degree of latitude within the framework. Certain questions are asked, but respondents are given freedom to talk about the topic and give their views in their own time.” (1993: 94) Following Hitchcock’s & Hughes’ (1989) distinction between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, these would be described as ‘semi-structured’.

I would probe them to explain or expand on something they had said, while sometimes I would follow an idea of theirs that I thought would lead to interesting conclusions. So, even from the time of the interviews, I saw their words as a text that was being co-authored by the interviewees and me.

For all interviews I used a list of guiding questions that were relevant to experience/behaviour, opinion/belief, with a small percentage of background ones. In general, they covered three broad areas.³⁴ First, there were questions on the interviewees' personal history of reading, and in particular, on their memories of reading literature as a child at school and at home. They were also invited to talk about what drove them to become teachers of literature as well as to identify which period of their life had been most decisive in their formation. The second part addressed their current teaching practice and theory, looking at the aims they set, their methodology, criteria for selection of texts and factors that determine their choices. Finally, the third part focused on their view of pupils as readers, and in particular, whether they think that gender, social or cultural differences between pupils affect their approach to literature in class as well as whether and how these differences determine their decisions and teaching practice.

Through these interviews I wanted to get a holistic view of the ways in which English and Greek teachers think of the reading process as well as their own and their pupils' role in a literature class. My aim was rather ambitious since I was more or less trying to describe the image of literature as an area of study as this appears from a teacher's perspective. It should be noted that the emerging picture is what these teachers have in mind or what they want to project to an attentive stranger who listens to them. By explaining their everyday practice to an outsider, they are brought to turn their 'taken-for-granted' assumptions into a statement of intent and of professional practice. As they had not seen the questions beforehand, and everything was over within an hour, they had to give short answers, without an opportunity to draft and redraft them. I guess that if they had access to their transcribed interview or if they had more time to think over each question, they would most probably make additions or alterations to what they said in the first place. I do not read these interviews in order to examine their worth as teachers, since such a project would presuppose the elaboration of a coherent and incontestable set of criteria for the assessment of literature teaching. Moreover, their practice is not entirely of their own making, and so they are not fully responsible for it. I rather aim at understanding their rhetoric and judgments and "to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences." (Patton, 1987: 115) So I read the interviews as texts that construct images of the reading process in school and of the agents involved, pupils and teachers alike.

³⁴ See Appendix 1.C for the guiding questions used in the interviews.

After transcribing the interviews, I ended up with a voluminous corpus of texts, nearly ninety thousand words long³⁵, where a multifaceted picture of literature teaching emerges that seems at first glance chaotic. In these texts, the voices of the individual teachers can be heard – even though they become more distant after the transcription – but also common lines of thought become discernible, indicating some sort of collective consciousness or common tradition that ought to be systematically studied. With regard to the Greek interviews, I translated them into English, trying to keep as close as possible to the syntax of the original. The reason for doing this was because I thought I should keep in mind the active and passive constructions and who occupied the position of the subject in these, as an indication of the power relationships elaborated in the interviews. However, by translating the interviews into another language I rewrote them and created a new text out of them. The whole process of rendering the Greek interviews into English emphasised the idea of translation as some kind of impossibility, as I had to take on cultural assumptions without an equivalent in English.

At the next phase, I analysed my material, trying to make ‘sense’ and to put ‘order’ into all those pages by identifying patterns and categories.³⁶ It is discourse analysis that I made, treating interviews as ‘texts’ rather than sources of information. At that stage I was faced with a dilemma: either I would try to figure out representative types of literature teachers or I would consider the trends in aspects of literature teaching that have developed in the two paradigms. I ruled out the former option, because I did not consider my sample to be big enough for such generalisation and because the resulting types from the two countries would not necessarily be comparable. In order to work out the main trends in each analytical category, I underlined bits and pieces in the interviews, made notes and comments in the margins, and finally copied all the relevant extracts in new documents on the analytical categories. Very often the same extract could go in more than one category, which made the task of avoiding repetitions in the presentation of the analysis all the more difficult.³⁷ During this process, I tried to keep in mind the interviews as a whole so as not to end up with disembodied ideas. Overall, I ended up using three categories in the analysis. First, I looked at how teachers perceive the nature of texts, and in particular, textual meaning and the relation between a text and its author. I also considered their criteria for text selection and, regarding the

³⁵ As has already been explained, the Greek interviews are longer than the English. The former are about 55,000 words long, while the latter are about 35,000 words long. Despite the difference in quantity, I think that the two sets are comparable, as all the main lines of questioning have been covered in all the interviews. See Appendix 5.A for the full text of the English interviews and Appendix 5.B for an English translation of the Greek ones.

³⁶ I should say that when I was first confronted with the task of analysing the interviews, I felt at a complete loss. In the bibliography, there is usually abundant discussion of the organisation and conduct of interviewing, but there is very little about how to analyse interviews. It was by reading and re-reading the texts that I managed to overcome this barrier.

Greek paradigm, how the interviewees comment on the use of anthologies. The second category concerned the image of the ideal reader that they project, or else the aims they set and what they would ideally expect their pupils to achieve. Finally, I considered their description of pupils' role in the reading process, whether they perceive any differences between pupils in the way they respond to literature and how their understanding of these differences affects their teaching practice. In this part I also discussed the assignment of power to various agents involved in the process, to teachers as individuals and as members of a community, to pupils and to central authorities.

Overall, the present work has the following structure: in the next chapter I start by giving an account of literature teaching in English education since its first steps, focusing on aspects like textual meaning, authorship, text selection, reading and the reader, the effects of literature and so on. Then, I make a close reading of the 'Cox' Report and the 1990, 1995 and 1999 versions of the National Curriculum, all of them official documents that determined the teaching of literature in the 1990s. In chapter 3, the analysis of the English interviews is presented, while an effort is made to consider how certain ideas are treated in the interviews compared with their treatment in the official documents. The next two chapters deal with the teaching of literature in the Greek paradigm, following a similar structure. So in chapter 4 I make a close reading of official documents of the 1990s related to literature teaching, putting them in a historical perspective. Then, in chapter 5 the analysis of the Greek interviews is presented, again in comparison with the official documents. In the final chapter, I compare the two paradigms and how literature is constructed as an area of study in all these different 'texts'. The interpretation of both the official documents and the interviews is made in the light of the comparison, acquiring thus a new meaning and significance. In the Appendices, I have included background information and the data of this project. So in Appendix 1, there is a list of the English schools I visited (Appendix 1.A), the timetable of the interviews (Appendix 1.B) and finally the guiding questions that were used in the interviews (Appendix 1.C). In Appendix 4, a short presentation of the interviewees is made, while the full text of the interviews, both the English and an English translation of the Greek ones, can be found in Appendix 5. Finally, in Appendices 2 and 3, information on the Greek education system and the history of Modern Greece has been included as an aid to readers who are not familiar with it.

³⁷ For example, the same extract could be both about textual meaning and about authors.

The reader of the following chapters should bear in mind that in considering the two paradigms, the Greek and the English, I focus on two sets of texts from each. Within each paradigm I first study the discourse of official documents of the 1990s, then I consider the discourse of literature teachers as this can be read in the interviews I conducted, and finally I make a comparison between the two. The comparison between the two sets of texts can be found at the end of chapter 3 for the English system and of chapter 5 for the Greek system. The reason for choosing to look at the conceptualisation of literature teaching in two different sets of texts is that the discourse of practising teachers is not the same as that of official policies. In both countries, it has been common for government bodies to use teachers as scapegoats for all the inadequacies of the education system, forcing teachers to adopt a confrontational attitude towards official discourse. There is often tension in the relation between policy bodies and the teachers' community as they do not necessarily approach the whole affair of teaching from the same perspective. As a result, official policies are not transferred to classrooms in a straightforward way as teachers interpret them and put them into practice. Bearing this in mind, I wanted to explore the relationship between teachers' discourse about literature teaching and that of official documents and how each of them is positioned towards the other. So, I will consider how literature is constructed as an area of the curriculum in each set of texts while also trying to identify how official policies feature in teachers' discourse and vice versa. Notwithstanding the possible differences that might emerge from the comparison of the official documents and the interviews in each setting, I think that it is possible to proceed to a further comparison of the teaching of literature in the Greek and the English education system. Despite any internal discord there might be, in each paradigm there is agreement on the issues to be debated and all different discursive positions come out of a common history and tradition.

The sample of teachers that were interviewed was a random one and no claim is made for its representativeness. The only thing the interviewees had in common was that they all worked in schools in big capital cities, Athens and London, thus having a multicultural pupil population in their classes. However, the range and detail of these interviews makes them valuable material as they illustrate how teachers grapple with the official policies, inserting themselves into them but also resisting them, as well as how they conceptualise literature teaching in the classroom. As has already been discussed, the interviews were guided and I made use of a list of questions that were open-ended and general. I decided that the option of formal and structured interviewing would not serve the needs of this study as I wanted to listen to the interviewees' thoughts and follow their way of thinking rather than impose my own analytical framework. Similarly, I ruled out the use of closed questions because they would not be easily translated into a different context and would not necessarily have a direct equivalent in the other country. As will be shown in the rest of the study, an approach to a particular practice in one setting might make no sense in the other one.

Sometimes interviewees addressed a question without my prompting in which case I would tick the question on my guiding list and would avoid asking it again. Despite any variation in the format of the interviews the same areas were tackled in all of them. As for the questions that were not dealt with in all interviews, these were left out of the analysis. For example, the question ‘what do you think pupils mean when they say that a book is ‘boring’?’ did not form part of the analysis. It should also be pointed out that many ideas emerge in the transcripts that have not been included in the presentation of their analysis in chapters 3 and 5, and even whole parts of the encounters, such as the interviewees’ personal history as readers, have been excluded. These omissions were unavoidable due to requirements regarding the length of the thesis.

Chapter 2

The English paradigm: History and policies

PART 2.A. – A SUBJECT UNDER CHANGE

The subject of English has gone a long way in the last two centuries as it was brought to the centre of the school curriculum. The effects of the earlier Protestant Reformation on attitudes to literacy¹, the controversy between the official Church and the Non-Conformists dating back to the sixteenth century, the establishment and function of alternative institutions such as the Dissenting Academies², the turbulence of the class system during the Industrial revolution³, the demands for girls' and working-class education⁴, the campaign for secondary and tertiary education for all, British imperialism and the attempt at natives' acculturation in the colonies⁵, the literary studies

¹ The Protestant Reformation contributed greatly to the spread of literacy and the prevalence of a new understanding of textual nature and the reading process. (Viswanathan, 1989; 1992)

² The establishment controlled knowledge and access to it by denying entry to Oxbridge or public and grammar schools to all those who would not subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles. In the educational structures that developed in opposition to the dominant ones, like the Dissenting Academies, new forms emerged as an alternative to classical studies. (Doyle, 1982; Williams, 1992 [1961]) The Dissenting Academies were autonomous institutions at a higher secondary or university level founded by Non-Conformists who were excluded from public education in the late sixteenth century. In them a new definition of the content of general education was put into practice, as the curriculum began to take its modern shape with the addition of maths, geography, modern languages and physical sciences.

³ The motive power of the middle-class who challenged the existing structure and contributed to the creation of alternative institutions devoted to 'modern studies' has also been identified as a factor that promoted the use of English in education.

⁴ Breaking away from the tradition of old institutions, the newly founded educational structures for women and working-class people of the nineteenth century functioned as a nursery for English studies, a subject that was excluded from fossilised Oxbridge. Changed attitudes to marriage and the family gave the opportunity to many women, both middle- and working-class, to acquire some education and enter the teaching profession, a trend that led to the 'feminisation' of schooling. (Doyle, 1982: 23) Once they engaged in teaching, women would seek to broaden their horizons, thirsty to gain access to more fields of 'knowledge'. John Dixon (1991) has laid stress on the radical educators, women and working-class men who went against the Oxbridge monopoly of tertiary education and organised the University Extension movement in industrial cities of the late nineteenth century, where courses with different discursive practices from the typical academic ones would be set up by local committees, aiming at breaking down the intellectual caste and extending university education to everyone who was interested irrespective of their sex, age, or creed.

⁵ In British colonies English would be employed in order to subjugate the native population to hegemonic cultural representations, as it was thought that cultural assimilation would be more effective than direct force as a means of maintaining social control. (Morgan, 1990; Viswanathan, 1989; 1992) By being educated in English language and literature, people in the colonies would also be acculturated to the discourse of 'Englishness' and its socio-cultural images. 'English' was invented as a subject and an ideology by state bodies and other forces in order to establish Identity against alien Otherness and the cosmopolitan centre against the marginal natives. (Morgan, 1990) British colonialists experimented by having English literature perform "the functions of those social institutions (such as the church) that, in England, served as the chief disseminators of value, tradition, and authority." (Viswanathan, 1989: 7) Even before the nineteenth century, there was a similar hegemonic function of English in Scottish universities of the eighteenth century, where a subject called 'English Rhetoric' or 'Belles Lettres' developed that was similar to what was later to be 'English'. As an outcome of the union with England, "educational practices were evolved which were intended to facilitate forms of cultural union." (Doyle, 1982: 21)

that were promoted through periodical journalism and annual conferences, the establishment of English studies first at University Extension courses and then at the old Universities; all these brought English to the fore of education in the second half of the 19th century to challenge the prestigious role of classics. So English teaching “developed within the range of provision which was adapting, or emerging, to cater for the education of the middle and working classes, and to provide avenues for the education of women, rather than in the commanding centres of Victorian education.” (Burgess, 1996: 59) English as a subject came into existence in a number of sites other than the traditional public or grammar schools, being conditioned by different agencies and serving different needs.

It is not easy either to decide on the driving force behind its institutionalisation or the purposes it was intended to serve. Was it a subject in the guise of a humanistic programme of enlightenment that was in fact employed for more effective social control of the emergent classes and groups? Or, was it the foundation of liberal education to which everyone had a right? Was education the central mechanism that would serve in the reproduction of a national culture that was “seen in terms of an organically unified whole national way of life”? (Doyle, 1982: 23) Was English employed as a means of constructing a national identity, with the further aim of imposing cultural uniformity and reproducing the status quo, while suppressing polyphony? Tony Burgess talks about literary and language studies developing a new sense of history; “such a sense of history could be turned easily towards the instinct for class survival among England’s elite, and especially, in time of war, towards patriotism.” (1996: 64) To this end, textbooks were produced and published, which according to Ian Michael “directly or indirectly express an intention to influence the pupils’ moral development, and in most of them the moral development includes, unsurprisingly, an acceptance of the society, and of that position in it, in which the pupils find themselves.” (1987: 243⁶) Or, was it a chance for young people, for women and working people to free themselves from a restrictive scholastic tradition, bringing education closer to them and their reality?

In its first steps the methodology and rationale of classical studies were carried over into English as well, constituting what David Shayer calls ‘the classical fallacy’. (Shayer, 1972) However, after that many things changed. From a curriculum that revolved around classical studies and where English had a very specialised and limited place, as was the case in the Dissenting Academies, or even no place at all, as was the case with the old public schools⁷, there was a

⁶ Michael (1987) writes this as a criticism of the series readers that were used in elementary schools in the nineteenth century.

⁷ Children of the upper classes attended independent and grammar schools where they would follow a classical curriculum, being educated in the ‘best’ and ‘higher’ tenets of human civilisation. For example, in support of classical learning John Houghton wrote in his *Introduction to English Grammar*, published in 1766, that it is “intimately connected with everything that is truly valuable in human life.” (quoted in Michael, 1987: 166)

gradual transition to a curriculum where English holds the stage. From a time when a lesson in English included reading aloud, parsing, reciting, elocution, spelling, rhetoric, or writing by imitation of a model, lessons now focus on personal readings and expressing one's reading through various mediums, while creative writing has become a commonplace activity. From a time when pupils were asked to learn by heart lists of names and dates of a national canon, a point was reached where such authorities are put in question and pupils are invited to make a 'personal' response to the texts under study. From a time when the study of language together with that of literary and other texts were part of the same subject serving the same ends⁸, a stage was reached when they were split into separate elements, and then lately moved towards integration once again. All these took place in a shifting terrain, into which more and more people entered, as educational provision expanded from a minority to the entire population.⁹ English as a subject has a long history and has changed out of recognition, without this acknowledgement meaning that its course through the years has been one of 'progress' from very dubious practices to marvellous ones, or else "a graph-like upward curve of increasing enlightenment." (Shayer, 1972) Despite the changes, there are segments that persist through the years or others that reappear in the same or a different form after having gone out of favour for a while, as is the case with grammar.

In the nineteenth century Matthew Arnold (1948; 1969) advocated the teaching of English culture and the beneficial power of literature as a way of establishing social harmony and forging a shared national identity. It was in that century that English gained in status as Chairs of English were established in Universities, examinations organised and classics and histories of English published. (Burgess, 1996) Later, in the 1910s and the 1920s, in the work of the English Association¹⁰ and the Newbolt Report, English gradually moves to the forefront of popular

⁸ Initially, the term 'English subjects' functioned as a catch-all, including elements that later became part of English literature, Modern History, Philology, English language, or even Geography, Economics, and Social Studies. (Doyle, 1982: 26) The textbooks used in those times could serve as an example of this treatment. Anthologies and readers in series compiled and used in the 19th century often included literary texts alongside factual and vocational extracts, such as scientific and technological texts, as well as doctrinal ones, such as prayers. (Michael, 1987: 241) Even when the subject was first introduced in Universities, literature was grouped together with language.

⁹ Education in England has often been charged with being organised along class lines, especially before the 19th century and the start of State intervention in the establishment and running of schools. However, in the late 18th century and beginning of 19th century, the Industrial revolution and the resulting changes in the socio-economic structure of the country made the demand for national education more pressing, giving rise to the great debate on education that went on for the greater part of the nineteenth century. It was not a discussion about whether the aristocracy should be formally educated, as there already was a network of private institutions that served their needs. It was rather a debate about whether primary education should be afforded to all children of the lower classes. Gradually, the system of formal education expanded to include all segments of society. However, despite the attempts made at creating a national education system, such as the 1870 *Elementary Education Act* or the 1944 *Education Act*, regulating the provision of education for all at primary and secondary level respectively, the English education system with its long tradition of selection and disparity of provision was strongly accused of class bias until the 1960s and 1970s movement for comprehensive education. And even after this, the claim to equal provision and equal opportunities for all is still being questioned.

¹⁰ From its establishment in 1906 and until 1930, the English Association had considerable influence in the shaping of English as a principal subject in both elementary and secondary schools. It asked for the

education, being seen as the keystone upon which the whole arch of national education should rest. (Board of Education, 1921) In those years, a literary version is gradually elaborated alongside the classical version, giving more emphasis to the literary qualities of the texts studied and to pupils' creative writings. In the 1930s and after, it is in the work of F.R. Leavis and the other critics of the Cambridge School that the literary version of English finds fervent support.¹¹ In the spirit of Arnold, the Newbolt Report and Leavis, English literature came to be the centrepiece of the subject called English, while the study of texts other than literary ones was considered irrelevant.¹² Once the rudiments of reading and writing were mastered in the first years of schooling, pupils were expected to move on to the study of texts from the literary 'canon', in which they would find the truths about human nature and life as well as the model of 'correct' expression. In literary texts the best and most creative minds have made a distillation of experiences, thoughts and feelings, making its study "of primary importance." (Leavis, 1952: 184) So literature is "the most direct and lasting communication of experience by man to men" (Board of Education, 1921: 9, §5), and books "the instruments through which we hear the voices of those who have known life better than ourselves." (ibid., p.17, §11)¹³ Literature is thought to lead beyond the world of fiction to a clear vision of the essential natural order, helping us break free from the destructive forces of mass society and taking us back to the traditional 'organic' society. This outlook takes for granted the existence of a hierarchy of discourses, whereby some are seen as being close to eternal truth and transcendental human essence, while others are voices of ignorance and deceit. Such a view has been criticised because it not only creates a hierarchy of discourses in literature, but it also aims at controlling and administering experience at large, giving rise to "relations of inequality by the endless production of discriminations between subjectivities." (Belsey, 1982: 129)

integration of all separate elements of English into one subject and for literature to become the leading component of the new discipline. In general, they went against those in universities and public and grammar schools who followed the tradition and supported the grammarian and philological versions of the subject. However, as Ball argues, the Association was not close to ordinary teachers of English, being elitist both politically and intellectually. Its work did not alter the classroom practices current in schools that remained biased towards the teaching methods of classics for another forty years. There was a gap between the rhetoric of the English Association and of the documents published by the Board of Education and the practice of teachers in schools, "between 'intended' and 'transacted' curriculum." (Ball, 1983: 83)

¹¹ Doyle argues that from the 19th and the early 20th century to the time after the 1920s, there was a shift from "a sense of 'English' as an integrated set of manifestations of the national character" to English "as a casebook of literary value." (Doyle, 1982) This shift could be seen as an outcome of the increasing specialisation and professionalisation characteristic of education in the 20th century.

¹² After the 1920s English "emerged as an autonomous academic domain almost exclusively concerned with the study of its own texts", which were vested with the authority of an objective-looking notion of 'literary value'. (Doyle, 1982: 28)

¹³ The elitist approach permeates the entire Newbolt Report and phrases like the following are very common: "Poets, philosophers, and historians have the power of revealing new values, relations of thought, feeling and act, by which the dull and superficial sight of the multitude is illuminated and helped to penetrate in the direction of reality." (Board of Education, 1921: 17, §11) A similar attitude can also be found in Leavis' works, where works of literature are presented as "an intimate study of the complexities, potentialities and essential conditions of human nature." (Leavis, 1952: 184)

In the nineteenth and the early twentieth century the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ texts was common but it came to be the main axis of F.R. Leavis’ criticism, which has been particularly influential within the context of British literary studies and education.¹⁴ A literary ‘canon’ was constructed of ‘great’ authors “distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity” (Leavis, 1948: 17), whose value was seen as permanent irrespective of the context of reading. Leavis might have avoided any explicit discussion of the criteria applied for his critical ‘discriminations’, but still he created a literary topography that has permeated literary culture and the national education system, producing a consensus as regards the notion of greatness in literature and the characteristics of the texts recognised as worth reading. (Belsey, 1982) As for a reader/critic, according to Leavis, she should not simply ‘think about’ a literary text but should ‘feel into’ or ‘become’ it, realising sensitively and completely the experience given in the text.¹⁵ She should value and judge it from the inside instead of using a ‘norm’ to evaluate it from the outside. A reader/critic’s aim should be to enter into possession of a text, to attain a complete, concrete, full response, to make this response fully conscious, and finally, to develop this response into commentary. The experiences put forward by a text are ‘placed’ alongside other similar experiences, all of them forming a whole without, though, forming a theoretical system or a system determined by abstract considerations. By experiencing what is offered by a text a reader/critic matures, achieving a growing stability and coherence of response. Through Leavis’ influence the philological grammarian version of English, which gave priority to authoritative readings and ‘correctness’ of expression, gave way to a literary version and his principles of literary value, discrimination, experience, authority etc. were transferred to classrooms by students or followers. Notwithstanding his contribution, it should be pointed out that in his framework a reader’s role remains as vague and problematic as the criteria used for the construction of the literary canon.¹⁶ So it is not obvious what reader/critics do when they are in ‘complete possession’ of a text and give a ‘full-bodied’ response to it, or how they can achieve this. (Leavis, 1952: 212-214) Similarly, when he writes that reader/critics should aim to “make fully conscious and articulate the immediate sense of value that ‘places’ the poem” (ibid., pp.213-214), it is not clear who has the authority to decide whether a reader has succeeded in this task or not. Is it the reader herself, the author, or, the critic?

¹⁴ Terry Eagleton (1983) argues that Leavis’ tradition has been so powerful and influential that students of English nowadays are ‘Leavisites’, whether they know it or not. “There is no more need to be a card-carrying Leavisite today than there is to be a card-carrying Copernican: that current has entered the bloodstream of English studies in England as Copernicus reshaped our astronomical beliefs, has become a form of spontaneous critical wisdom as deep-seated as our conviction that the earth moves round the sun.” (ibid., p.31) And even more recently, it has been pointed out that Leavisite values still remain influential in schools. (Hardman & Williamson, 1997)

¹⁵ Here, I make use of the term ‘reader/critic’ because Leavis has written that “the ideal critic is the ideal reader”, identifying the two. (1952: 212)

¹⁶ Leavis’ discussion of literature and its reading is so vague that his criticism has been described as ‘antitheoretical.’ (Jefferson and Robey, 1982: 11)

This approach to literary education is based on an idealistic view of culture that is far removed from any sort of culture as a lived expression of people. In his book *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold (1948 [1869]) defined culture as the development of “all sides of our humanity” and of “all parts of our society” (ibid., p.11), through which one can become “a perfect and total man” (ibid., p.30), leaving behind the raw person one used to be.¹⁷ Starting from a few enlightened men, “the true apostles of equality” (ibid., p.70), culture would spread to the whole of society, doing away with classes and all ensuing problems. The same idea is reproduced in *The Newbolt Report* where national culture is seen as a means ‘to obliterate, or even to soften, the lines of separation between the young of different classes’, ‘the way to bridge the social chasms which divide us.’ (Board of Education, 1921: 6, §2) Educating all strata to a national culture would result in a unified nation with common values and points of reference taking the place of a fragmented class-divided society. However, it is not clear in what way this potent culture, which first Arnold and then the authors of the Newbolt Report called upon, would bring into existence such an egalitarian society. Not only is there no consideration of the factors that determine the class system but also its existence is not really challenged. The concept of culture they use has no social, political or economic dimension, being, instead, purely spiritual and metaphysical. Identifying culture with the essence of man, Arnold located its function at an inward individual context rather than at an interpersonal social one, arguing that culture places “human perfection in an internal position, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality.” (1948: 47) In his view, a few charismatic, cultivated and learned, individuals were enough to establish “the best knowledge and thought of the time” (ibid., p.70), which the rest of society had only to endorse in order to discard their class spirit and reach personal and social perfection. Thus, with English culture at its centre, liberal education ‘would form a new element of national unity, linking together the mental life of all classes by experiences which have hitherto been the privilege of a limited section’ (Newbolt Report, 1921: 15, §10) This cultural spirit should be branded as ‘national’, giving voice to the whole nation and filling them with a sense of belonging, with respect and ‘a genuine feeling of pride and affection.’ (ibid., p.22, §15) National pride would overshadow social critique and shared texts would silence dissonance.

Alongside this tradition of liberal humanism, cultural heritage and formalistic teaching, the movement of progressive education grew in reaction to the dominant disregard for originality and creativity as well as against the view that children’s thought is chaotic, primitive, untrained and incoherent. Instead, educators like Greening, Lamborn, Edmund Holmes, Percy Nunn, W.S. Tomkinson and Caldwell Cook argued for a freer and more spontaneous approach in teaching that

¹⁷ Arnold’s view of culture reminds one of the Calvinist distinction between the natural self, which has been lulled in total depravity and sinful existence after the Fall, and the ideal, cultivated self, where the connection between knowledge, feeling and action has been renewed. Viswanathan points out that such a split between ideal and actual selves as well as between material and cultural practices leads to a split

would start from the child. In his book *The Play Way*, which was written as early as 1917, Caldwell Cook argues that the school should not primarily concern itself with the transmission of knowledge but with the development of character and the provision of the motivation to learn. The idea is that children profit from their own experience rather than from that of others, and thus a teacher's role is to encourage and support them in their course to maturation and progress, instead of passing on fixed, consolidated knowledge. In all these she should find ways to excite their interest, because "without interest there is no learning." (ibid., p.3) As for the course that children will follow when left unobstructed in their development, Cook argues that it is determined by nature, without, of course, being immune to the function of reason and free will. (ibid., p.5)¹⁸ In accordance with his pedagogical principles, Cook argues that pupils should not simply read and appreciate poetry, but they should also write poetry. It is not enough that pupils read poetry "embalmed in printed books", but they "must themselves come forth as poets" (ibid., p.16), because "only through the practice of anything can come a full acknowledgement of its worth." (ibid., p.20)¹⁹ Cook even discusses reading as being synonymous with writing when he admits that "we know that in appreciating a poem one is a poet oneself" (ibid., p.17), an idea that formed a central idea of Roland Barthes' work a few decades later. At least, this is how poetry is expected to function if its reading earns the "high title of Play", whereby "appreciation must be not only felt, but expressed." (ibid., p.17) In contrast to the didactic and moralistic approach to literature that prevailed in his time, Cook also suggested that pupils should first read literature "for the sake of sheer enjoyment in the story, passing over all difficulties, and completely ignoring all that the critics have said." (ibid., p.32) A teacher's view of a text should be left aside for a while so that it does not influence pupils' responses with its status of authority. These ideas – that pupils should respond to poetry by actively and imaginatively writing poems of their own and that they should be left to discover the pleasant side of reading – were later advanced by Marjorie Hourd and other supporters of the creative movement in English.²⁰ By emphasising the need for children to experience life, actively doing things and thinking for themselves, Cook goes against the Arnoldian ideal that sought to inculcate children with an exemplary culture whose origin and making was left unaccountable. At the same time, though, he puts inclination and an individual's

between man in history and man as producer of the knowledge of man in history. "The blurring of the man and his works effectively removes him from history", making him unaccountable for his acts. (1989: 20)

¹⁸ For Cook, education is to serve nature and its bidding for every individual. "There is many a *must* in educational practice, but the most urgent of them all is the *must* which nature has implanted in the character of the boy." (1917: 37) It could be said that his belief in essentialism and predestination is extreme, especially when he makes assertions like "a player, like a poet, must be born before he can be made" (ibid., p.52), or that "the springs of human action lie not in the reasoned intention of the individual, but in the intuition of man's mind, in the gathered energy of inherited tendency and communicated desire." (ibid., p.53)

¹⁹ While at the Perse School, Cook put his theory into practice, encouraging his pupils to write poetry, prose and drama, which he proceeded to publish in six books called the *Perse Playbooks*. The first *Perse Playbook* was published in 1912 and the other five had appeared by 1917. They contained plays, stories, sketches and poems written by his pupils at the Perse School.

²⁰ However, as Shayer wrote in the early 1970s, "of Cook it is no exaggeration to say that in some matters English teaching has only caught up with him in the last fifteen years." (1972: 49)

journey to natural perfection in the place of this exemplary culture, notions that are equally unquestionable.

In the late 1940s, after the recognition of the achievements of elementary schools, the 1944 *Education Act* that legislated the provision of secondary education for all and the calls from people like Sir Fred Clarke for a ‘popular’ culture that would be the means for social cohesion as opposed to the Arnoldian elitist culture, a ‘child-centred’, ‘creative’ movement was developed in English teaching. Thus, there was a gradual turn to a more personal approach of student response, placing imaginative writing at the centre of the educational process. Marjorie Hourd’s *The Education of the Poetic Spirit* has been described as the ‘seminal work’ in this movement. (Shayer, 1972: 136) Instead of recognising authoritative ‘knowledge’ or a teacher’s definitive views on literature as the appropriate starting point of educational practice, Hourd endorsed Dewey’s argument that knowledge should be ‘psychologised’, or else, that teachers need to “discover how [their] subject could become part of child experience” (Hourd, 1949: 12), finding ways to excite their interest. Children should be expected to meet school texts at their own level, respond to them and act from them, by using mime, dramatisation and creative writing in their own dialects. As a forerunner of reader-response criticism that was to come to the fore in literary criticism in the 1970s, Hourd put the child at the centre, acknowledging her potential to understand the deeper meanings of literature, even if this is to be done only unconsciously for the time being.

It is more profitable at this stage for the child to become the playwright than the critic – the active participant in a creative process than the passive recipient of meanings interpreted directly by the teacher. (ibid., p.62)

All children, irrespective of their age, sex or intellectual background, are thought to be capable of such creative readings/writings since experience is seen as far more important than the result.²¹ She does not consider it necessary that young readers moralise a literary text, so long as they let themselves feel it, because our feelings and disposition towards a text are as important as our discernment. (ibid., p.84) Responses to literature should be understood in their wholeness, keeping a balance between judgment and strong feeling, instead of being fragmented under artificial headings. (ibid., p.85) Hourd even reconsiders the aim of a literature lesson, writing that:

though it may be ultimately to inculcate a standard of literary taste, [the aim] is, to begin with, to provide a means towards a fuller development of personality – a means, again of growth. (ibid., p.13)²²

Hourd’s writing resonates with the Arnoldian idea of growth towards perfection, that is, with the liberal humanist ideal of developing human virtue to its fullest extent, on the assumption that knowledge and learning contribute to such an accomplishment. However, in contrast to Arnold and other traditional educators, who see the knowledge or culture to be imparted as the starting

²¹ She argues that “the spontaneous feeling of the child is more important than perfected technique.” (1949: 23-24; see also p.43)

²² Whether this aim has been fulfilled or not might be shown later “in the beauty of a piece of embroidery, or less specifically even in a richer response to life.” (ibid., p.13)

point of the educational process, Hourd believes in children's imaginative powers as the means to achieving growth.

Hourd maintains that children can be original and creative when left to express themselves in a spontaneous way.²³ Through such free expression of their inner self they come to terms with and resolve the dilemmas that torment them in the three stages of development to maturity²⁴, getting help to balance their personality in some sort of therapy through drama and play. Hourd treats young children as poets in embryo and their writings as expressions in embryonic perfection, refusing to assess them and their responses to literature by adult standards. In place of a judgmental attitude, she argues that one should look at children's writings for developmental norms as well as for standards that could apply to grown-up art.²⁵ Many years later, James Britton also made use of the idea of 'a spectrum of poetic discourse' where pupils' writings are placed. (Lightfoot & Martin, 1988) Whether a child will turn out to be a poet or a painter or neither is a matter of her innate nature, and "our job as teachers is to leave the way open." (Hourd, 1949: 83) Children are thought to be predestined to a certain means of expression, and so, a teacher is asked to let them find it on their own, rather than become a "meddling interloper." (ibid., p.82) Literary texts could be useful in such an undertaking because they give expression to our 'collective unconscious', or to feelings and conflicts that are universal and timeless. With their teachers' help, children can tap into this, reaching the instinctive forces of their own personalities. It is not that children should bend to the standards of a literature syllabus but that the syllabus needs to bend for it to serve children's needs – a central tenet of progressive education. (ibid., p.14) In order to make such a selection of texts, a teacher needs to know what it is like to be a child, putting herself in the position of a student and constantly being in touch with someone greater than herself.²⁶ (ibid., p.122; see also p.124) However, despite her respect for children's writings and her willingness to foster it, Hourd does not really question the established literary canon and the values underpinning it, as can be seen when she refers to pupils' home reading as 'trash' (ibid., pp.14 & 17) or when she urges the use of authors of the 'highest' standards in school. (ibid., p.17) Moreover, like many others before her, Hourd considers literary texts to have some kind of inherent power: "there is in literature itself, if selection is well made, a quality which feeds and nourishes [the child]." (ibid., p.128) Depending on a teacher's mediation and integrity,

²³ In this she was inspired by Romanticism, progressive educators, such as Dewey, and child psychologists, like Susan Isaacs and Piaget.

²⁴ In the first stage, Hourd saw children puzzling over the question 'Who am I?'; in the second stage, they were concerned about their relation with other people; and finally, in the third stage, they were faced with the question 'What kind of a person am I?'

²⁵ As she explains: "For although, as we have seen, her dramatic expression is on the whole developmental and egoistical, yet lying in embryonic fashion within the folds of her child nature is the full woman and the artist she has it in her to be." (ibid., p.60; see also p.90)

²⁶ Hourd does not make it clear what she means when she says that a teacher needs to be in touch with someone greater than herself and whether that greatness should be measured in terms of maturity, worth, understanding or something else.

authors and their texts have the power to reach “the deepest levels of understanding in the child” and to stir their “own responses.” (ibid., p.128)

Hourd was not the only one to draw attention to the importance of teachers’ training in psychology and the treatment of children’s development in reading as a psychological process. D.W. Harding (1967), a psychologist, also identified three stages that children go through in order to achieve maturity as readers. In the first stage, readers feel empathy and identify with the fictional characters, putting themselves in their position. Events in readers’ lives gain a changed significance as a result of their analogy with the events presented in a literary text, which means that fiction results in a re-interpretation of events in our own lives. When they get to the second stage, readers ponder on the psychological and social probabilities and improbabilities employed by authors and evaluate fictional characters and events, on the basis of the relation between reality and fiction. A reader’s response at this stage depends on the complexity of her reading. Readers who are lower in this scale feel *with* the characters, whereas those who are higher also react *to* them, evaluating them, their behaviour and feelings. Thus, readers develop from being fiction-centred to discerning a developing pattern of characters in interaction with one another and with events. The third and final stage refers to a reader’s distanced evaluation and her acceptance or rejection of an author’s values. Harding points out that the three stages of practised response to fiction are not necessarily successive and each of them might be found in a simple or in a developed and subtle form. Depending on their position on the scale of development, readers perceive the relation between reality and fiction differently. At one end, there is “the child who is not quite secure in distinguishing between fiction and true narrative” (ibid., p.13) and treats fiction as a substitute for real events. At the other end, there is the ‘critic’ who sees fiction as a form of communication with the author and can keep up her defences. Harding’s theory of reading inspired some teachers to interview their own students to see whether they fitted this pattern of development as readers of literature. (e.g. Blunt, 1977; Thomson, 1979). Their findings seem to support the specific theory, showing that each student reaches a different stage of the developmental process and it is only a gifted, exceptional minority that achieves the ‘mature’ reading response. What is striking about these studies is that they start off with a ready-made model, and then try to fit pupils into the stages and the rigid categories of the particular model, instead of ‘listening’ to what they have to say.²⁷ Even though these studies centre around young

²⁷ For example, in an effort to have a representative sample, Blunt (1977) interviewed sixteen fifteen-year-old pupils, some from the ‘top’ ability group and some from the ‘bottom’ ability group, from two schools, a grammar school in a suburban area and a secondary modern in an industrial neighbourhood. However, when it came to the discussion of her findings she made use of only nine of the interviews, explaining that only these were “explicit and definite about what the process of reading held for them”, whereas for the other seven “the questions were baffling.” (ibid., p.36) It seems that her preconceptions were far too strong to let her find a way of communicating with them. Interestingly enough, from the nine interviewees that she finally used in her study only one pupil had “fulfilled all the requirements of the full response.” (ibid., p.44) The rest had to stay out as “the field narrows.” (ibid., p.41) In practice, it seems a very elitist and discriminatory model.

readers' development as readers, they do not refute the idea of discrimination that was so much favoured by Leavisite criticism.²⁸ Moreover, they treat the reading process and young people's learning of it in the same way as all psychological processes, subjecting it to a set of universal natural 'laws', seen out of context.

An idea developed by Harding that has been used by others, such as James Britton, is that of a reader in the role of a spectator. Harding considered that, ideally, readers of a novel behave like a ghost watching people's lives, being committed to their concerns, and at the same time, detached and critical of them. The idea of the spectator was introduced to describe a reader who keeps on reading even when she is deeply moved and grieved. Whether a reader will prove to be a 'helpless' or a 'willing' spectator depends on her as well as on how successful the literary text is. In general, Harding argues that even when there is continuity between a reader's experiences and those presented in a text and she takes sides evaluating and appraising, a reader still preserves her detachment and spectatorship.

With the development of educational structures at secondary level for all children of all backgrounds and abilities after the mid 1940s, some of the views of progressive education gained in strength. A range of developments in the 1960s is indicative of a shift in the subject: the formation of the National Association for the Teaching of English (henceforth NATE) in 1963, arguing for the end of the false distinction between language and literature; the establishment of the Schools Council in 1964, where teachers had a chief role in working on curricular and assessment matters²⁹; the first International Federation for the Teaching of English (IFTE) conference at Dartmouth in 1966 where teachers from various countries exchanged their views about the teaching of English, developing a common discourse; the Examination Boards' attempt to adapt to the changing patterns of English teaching, and so on. From the late 1960s to the 1980s, there has been a shift in the conceptualisation of literature in schools as well as of readers' role. Through publications like those of the English and Media Centre, through seminars and organisations like NATE or LATE (i.e. London Association for the Teaching of English), English teachers have developed a shared understanding of reading, whose main principles come out of the writings on literature teaching. Criticising the 'cultural heritage' model, where students were treated as passive receivers of a master's voice and where culture was seen as a given, English teaching came to embrace the 'personal growth' model, with its emphasis on experience and

²⁸ For example, Blunt (1977) considers that in the final stage readers should be able "to discriminate and recognise weaknesses in certain works of fiction" (p.46) and books should be seen as conventions "to be rejected or applauded by the reader." (p.42)

²⁹ Rather than assuming a regulatory role, the Schools Council worked in support of teachers, informing and facilitating their work, disseminating material, organising in-service courses and research projects etc. The main principles of the Council's work sprang "from the desire to help the teachers, above all to help the teachers help themselves." (Schools Council, 1979: 25)

creativity and its view of learning as interactive. (Dixon, 1967)³⁰ There seems to have been a gradual shift from a product oriented and teacher-controlled classroom to a process oriented and student-centred learning environment. It was the time, especially in the 1980s, when English as a subject became more complex and a range of theoretical and ideological positions gained currency, many of them conflicting. English teachers were inspired in their practice by a whole plethora of approaches, like feminism, Marxism, linguistics, structuralism, semiotics, sociology and post-structuralism.

Moving away from the centrality of the ‘text’ and the assumption that its meaning is a single one that has to be found to the exclusion of all other non-authoritative ones, there has been a shift towards the acceptance of a plurality of meanings. Attention is no more focused on authors and their intended meanings to be found *in* a text and readers’ decisive role is acknowledged. The idea of a reader as a passive recipient who has to be taught how to read a text has given way to the idea of a reader as an active creator of valid meanings and of reading as the ‘experiential’ meeting between an individual and a text. This idea, initially elaborated in progressive educators’ writings, gradually gained ground with reader-response approaches and permeated teaching practice until it became mainstream in the late 1980s and 1990s.³¹ The writings of theorists like Iser (1974; 1978), Rosenblatt (1970; 1978) or Barthes³² have influenced literature teaching greatly, making English teachers review their previous understandings and practices. Reading is no longer seen as the ‘discovery’ of meanings to be found in a text, but is described as a process akin to ‘writing’, whereby readers create a text anew through their experience of it. So a poem “should not be thought as an object, an entity, but rather as an active process lived through during the relationship between a reader and a text.” (Rosenblatt, 1978: 20-21)³³ In general, English teachers have become more attentive to their students’ responses, trying to figure out how these might be determined by what they bring to their reading or how pupils develop as readers. One often comes across articles on small-scale research projects, organised and conducted by teachers who try to gain a better understanding of their pupils and their readings.³⁴

³⁰ Bogdan (1990) has used two different terms to describe these two approaches. On the one hand, she talks about the *pedagogy of detachment*, according to which enculturation and personal transformation can be achieved through the reading of texts of the ‘great literary heritage’, and on the other hand, she describes the *pedagogy of engagement* that focuses on personal growth being achieved through readers’ engagement with a text and free response to it.

³¹ There are numerous writings in which English teachers have this renewed understanding of a reader’s role as their starting point and explore its implications for the teaching of literature. E.g. Grugeon & Walden (1978); Benton & Fox (1985); Butler (1987a; 1987b); Corcoran & Evans (1987); Evans (1987); Hackman (1987); Moss (1989) etc.

³² Roland Barthes is a rather slippery case when it comes to systematising theoretical trends, since he could be described as a structuralist, a post-structuralist and partly as a reader-response theorist. Irrespective of the label one might choose for him, some writings of his, like *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) or *The Death of the Author* (1977), have had an effect on thinking about readers and reading in Britain.

³³ Similarly, Fish asserts that a text “is no longer an object, a thing-in-itself, but an *event*, something that *happens* to, and with the participation of, the reader.” (1980: 72; italics in the original)

³⁴ See, for example, Culp, 1977; Grugeon & Walden, 1978; Plant, 1988; McKinlay, 1990; Lathey, 1992; Conniff, 1993; Maybin & Moss, 1993; Wing, 1997; Marriott, 1998 etc.

Literature has always been invested with great hopes for its educative influence upon readers. In contrast to the previously established view that saw enculturation and progress as the outcome of a ‘great’ text’s humanising influence upon readers, in the ‘personal growth’ model, it is ‘whole-person’ involvement in reading that leads to social and personal development.³⁵ And “responsive reading demands a commitment of the whole person.” (Butler, 1987a: 40) This means that a reader needs to respond to a text both at a cognitive and at an affective level, and once this is achieved, then she gradually changes into a different person. Deep involvement means that a reader empathises and identifies with characters, recognising her own experiences in those presented in a text. In a way, literary texts are seen as a means for communicating and sharing human experience, a means for creating common *topoi*. Moreover, through literature reading a reader’s received stereotypes or conventional judgements are challenged and her ‘frontiers of experience’ are extended. (Evans, 1987: 41) It is assumed that, under a teacher’s guidance, texts can act as “a catalyst for the raising of awareness”, making a student consider issues that have hitherto been tacit or submerged and changing her view of the world and of herself in a way that is more equitable. (Wing, 1997) However, this idea of literature reading having a character-formative effect upon readers is not so new, since it resonates with the Arnoldian ideal of literature as a humanising and cultivating agency.

From a more practical point of view, teachers have experimented with alternative texts and techniques in their effort to excite students’ interest and to motivate them to be actively involved in reading. They want their students to acquire the habit of reading, to find pleasure in reading and to appropriate the reading process. Pleasure and interest feature very high in teachers’ agenda, even though they know that these might not sit well with a system that is based on quantifiable skills.³⁶ They sense that students’ encounter with a text is smoother and more effective once they find enjoyment in it, which means that reading should be seen “as an end-in-itself, just as much as a means-to-an-end.” (Plant, 1988: 116)³⁷ There are numerous writings with suggestions on how to encourage reading, such as allocating time for silent reading, reading aloud, dramatisation, discussing, anticipating and retrospecting, setting personal questions, responding in graphs, diagrams or visual representations and so on.³⁸ With reading being treated as the dynamic interaction between readers and texts, tasks in a literature class invite students to *do* things, while

³⁵ Marriott (1998) argues that there are only intuitive and anecdotal observations on the power of texts and not much evidence. So he suggests the conduct of a study that will establish how exactly literature does influence readers.

³⁶ Butler argues that even though reader-response theorisation of reading can be found in the aims of examination boards, examinations still put too much emphasis on knowledge and consider meaning to be objective and fixed, something to be discovered and evaluated. Thus, they undermine pupils’ pleasure in reading as well as their affective response to it. (Butler, 1987a; 1987b)

³⁷ References to children finding pleasure in reading are very common in writings about literature teaching. See, for example, Jackson, 1983; Inglis, 1987; Lindberg, 1988; McKinlay, 1990. Moreover, it is often shown that pupils respond better to texts of their own choosing. E.g. Culp, 1977; Conniff, 1993.

analysis is seen as experiential in terms of *doings* and *happenings*.³⁹ Rather than teachers analysing the rules, students are encouraged to learn how to read by reading. In addition, the forms available to students to articulate their readings in writing are more varied, as there is space given to more ‘personal’ forms of writing such as reading journals, literature workbooks etc.⁴⁰ These forms of writing are considered more ‘authentic’ than the traditional discursive essay, giving students the opportunity to explore their feelings and thoughts and to gain renewed insights into their experiences. So creative writing has been admitted into literature classes and students experiment with a range of genres. Such writing might have been undermined at times, but students like modelling their writing on these, either because it makes writing easier for them or because they realise that writing takes place in culture and in history. Rather than castigating such usage, it has been suggested that teachers should show young writers “how to use conventions to find their own voice.” (Jenkins, 1986: 158) The aim behind all these tasks is to make children independent and active readers, but also to encourage them to reflect on the reading process itself and what it entails.⁴¹ It could be said that, further than reading, teachers are interested in ‘meta-reading’ and so they want their students to problematise reading itself and to look at themselves as readers.

The above ‘personal growth’ model has been criticised from many sides. For example, Woodhead (1979; 1982) describes it as an unrealistic view that works only for some people, while most children escape into a personal egotistical fantasy. It is not simply that many children do not read at all outside school; more than that, it is virtually impossible for all children to respond to literature teaching. In addition, students’ personal responses cannot be easily evaluated and thus the issues of evaluation and of measuring progress become a real problem.⁴² From a different point of view, it has been suggested that this model might work for middle-class students “who are used to seeing their personal experience as significant”, but it does not necessarily work for working-class children who feel at a loss when there are no specific directions and who need a more explicit teaching of skills. (St. John-Brooks, 1983: 45) And yet from another point of view, the notion of a ‘personal response’ has been described as a chimera, since all responses are “framed by a cultural system which limits and regulates” them. (Scafe, 1989: 21) It implies the existence of an autonomous, unitary and conscious subject that can give voice to an authentic and particular inner self when the circumstances are supportive enough. However, such a rational subject has been questioned in the context of postmodernism, where emphasis is put on “the

³⁸ See, for example, Dean, 1978; Brumfit, 1980; Inglis, 1987; Lindberg, 1988.

³⁹ Lindberg (1988) has described it as the ‘process approach’, emphasising its focus on the act of reading.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Torbe, 1978; Hackman, 1987; Corcoran, 1987; Lindberg, 1988.

⁴¹ See, for example, Torbe, 1978.

⁴² According to Woodhead (1979), the aim of literature teaching should be to help pupils move from the obsessive and claustrophobic demands of personal fantasy to a delight in the independent existence of a work of literature, which will also help them understand why they were affected by the text in the first place. This view of literature alludes to the ‘cultural heritage’ model that attributes a special power to literature.

inscribed subject, the subject constructed by discourses and signifying systems, ‘decentred’ through language, society and the unconscious.” (Usher, 1994: 25; italics in the original)

In the context of these renewed understandings, the construction and use of a national literary ‘canon’ has been strongly criticised as a hegemonic affirmation of a monolithic sense of ‘Englishness’ that discriminated against marginalised groups and cultures while trying to inculcate students with particular attitudes.⁴³ Questioning the use of a corpus compiled on the basis of some vague and dubious ‘good quality’, teachers put forward the examination of how such corpuses are constructed and function. Instead of studying a set of texts considered to be of universal and timeless worth, they have argued that texts and their reading need to be seen in their social and historical context “if the pupils are to be educated rather than indoctrinated.” (Cox, 1986: 74) Rather than focusing on the ‘quality’ of a text to be studied, attention should be on “the quality of the possible interactions between any text and a great variety of readers.” (Evans, 1987: 39) A good example of the criticisms made of the literary canon comes from the feminist teachers’ side. They attacked the school canon not only for the under-representation of women authors in it but also for the patriarchal discourse promoted by it.⁴⁴ Putting the texts used in literature classes under scrutiny, they pointed out that female characters were impressively less than the male ones, their occupations were of lower status and were usually related to the realm of the house, while they assumed a passive attitude, always following male characters, listening to them and facilitating their actions. Thus, female characters formed a silent acquiescent group in literary texts, a representation that made it even easier to confine girls to invisibility in class discourse. Such literary texts were seen as contributing to girls’ education in stereotypical roles of powerlessness, making them internalise the dominant discourse that associates women with passivity and maternal caring while it vests men with power and decisiveness. The representations of gender in class readings were found to be patterned on the same binary oppositions that structure patriarchal discourse in society at large. As a result of these criticisms, it has come to be widely accepted that characters and attitudes presented in texts should be carefully considered in order to avoid biased and discriminatory representations, while there needs to be a deconstructive approach that lays bare and criticises any sexist or racist attitudes presented in the texts under study.

The above critiques have been followed by systematic efforts to offer a broader range of literary texts to students. In place of the arbitrary criterion of ‘quality’ that upholds a dubious literary canon, it has been argued that text selection should be made on the grounds of ‘representativeness’, a criterion that would allow women and other marginalized groups to gain a voice of their own in a literature class. In addition, it is now seen as necessary to include texts that

⁴³ For examples of such critique of the ‘literary canon’ see Cox (1986); Clem (1987); Viswanathan (1989).

excite students' interest, since their active involvement is indispensable for the success of literature reading. As a result of this shift, different standards have been applied and new texts have found their place in the literature curriculum either because they are 'relevant' to students' experiences and interest them⁴⁵, or because they belong to genres that are popular among them, or because they offer different perspectives. Such new admissions would be texts that offer alternative ways of viewing the world⁴⁶, texts from popular genres like romance fiction, boarding school stories or fantasy books⁴⁷, or texts from cultures other than English that open windows into different worlds and offer new perspectives.⁴⁸ There have even been cases where set fields of texts, compiled according to period, author, genre or theme, have taken the place of set texts and restrictive syllabuses.⁴⁹ Once the sacredness of the literary 'canon' was shattered, text selection could never be self-evident or easy again. It seems, though, that the idea of 'representativeness' or of texts opening windows on other worlds and perspectives is based on the assumption that literary texts are reflections or imitations of life, which means that when a reader approaches a text, she also becomes familiar with the culture depicted by this text. However, such a close correspondence between texts and reality leads to fixedness and goes against the previously discussed idea of reading as writing. Criticising this treatment of literature as 'copies of life', Stibbs (1995) argues that instead of a 'documentary' approach there should be an 'aesthetic' one, whereby art is seen as artificial rather than mimetic and texts as artefacts and criticisms of life rather than exemplary documents of life.⁵⁰

The treatment of romance fiction or boarding school stories could serve as an example of the concerns that have been voiced regarding the selection and use of literary texts. Both genres might

⁴⁴ For examples of a feminist critique of the school literary canon see Hunt et al. (1988); NATE (1988), Gilbert (1989).

⁴⁵ Allowing texts which are 'relevant' to pupils and excite their interest means that different standards need to be applied instead of 'adult standards', an idea that was also put forward by Hourd in the 1950s. As Meek et al. put it: "although it is possible to judge books for children by what are called 'adult standards' and regard them as part of literature, the young reader carries a different world in his head, no less complex than an adult's but differently organized. He needs his stories in a different way, his experience of reading must be different. When discussing stories for children, to lose sight of the reader is too dangerous to contemplate." (1977: 11)

⁴⁶ Such 'alternative texts' are those that challenge the status quo as well as children's stereotyped preconceptions. E.g. Wing, 1997.

⁴⁷ For example, for the use of fantasy books, see Owen (1984), Sarland (1988); of romance fiction, see Walkerdine (1984), Moss (1989), Turvey (1992); of boarding school stories, see Frith (1985) etc. In this context, popular genres are treated as cultural products to be understood and analysed and not as harmful texts with a corrupting influence to be moralistic about.

⁴⁸ In many articles, it is assumed that the reading of texts written by people from a different culture helps readers understand these cultures better. (E.g. Hirvela, 1988/89; Tawake, 1991) In support of such openings, NATE publishes annotated lists of 'multicultural literature' in order to help English teachers select texts from other traditions. See, for example, Goody (Ed.), 1992.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Driver, 1976; Brumfit, 1980. At the same time, though, there were others who still worked in the Leavisite paradigm and attacked the use of a thematic approach, supporting instead the detailed study of a few 'good' set texts, which would then be used as the 'touchstones' for the study of other texts. (Gibbs, 1976)

be much favoured by girls, but at the same time, they are seen as worthless and prosaic by official discourse. There is a view that the reading of such sexist and biased texts is harmful and so they should be banished from a literature class⁵¹ or, if included, they should be criticised and alternative, ‘politically correct’ perspectives should be suggested instead. However, there is the argument that, no matter how unreal or reactionary these texts might be, still they give girls the space in which to solve contradictions they are confronted with (Walkerdine, 1984) as well as the opportunity to reassemble contradictory messages of the same nature as the ones they receive in their everyday lives but in a less complex and frustrating way. (Frith, 1985)⁵² Girls do not approach these texts as “passive consumers hopelessly trapped and subdued by an all-powerful popular fiction”, fooling themselves into believing that these stories are real. (Moss, 1989: 78) Instead, they get pleasure from mastering the conventions of the genre and use this knowledge in their reading and writing as well as in negotiating questions about social identity.

Alongside the view of ‘personal growth’ that regards readers as if they operate in a vacuum, isolated and unaffected by their environment, and alludes to a rather vague notion of ‘personal’ response, another approach has developed in English teaching that recognises a reader as someone who enters a community and its discourses at birth, and reading as a localised practice to be learned. This approach could be described as the ‘socio-cultural awareness’ model and is rather close to the ‘personal growth’ model, albeit with more explicit foregrounding of the role of students’ background and of the constructed nature of literature as an area of study in schools.⁵³ In this approach, the myth of an ideologically pure teaching of language and literature is shattered and readings are seen as “consciously and explicitly *produced* and not ‘recognised’” (Belsey, 1982: 134), by people who operate in social contexts with regulatory systems. It is recognised that students have an identity of their own that bears on their reading and this identity is structured upon their experiences of gender, class, ethnicity and so on. As teachers focused their attention on their students as readers after the mid 1960s, the realisation grew stronger that children’s responses to literature are determined by what they bring to school from home.

Children make stories and poems and pictures and the world we live in *mean* something, and they make that meaning through negotiating between what they already know, what they are coming to know and what writers and story-tellers have made for them. (Miller, 1984: 8)

⁵⁰ In the context of such an ‘aesthetic’ approach, Stibbs (1995; 1997) argues that literature teaching should promote the explicit knowledge about literature and the pleasure derived from such awareness. As for knowledge about literature, it should not be treated in a reductive, testable way but as an operation on texts.

⁵¹ See, for example, Altus (1984).

⁵² Similarly, Sarland argues that encouraging pupils to unravel clichés, an integral feature of popular culture texts, “will give us, and them, a unique window both on to their culture, and on to how the text in question draws upon and interacts with it, thus allowing them to construct meaning as readers.” (1988: 46)

⁵³ Bogdan (1990) uses the term ‘pedagogy of critical detachment’ for this approach, so as to distinguish it from the other two, the ‘pedagogy of detachment’ and the ‘pedagogy of engagement’.

There has been a tendency to generalise over these differences between students and their responses and to systematise them in terms of gender, class etc.⁵⁴ Accepting that students' identity determines her reading means that many different voices can be heard in a literature class, since these sites are far from homogeneous.

Children also encounter reading in settings other than school, in experiences that might be substantially different from those of formal teaching and learning. Even before they go to school they have seen adults reading in a whole range of situations and these models influence their understanding of reading, an understanding that is fluid and changing.⁵⁵ Not just reading but narrative itself acquires a significant function in children's lives well before they come into contact with any literary text, and this is because people construct their lives as narratives. "A life as led is inseparable from a life as told – or more bluntly, a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold." (Bruner, 1988: 582)⁵⁶ So autobiography becomes a way of giving shape to our own lives and of organising our experiences, a space where we can come to terms with our dilemmas, an opportunity to negotiate our very identity.⁵⁷ And like any narrative, the story of our lives can be interpreted from many perspectives and can be rewritten many times. Going way beyond the previously dominant approach that expected students to find the knowledge about themselves and the world in valuable texts, this view sees students creating their own meanings in the context of discourses, which circumscribe and facilitate them at the same time.

Besides seeing readers as individuals with a social identity, the very act of reading is also understood as a social practice determined by the setting in which it takes place. So reading a text is not just a matter of analysing its content but also of "drawing attention to the ways in which texts are consumed in different social settings" (Moss, 1991: 52), and teachers need to offer students the analytical tools that will help them do so. Literature is only part of a range of diverse cultural texts that children are faced with every day in their social interactions in various settings and, as for any other text, they should be encouraged to consider how they are produced, circulated and read. Notions such as audience, context, authority, agency, ways of interpreting,

⁵⁴ For example, it is argued that girls find pleasure in literature more than boys do. (Conniff, 1993)

Despite the widespread agreement on the significance of pupils' background and experiences in their response to literature, there are still studies that refute such connection. For example, in a study of pupils of English in the States, Culp (1977) found that socio-economic background and teacher intervention have little to do with the effect of literature on readers.

⁵⁵ There have been a number of studies on children's experiences of reading and how they are context-dependent. E.g. Lathey, 1992.

⁵⁶ As Hardy puts it, narrative "is not to be regarded as an aesthetic invention used by artists to control, manipulate, and order experience, but as a primary act of mind transferred to art from life." (1977: 12)

⁵⁷ The idea of autobiography as a way of giving shape to our own lives has been prominent among English teachers. See, for example, Meek et al., 1977. Burgess and Hardcastle argue it has developed into a 'British classroom genre', requiring awareness of the conventions as well as linguistic expertise. (Burgess & Hardcastle, 1991: 39)

discourse and so on become central in a critical approach to texts that aims at recognising the hegemonic and cultural patterns in texts. Thus, readers are introduced to new ways of seeing and doing, gaining access to the dominant culture and the discourse of power.⁵⁸ Learning how to become a critical reader is better done in a literature lesson, because:

literature is capable of subverting all attempts to make it the instrument of a powerful group. Literature is the most powerful means of seeing and understanding many ways of reading, many literacy practices. (Fox, 1996: 183)

When students learn how to read texts with a critical eye, then they can also resist them. In the light of the above understandings, reading can no more be seen as an individual's affair, neutral and decontextualised, but should be understood as a social activity in a social context. More than individual responses, reading literature in class involves the construction of meaning in a shared framework, where there is tension and conflict but also negotiation and compromise. Drawing on Vygotsky's idea about the primacy of social dialogue, Maybin and Moss argue that the collaborative understandings of a text that are developed through class discussions might even precede students' individual comprehension of it. And these class readings "are never finished. They are continually made and remade in talk about text." (1993: 145) So it is a teacher's task to turn a class into the space where students can step in and make their voices heard, in an exploration of possibilities and a joint construction of stories.⁵⁹

All these changed understandings of reading and readers have led to a reconsideration of teachers' position in the praxis of a literature class. Once authoritative judgements give way to personal responses and meaning is seen as something to be negotiated and constructed, the image of a teacher as the disseminator and guarantor of *the* textual meaning seems odd and out of place. Instead, in many writings a new role is envisaged for teachers as the 'guides' or the 'facilitators' that set up the appropriate environment in which students can come into contact with literary texts and develop their response to them.⁶⁰ In order to describe this situation of active learning, the metaphor of scaffolding has been used, where a teacher gradually withdraws, taking down the supportive structure she has put up, as children take more and more responsibility. (Cazden, 1988) A teacher is no longer expected to provide students with the established correct knowledge about texts, expecting them to model their reading on her own. Rather than that, she is to assist them in their 'writing' of the texts studied and to be a responsive listener of students' texts.⁶¹

⁵⁸ According to Marshall's description of English teachers called 'The Rough Guide to English Teachers' (2000a; 2000b), this is the view promoted by the 'Critical Dissenters', that is, those teachers who insist on pupils' empowerment and emphasise the political context and connotations of literature.

⁵⁹ As Burgess puts it, while describing the reading of a West Indian story by a London literature class, "in the multi-cultural setting ... when stories are told, there will be diverse melodies." (1984: 68)

⁶⁰ See, for example, Grugeon & Walden (Eds) (1978), Brumfit (1980), Jackson (1983), Inglis (1987), Pradl (1988).

⁶¹ This idea of a teacher putting herself in the position of a listener has also been developed by Hélène Cixous, the French feminist educator who has been working in a very different paradigm. She has also argued for the dismantling of the student/teacher hierarchy, proposing instead a 'collective' approach that would allow differences to flourish. Taking time to listen tentatively to the 'other' is considered a principal

The above critical view of literature and, more generally, of texts has been reinforced by the recent theorisation of literacy practices as social practices, an approach that has opposed the dominant conception of literacy as a neutral and mechanical skill. This has been part of the ‘great debate’ on literacy that has been going on for the past twenty-five years, where a ‘meaning-based’ approach has been set against a ‘code-oriented’ one. (Wray, 1997)⁶² In the context of this debate, a number of literacy studies have appeared that elaborate on a new way of understanding language and literacy, looking at literacy practices from a socio-cultural anthropological perspective and making use of the notions of difference and power. Brian Street initially described this approach as the ‘ideological’ model, a framework that sees literacy embedded in ideology and social structure, as opposed to the ‘autonomous’ model, that adopts an unproblematic and atomised view of it. (Street, 1984) At a later point, Street made use of the term ‘New Literacy Studies’, including “a series of writings, in both research and practice, that treat language and literacy as social practices rather than technical skills to be learned in formal education.” (Street, 1997: 47) The arguments in these studies develop along three lines. First, they question the fixedness of the concept of literacy, documenting the multiplicity of literacy practices and the role of context in their construction and use. ‘Literacy’ is an ambiguous term whose meaning has shifted through time: not only do people of different eras define it differently⁶³, but also they use it for different purposes.⁶⁴ Through their studies of various communities and social groups, many ethnographers and educators have concluded that literacy practices are far from uniform and standard, since communities incorporate literacy in their communicative repertoire in different ways, depending

feature of the educational praxis, as it gives the opportunity to follow the other’s course of thinking, identifying differences as well as connections. (Cixous & Clément, 1988; Sellers, 1988; Sellers, 1989)

⁶² From a more practical point of view, this debate has focused on the dilemma between the use of ‘phonics’ or ‘real books’ in the teaching of literacy. Using ‘phonics’ and reading schemes is part of the ‘back-to-basics’ campaign that has been going for some time, where reading is seen as a neutral technology and learning to read as a linear, technical process. On the other hand, it has been argued that children should come into contact with real and interesting books, that will help them become active, reflective and critical readers, engaging actively in prediction and the construction of meaning. (Dombey, 1996; Plant, 1988)

⁶³ For many centuries literacy denoted the ability to read and write and a person was considered to be literate if she could sign a document. Nowadays, though, alphabetic literacy is only one mode of communication alongside many others, such as oral, visual, graphic, physical, mathematical, media etc., which means that the concept has expanded to include all other modes as well. (Graff, 1987) So, for example, in the page ‘Quotations About Literacy’ included on the website of the National Literacy Trust, the very first quotation was David Barton’s assertion of the multiplicity of literacies. “There are a range of contemporary literacies available to us – while print literacy was the first mass media, it is now one of the mass media.” (National Literacy Trust, www.literacytrust.org.uk, May 2000) This changing conception of literacy is also manifested in the increased frequency of references to information technology to be found in the current educational discourse. Access to the Internet is now seen as a guarantee for development, taking the place of literacy in the rhetoric about ‘progress’ – whatever the meaning of this term might be in a capitalistic world where the echoes of humanism are losing their credibility.

⁶⁴ For a long time since the Dark Ages, the main reason for a person in the Christian world to acquire literacy was to be able to read the Bible and consequently to be close to the Church and embrace its moral and religious principles. It should be noted that this was more the case in the Protestant countries, because the Catholic Church did not really encourage literacy among its followers. However, as modern states developed, loosening their links with the Church, and as national systems of education expanded in the last two centuries so did the concept of learning to read and write broaden, serving a wider and rather different range of purposes. (Graff, 1987)

on their existing needs and developed skills. Literacy practices are culture and group specific, and are consequently learned. “Ways of taking from books are as much a part of learned behavior as are ways of eating, sitting, playing games, and building houses.” (Heath, 1988: 22) So it is better to talk about ‘literacies’ instead of ‘literacy’ so as to depict its multifarious functions.⁶⁵ The second issue that has been tackled in the New Literacy Studies is that, notwithstanding the reality of multiplicity and polyphony in literacy practices, there is a tendency to hierarchise them and to confound ‘proper’ literacy with that promoted by schooling, which is also the dominant group’s model.⁶⁶ Even though schooled literacy is only one set of practices alongside others, still it is enforced as the natural and only one. So the difficulty that some children have at school could be interpreted not as a deficiency, but as a result of their discourse styles at home being different from school literacy-related practices. It has been observed that it is the children from the white middle-class community whose discourse style is closer to that of the school, a difference which makes new demands on teachers if they want to support all their students.⁶⁷

Finally, writings in the New Literacy Studies explore the implications that a different conception of literacy could have upon schooling. Admitting that there are ‘literacies’ rather than ‘literacy’ and that the function of schooled literacy should be considered alongside other home practices has very serious implications for curriculum planning and classroom reality since it makes imperative the acceptance that children bring other experiences of literacy with them, which interact with those of school. Educators from many countries have been considering how this new understanding of the function of literacies could be incorporated into their school practice. Brian Street argues that the task “appears to be twofold: to challenge the dominant representations of literacy; and to develop collaborative research projects that look at the actual literacy practices of both home and school.” (1997: 56)⁶⁸ A school curriculum is envisioned that would put emphasis on the ‘real’ uses of literacy, building on local practices while putting school literacy into perspective. If teachers want to help their students broaden their communicative repertoire, then they need to immerse themselves in the ongoing communication of their students’ communities to

⁶⁵ For examples of such studies, see Heath, 1983; Heath, 1988; Camitta, 1993; Fox, 1996; Street, 1997.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Michaels & Cazden 1986; Graff, 1987; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Dombey, 1996; Tett & Crowther, 1998.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Heath, 1983; 1988; Michaels & Cazden, 1986. Heath, Michaels and Cazden have studied the function of literacy in communities that were identified in terms of race (black and white) and, in Heath’s case, of social class (working-class and middle-class). They considered these communities to be homogeneous and treated them accordingly when they juxtaposed their practices to those of the school system. They regarded individuals as members of a community, sharing certain traits, such as ethnicity and social class, as well as acting within a commonly shared framework. However, there have been other studies that have dealt with literacy practices in social groups that are defined along different lines, such as age, gender, religion etc. For example, Miriam Camitta (1993) looked at some adolescents’ uses of literacy outside school in Philadelphia, using, thus, age and the distinction home vs. school as the determining factors.

⁶⁸ In the same article Street also lists initiatives taking place in South Africa, the USA, Nepal and Australia, of educators who develop courses that embrace and use as a basis the diversity of literacy and language.

get to know the rules and conventions – and literacy practices are part of these – in which their students have been acculturated because, as Shirley Brice Heath puts it:

Children have to learn to select, hold, and retrieve content from books and other written or printed texts in accordance with their community's rules or 'ways of talking,' and the children's learning follows community paths of language socialization. (Heath, 1988: 38)

Once teachers know the feeding community's literacy practices and their relation to school literacy, they will know what adaptations need to be made to ease their students' way into school literacy more effectively.

PART 2.B. – FORCED TO SHARE A COMMON GROUND

The above are only glimpses of the rich and long history of English literature in the school curriculum. In this history, the year 1988 could be considered momentous, as it was the year when the National Curriculum (henceforward NC) was introduced.⁶⁹ From that point onwards, students and teachers across the country would be obliged to work within the same framework, sharing the same attainment targets and following the same programmes of study. A system of tests at various intervals, whose results would be made public in league tables, was devised to ensure the implementation of the NC in all classes across the country. Over the course of ten years, from 1989 until 1999, three final versions of the NC were published with specific directions for each curriculum subject: the original 1990 NC, the Revised 1995 one and the 1999 NC. In the same period, a significant number of documents circulated either for consultation or for guidance, giving the impression of a grand enterprise aiming at the systematisation and centralisation of the state education system. In the context of English as a subject, students are expected to work on the English language, developing the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. In terms of reading, they are to come into contact not only with literary texts but also with media and information texts. Regarding the weight attached to the different kinds of texts, there seems to be a shift in the successive versions of the NC. Thus, in the 1990 NC, literature has a more pronounced position in comparison with that in the 1999 NC, where an effort is made to balance the study of literature with the reading of information, media and moving image texts.

In the second part of this chapter I will offer a reading of four official documents that have regulated the teaching of English for more than a decade: the 1989 'Cox' Report (DES & W.O., 1989), the 1990 NC (DES & W.O., 1990), the 1995 NC (DFE & W.O., 1995) and the 1999 NC

⁶⁹ The roots of this move could be traced back to 1976 and James Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, that set off the Great Debate. In that speech, Callaghan questioned 'informal instruction' and submitted for discussion the idea of a 'core curriculum' of basic knowledge that would ensure a national standard of performance and would equip pupils with the skills necessary for employment. ('Towards a national debate', *The Guardian*, 16/10/2001) The introduction of the National Curriculum was made easier by the panic that was created about the decline in standards in education, as a result of an alarmist campaign held by the right and some affiliated media. And yet, as Marshall (1996) pointedly remarks, the arguments of the 1990s in Britain about the decline in standards sound similar to those put forward in James Callaghan's 1976 speech at Ruskin College, in the 1921 Newbolt Report, in the 1928 Spens Report, in the

(DFEE & QCA, 1999). In particular, I will focus on literature teaching and the treatment of the following notions: how textual meaning is conceived and what a reader's role is in a literature class; how text selection is to be made; what aims are set; how students are being treated; and finally, how power is distributed among the agents of education.

2.B.i. *Textual meaning and the reader's role*

In all versions of the NC, texts are treated as windows on reality and reading as a way to enhance one's grasp of it by becoming aware of other people's perspectives. This conception of literary texts is central in all policy documents, and we find it in bold letters in the 'Cox' Report:

An active involvement with literature enables pupils to share *the experience of others*. They will encounter and come to understand *a wide range of feelings and relationships* by entering vicariously *the worlds of others*, and in consequence they are likely to understand more of themselves. (DES & W.O., 1989, §7.3)

In literary texts, one can come into contact with the 'experience' and the 'worlds' of others, with a 'wide range of feelings and relationships'. However, it is left hazy who these 'others' might be or what the relation might be between the 'others' and 'us-readers' or 'me-reader'. Are these 'others' the authors, the social groups to which authors belong, any social group other than the one to which a reader belongs, or the individuals living next to a reader? From the next two paragraphs of the report, §7.4 and §7.5, one gets the impression that the phrase 'worlds of others' refers to different groups, as these are determined in terms of gender, age or culture. In these paragraphs, policy makers discuss literary texts as expressions of different social and cultural groups, explaining that "texts may be related to interests of different groups – such as women or men, adolescents or minorities of different kinds" (ibid., §7.4) or that:

All pupils need to be aware of the richness of experience offered by such writing [i.e. from different countries], so that they may be introduced to the ideas and feelings of cultures different from their own. (ibid., §7.5)

So, on the one hand, the report acknowledges that a difference of background is manifest in a literary text and readers get to know different aspects of experience by reading texts coming out of different cultures. And yet, on the other hand, it is also implied that all humans share certain features, when, for example, we are told that by understanding others' worlds and experiences readers are 'likely to understand more of themselves'. The same idea of universality of human experience is repeated in "Appendix 6: Approaches to the 'class novel'", where students are expected to become aware "of what the story stands for – the universal meanings, and circumstances illustrated by the particular narrative." (ibid., Appendix 6)⁷⁰ Thus, textual meaning is seen as double-sided: on the one hand, as particular and related to certain cultural and social groups, and on the other hand, as transcendental and appealing to all human beings.

1943 Norwood Report etc., concluding that "given the apparently unremitting evidence of our continual decline over the last one hundred years, it is a wonder any of us read or write at all." (ibid., p. 11)

⁷⁰ Appendix 6 in *The 'Cox' Report* was a reproduction of a handout published by the Northampton Heads of English.



The same idea of literary texts as depictions of reality can also be found in the later policy documents, only this time it is expressed in a quieter tone. Thus, in the 1995 Revised NC, it is argued that literary texts communicate “attitudes, values and meanings” and students are expected to become aware of these. (ibid., p.22, §3.a) In paragraph §1.b of the same document, policy makers explain that students should study plays, novels, short stories and poetry. (ibid., p.19) The texts chosen from each genre should “offer perspectives on society and community and their impact on the lives of individuals”, a suggestion based on the assumption that literary texts could provide students with the analytical framework for conceptualising society and an individual’s relationship with it. (DFE & W.O., 1995: 19, §1.b) In this paragraph, texts are defined only in terms of their genre and without any comment on their context, giving the impression that the perspectives offered in texts affect all societies and the whole of humanity. And yet, in the very next paragraph (§1.c), it is explained that:

Pupils should read texts from *other* cultures and traditions that represent their *distinctive* voices and forms, and offer *varied perspectives and subject matter*. (ibid., p.19, §1.c, my italics)

Here, the perspectives offered in texts are discussed as culture-specific, their voices and forms depending on the tradition they come from. What is interesting is that this diversity is brought up only when it comes to texts from ‘other’ cultures, while there is silence about the culture-bound nature of texts from the English tradition, which are defined only in terms of their genre. The idea of literary texts being windows on a reality that exists outside and prior to them is also present in the 1999 NC, where it is stated that “literature in English is rich and influential, *reflecting the experience* of people from many countries and times.” (DFEE & QCA, 1999: 14; my italics) So a fundamental assumption of the official discourse is that literary texts are reflections of reality and their reading gives students the opportunity to come into contact with people’s experiences and with the world.

Another assumption, which comes up time and time again, is that textual meaning is layered, ranging from the literal and explicit to the implied and hidden, and a reader needs to make an effort to ‘identify’ all levels. In the ‘Cox’ Report it is explained that “literary texts have the habit of not turning out to mean what might be expected at first sight” (DES & W.O., 1989, §7.23), while students are expected to become aware of the three levels “at which a fictional text operates”: the narrative, the symbolic, and finally, the stylistic/linguistic level. (ibid., Appendix 6) Similarly, in the 1990 version of the NC, we read that as early as at attainment level 3:

[Pupils should] demonstrate, in talking about stories and poems, that they are beginning to use inference, deduction and previous reading experience *to find and appreciate meanings beyond the literal*. (DES & W.O., 1990: 8; my italics)

Moreover, for students to reach the higher attainment levels “they should be taught how to compare surface meaning *in* a text with an implied sub-text.” (ibid., p.33; my italics) The same idea of textual meaning to be found in layers is repeated in the 1995 and 1999 versions of the NC, where it is stated that students should be taught “to *extract* meaning beyond the literal, explaining

how choice of language and style affects implied and explicit meanings.” (DFE & W.O., 1995: 21; DFEE & QCA, 1999: 34; my italics)⁷¹ At other times, the idea of ‘layered’ meanings gives way to the notion that a text might have ‘multiple’ meanings. For example, students who achieve the top attainment level “should discuss the possibility of multiple meanings *in* the texts studied and be taught how to *recognise* and *describe* some of them.” (DES & W.O., 1990: 34; my italics)⁷² Interestingly, in this description of the reading process, it is not readers who might read a text in different ways, since all meanings are to be found *in* a text and a reader’s task is only to *find*, *recognise*, *extract* and *describe* them. Textual meaning is to be found *in* a text but it is also discussed as being dependent on the medium, as it is suggested that students need “to consider how meanings are changed when texts are adapted to different media.” (DFEE & QCA, 1999: 34)⁷³

In all the policy documents studied, meanings might be seen as inherent to a text that are to be extracted, but there are also references to students having a ‘personal’, ‘active’ and ‘creative’ response to literature, indicating a shift of emphasis from the text to the reader in the process of meaning making. This idea was particularly prominent in the ‘Cox’ Report, but it is also to be found in the subsequent NC versions, albeit toned down. In the ‘Cox’ Report, there is discussion of “an active involvement with literature” (§7.3), and of an active response “that requires the pupil to make meaning yet to show a grasp of the original author’s craft at the same time.” (ibid., §7.20) These ‘active’ approaches and ‘positive’ attitudes are expected to promote enjoyment in reading “in the face of more passive forms of entertainment.” (ibid., §7.21) To this end, policy makers suggest the replacement of more traditional methods with “exciting, enjoyable approaches that are social, imaginative and physical”, as well as participatory and exploratory (§7.16), involving pupils’ ‘creative’ writing on the model of literary texts. (§7.9) In the proposed framework, the echoes of reader response criticism can be vividly heard: placing the reader at the centre of the reading process as the producer of meaning from a text, instead of limiting her to the position of a passive recipient. However, it is not explained how this ‘personal response’ can be reconciled with the ideas discussed earlier that meaning is to be found *in* a text and that readers have to work to extract it. Moreover, the notion of the ‘personal’ remains ambiguous, as it is not made clear what such a reading might entail or what it depends on.

The initial enthusiasm about active readings to be found in the ‘Cox’ Report later gives way to more scarce and moderate assertions of the importance of personal response. Thus, in the 1995 Revised NC there are only a couple of references to it, as when we are told that pupils should

⁷¹ See also the description of attainment level 6 in the 1995 and 1999 versions of the NC, where it is stated that: “pupils *identify* different layers of meaning and comment on their significance and effect.” (DFE & W.O., 1995: 28; DFEE & QCA, 1999: 58, my italics)

⁷² The idea of alternative interpretations is also present in the next two versions of the NC: DFE & W.O., 1995: 21; DFEE & QCA, 1999: 34.

become “independent, responsive and enthusiastic readers” and should learn “to articulate informed personal opinions.” (DFE & W.O., 1995: 19 & 21) Similar references are to be found in the descriptions of attainment levels 6 and 7. In order for pupils to reach level 6, they need to “give personal responses to literary texts” but also they need to make sure they justify their views “referring to aspects of language, structure and themes”, which means that a ‘personal’ response needs to conform to the commonly held assumptions about what reading is and how it should be expressed. (DFE & W.O., 1995: 28)⁷⁴ And then, for pupils to reach attainment level 7, they need to “articulate personal and critical responses” to literature “showing awareness of their thematic, structural and linguistic features.” (ibid., p.28) Here, apart from the repetition of the need for personal response to assume a form within specific norms, a distinction is made between ‘personal’ and ‘critical’ responses, as if the two are distinct. In the 1999 NC, references to ‘personal’ ‘active’ readings are even fewer, since only those two in the descriptions of attainment levels 6 and 7 have been retained. So it seems there is a move away from the ambiguous notion of ‘personal’ reading and towards an espousal of a more ‘critical’ reading, whereby pupils are expected to assume a more analytical and reflective attitude.

In official discourse, literary texts are treated as reflections of a reality that exists prior to and outside them and can serve as a terrain for pupils’ familiarisation with and questioning of experiences, ideas and attitudes. At some points, this reality is discussed as multifaceted, the different aspects presented in texts being dependent on their cultural background. Reading a wide range of texts gives pupils the opportunity to become acquainted with the different perspectives offered in these. At other times, though, texts are seen as an articulation of universal human experience, allowing pupils to enhance their understanding of human thought and feeling. The relationship between the particular and the universal is not really addressed in any of the policy documents and remains rather ambiguous, and so are the notions of culture and the relationship between different cultures. For the most part, the prevalent assumption is that meanings are to be found *in* a text, being multiple or in layers, and a reader’s task is to ‘extract’, ‘explore’, or ‘identify’ them. In the ‘Cox’ Report, emphasis is put on pupils having a creative and active response to texts, but such references are only minimal in subsequent documents. Sometimes it is suggested that meanings change as texts are adapted for different media, but generally it seems that policy makers are still rather sceptical about the idea of readers ‘writing’ texts through their readings and creating meanings.

2.B.ii. What about text selection?

Literary texts are not the only texts to be studied in the context of the subject of English, as they feature alongside media, information, moving image and other non-fiction texts. Regarding

⁷³ See also DFE & W.O., 1995: 21.

literature, policy makers indicate the use of a wide range of texts, including plays, novels, short stories and poetry. They expect pupils to study not only contemporary texts but also texts written before 1900⁷⁵, aiming, as it seems, at their acquaintance with the historical dimension of English literature.⁷⁶ Literature is to be seen as the traditional means for written expression and English people as a creative force that has a long history. The first report published by the Subject Working Committee (DES & W.O., 1988) for Key Stage 1 included a list of suggested texts. However, this list was omitted from the second report, and no equivalent was given for older pupils, because, as the authors explain, the media focused on this list “to the detriment of the other, more important recommendations in the Report.” (DES & W.O., 1989, §1.21) Thus, the 1990 NC did not prescribe any set list of authors and was limited to suggesting the broad categories of texts to be studied.⁷⁷ However, after the initial displacement of authority to teachers and English departments, the control of material to be used in a literature class has shifted to the centre and the subsequent NCs contain lists of authors that are suggested for study. Thus, English teachers are told how many works to cover in Key Stages 3 and 4 as well as which authors would be preferable.⁷⁸ It should be acknowledged that the lists are given as examples and there is a wide variety from which to choose, but still teachers are deprived of the freedom and responsibility they had to shape the curriculum to suit their pupils’ needs. Another thing that is interesting about the suggested lists of authors in the 1995 and 1999 NCs concerns the texts from ‘other cultures and traditions’. In the 1995 Revised NC, the suggested list only addresses the English literary heritage, while there are no examples given of authors from other countries, which pupils are also supposed to study. (DFE & W.O., 1995: 19-20) Do policy makers want to give teachers the freedom to determine which texts should be included, or is the omission the result of an effort to undermine this part of the curriculum? Things are different in the 1999 NC where the suggested list has been expanded with “examples of drama, fiction and poetry by major writers from different cultures and traditions.” (DFEE & QCA, 1999: 36)

According to policy documents, literature teaching should include texts originally written in English, either from the ‘English literary heritage’ or from other cultures and traditions, but not translated ones. If one takes into account that foreign language teaching does not include the

⁷⁴ The attainment levels for reading are reproduced without alterations in the 1999 NC. (DFEE & QCA, 1999: 57-58)

⁷⁵ This time boundary changed to 1914 in the 1999 NC. (DFEE & QCA, 1999)

⁷⁶ See DES & W.O., 1989, §7.15 & 7.16; DES & W.O., 1990: 31; DFE & W.O., 1995: 19-20; and DFEE & QCA, 1999: 34 & 36.

⁷⁷ For example, it is suggested that at Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils should be introduced to ‘contemporary writing’, ‘pre-20th century literature’, ‘some works of Shakespeare’ or ‘some of the works which have been influential in shaping and refining the English language and its literature. (DES & W.O., 1990: 31)

⁷⁸ Writing in 1998, which means that she had the 1995 NC list of authors in mind, de Rijke (1998) criticises the English NC for being misogynous and dominated mainly by male authors. She also questions the view that sees English as a subject directed to girls in order to account for boys’ disaffection with reading. Instead, she argues that English has shifted from feminine to masculine and English teachers and their practice have been used as scapegoats for society’s expectations.

reading of literary texts, at least not until A-level, and then it is not a compulsory subject any more, it becomes obvious that pupils do not come into contact with literature written in any language other than English. Apart from reading such stories as H.C. Andersen's stories or Aesop's Fables in the early years of schooling, pupils are not supposed to become acquainted with literatures in other languages, as if English is the one and only medium for literary expression and as if the world consists only of Britain and its former colonies. Policy documents do not address this issue at all, as if the contents of a curriculum subject named 'English' is self-evident and only literature written in English could have a place in it. One could also think of other explanations for this exclusion, such as that there are not enough good translations or that a text in translation 'misses out' something of the original. However, these are not sufficient in the light of the recent publishing boom or of contemporary literary theory, which understands reading as writing and recasts the idea of translation. Thus we see that literature in school revolves around the notion of Englishness, by studying either texts from the 'English' literary heritage or texts from other cultures where English is the official language and often the colonial past looms, forcing authors to define their identity in relation to it. Interestingly enough, this exclusive engagement with the notion of Englishness remains totally unacknowledged and is not questioned at all.⁷⁹

Policy documents differ in their approach to the 'literary canon', and in the weight they attach to texts from the English literary heritage, reflecting the ideological framework of the central authority at the time. In the 'Cox' Report, policy makers propose a critical approach to the 'literary canon' and a consideration of its construction, seeing it as an opportunity to promote an equal opportunities policy. The fact that "texts may be related to interests of different groups" means that a discussion of such diverse texts could evolve into a discussion of alternative points of view and of practices of selection and representation. (DES & W.O., 1989, §7.4) The 'literary canon' is also regarded as changing, an idea that is introduced at a later point where they discuss their reservations about prescribing a list of set texts.

Formulations of 'literary tradition', 'our literary heritage' or lists of 'great works', however influential their proponents, *may change radically during the course of time.* (ibid., §7.14; my italics)

This critical approach to the 'literary canon' is to be found once again in the 1999 NC, according to which pupils should learn about the characteristics of those texts "that are considered to be of high quality" as well as to examine the circumstances under which these have been accredited with such influence and significance, all of them notions that change over time. (DFEE & QCA, 1999: 34)

⁷⁹ Discussing the writing of the 1989 Report, Brian Cox argues that it is necessary "to maintain *our* cultural heritage, *our* knowledge of English classics of high quality" because "we need *national unity*, for *common understanding of Standard English*, for *common values* of justice and equality and freedom of expression so we can live at peace with each other", even though this needs to be balanced with the inclusion of texts from other cultures that will infuse pupils with respect for differences and diversity. (1995: 16; my italics) In this, he echoes the Arnoldian ideal of literature teaching as a way to forge a unified nation that lives in harmony, an idea that was also prevalent in the 1921 'Newbolt' Report.

However, the aforementioned critical approach to the ‘literary canon’ is completely absent from the final document that was put up as the first statutory NC in 1990 as well as from the Revised NC that came into force a few years later, in 1995. Instead of encouraging a reflective attitude, the 1995 version of the NC erects the ‘literary canon’ as something that ought to be accepted and revered unquestioningly.⁸⁰ Policy makers make sure not to use the phrase ‘canon’, not even once, but they keep on talking about ‘major works’, ‘works of high quality by major writers with well established critical reputations’, ‘significant authors’ and so on. (DFE & W.O., 1995: 19-21) Despite their being used so frequently, all these notions are left undiscussed. So it is never explained what the criteria are that determine the ‘quality’ or ‘significance’ of a text, as if these are unambiguous and definite notions, shared by everyone. As part of the key skills that pupils should be taught, it is stated that they should be given opportunities “to appreciate the characteristics that distinguish literature of high quality.” (ibid., p.21) In this sentence, policy makers refer to ‘literature of high quality’ as to a fixed corpus with transparent characteristics, whose worth pupils should learn to recognise and acknowledge.

Similar differentiation between policy documents can be found with regard to the texts from other cultures and traditions that pupils should study. The ‘Cox’ Report recommended that pupils read texts from different countries, from different parts of the world (DES & W.O., 1989, §7.15 & §7.5), because:

All pupils need to be aware of the richness of experience offered by such writing, so that they may be introduced to the ideas and feelings of cultures different from their own. English teachers should seek opportunities to exploit the multicultural aspects of literature. (ibid., §7.5)

It seems to open the way for writings that had been marginalised to be admitted in the literature class, in celebration of diversity and of dialogism. However, this opening of the curriculum to include more voices is thought to bring pupils into contact with “a greater range of human ‘thought and feeling’”, but also:

through looking at literature from different parts of the world and written from different points of view – pupils should also be in a position to gain a better understanding of the cultural heritage of English literature itself. (ibid., §7.5)

Anne Turvey (1992) compares this attention paid to the multicultural aspects of literature with travel: a journey that might be good for the mind, “but it is definitely *safe* travel: you return to the harbour of the ‘cultural heritage of English literature itself’.” (ibid., p.37) There is no sense of different cultures meeting on the basis of parity or attentiveness, since difference does not have a structural role in this framework, being recognised either as a way to get a fuller view of universalised ‘human thought and feeling’ or as a way to reinforce the dominant cultural discourse in pupils. Moreover, when the document writers discuss pupils’ contact with texts from

⁸⁰ Writing in 1996, Fox comments on the versions of the NC for English produced until then: “Each has attempted, either through lists of ‘exemplary books’, or through named set texts on which pupils are to be formally tested, to impose literature as a ‘cultural heritage’ on schools and pupils.” (1996: 183)

cultures that are ‘different from their own’, they seem to assume that all pupils share a single tradition and culture, completely disregarding the multicultural nature of the pupil population in Britain.

This rather extended reference to texts from other countries made in the ‘Cox’ Report is not repeated in the first two versions of the NC, published in 1990 and 1995, where only minimal remarks can be found. Thus, in the 1990 NC it is suggested that, at Key Stages 3 and 4, texts “should include literature from different countries written in English”, but there is no consideration of the reasons, ways or effects of such a study, treating it as a superficial decorative element without any bearing on the reading process and its rationale. (DES & W.O., 1990: 31) Similarly, in the 1995 Revised NC, it is indicated that:

Pupils should read texts from other cultures and traditions that represent their distinctive voices and forms, and offer varied perspectives and subject matter. (DFE & W.O., 1995: 19)

However, as has been discussed earlier in this section, document writers do not include a list of suggested authors as they do for the English literary heritage, thus downgrading the significance of this part of the curriculum. Their different treatment of these texts can also be seen in the way they refer to them as compared to the references they make to texts from the English heritage. Works and authors from the English literary heritage, which are to be studied, are described as ‘significant’, ‘major’, or ‘of high quality’, whereas texts from other cultures and traditions are described as having ‘distinctive’ voices and forms or offering ‘varied’ perspectives and subject matter. Interestingly, the notions of quality or excellence are used only in the definition of works from the English heritage, whereas texts from ‘other’ traditions are defined in terms of their distinctiveness and peculiarity. A binary opposition is being constructed in the document, involving ‘our’ literary heritage in contrast to the ‘other’ traditions. The first term of the opposition is described as a ‘heritage’, something precious and worthwhile that is to be possessed and valued, whereas the alternative term is described as ‘other cultures and traditions’, something that might be long-established but is also strange and remote. Pupils are also expected to approach texts from each tradition differently. On the one hand, they are expected simply to ‘read’ the texts from other traditions, but on the other hand, they “should be *encouraged to appreciate the distinctive qualities of [the works from the English heritage] through activities that emphasise the interest and pleasure of reading them.*” (ibid., p.20; my italics) Document writers might not use an inclusive ‘ours’ when referring to the English literary heritage, but still they present it as the corpus that is more relevant, rewarding and important for pupils than the ‘other’ texts.

The 1999 NC adopts a different attitude, as it tries to strike a balance between texts of the English literary heritage and those from different cultures and traditions, while it introduces for the first time the study of “recent and contemporary drama, fiction and poetry written for young people and adults.” (DFEE & QCA, 1999: 36) Instead of talking about ‘other’ cultures and traditions,

document writers describe them as ‘different’ and go on to give lists of suggested writers for all sets of texts. The writers included in the suggested list are all from former British colonies, often trying to explore their identity as at variance with Englishness.⁸¹ Pupils are expected to approach all texts critically, considering their characteristics and distinctive qualities, making connections and comparisons, understanding their values and assumptions and so on. (ibid., p.34) What remains from the previous versions of the NC is the binary opposition between the English heritage and the ‘different’ traditions, between an implied ‘us’ and ‘them’, which are both being treated as distinct wholes. Moreover, references to these ‘different cultures and traditions’ are rather hazy and vague, as it is never explicitly explained which cultures or traditions pupils should become familiar with. All ‘non-English’ cultures and literary traditions are branded as ‘different’ but are not named, evading a discussion on what is ‘English’ and what ‘different’, or how the boundaries between the various corpuses are set.

In sum, it seems that even though the different versions of the NC vary in their treatment of literary texts, they still have some notable common ground. While the 1990 gives only general indications of the broad categories to be studied, in the 1995 document there is an insistence on the appreciation of the English ‘literary canon’, which includes ‘major’ texts of ‘high quality’, and a secondary role is given to texts from ‘other’ cultures and traditions. On the other hand, the ‘Cox’ Report and the 1999 NC suggest a more critical view of texts that have been influential and of the practices of inclusion and representation, while they give more importance to the study of texts from other parts of the world or from ‘different’ cultures and traditions. Despite their differences, all versions of the NC have a lot in common. First, in all of them, a notion of literature is built that includes only texts written in English and no other language. Moreover, a binary opposition is constructed between the ‘English literary heritage’ and the ‘other’ or ‘different’ traditions, without any consideration of the relationship between literature and culture, between different cultures and literatures, or between readers/writers and cultural texts. In all documents, the English heritage occupies a more central position in the curriculum than texts from ‘other/different’ traditions, which are left unnamed, as if pertaining to remote and strange places.

2.B.iii. Text and author

Authors are ‘present’ in policy documents and, despite their having a minor role in class reading, they are still referred to as individuals whose ideas and intentions can be discerned in their writings. In fact, pupils are expected to “distinguish between the attitudes and assumptions displayed by characters and those of the author”, even though we are not told exactly how an author’s attitude can be deduced. (DFE & W.O., 1995: 21, §2b; DFEE & QCA, 1999: 34, §1.h) Should pupils search in autobiographical or critical writings for an author’s personal view? Is it

⁸¹ The list includes 22 writers, 15 men and 7 women, 12 white and 10 non-white. There are 9 from the USA, 5 from African countries (2 from South Africa, 2 from Nigeria and 1 from Kenya), 3 from India, 2 from

the narrator that can be identified with the author, giving voice to her inner thoughts and psychology, or is it textual structure that reveals her attitude in some way? Treating the narrator as the author's voice is not seen as an option, since it is made clear that:

pupils should be shown how to recognise that the attitudes and behaviour of a character or narrator are not necessarily the attitudes or beliefs of the author. (DES & W.O., 1990: 32)⁸²

Instead, the idea most prevalent is that, in fiction as in non-fiction, a writer's outlook can be found in a text *itself* and "pupils should be taught how to *recognise* the author's viewpoint." (ibid., p.33, §26, my italics) Thus, pupils should be encouraged to consider "how authors' purposes and intentions are portrayed", while they will reach the higher levels of attainment when they can show an understanding and can "evaluate how authors achieve their effects through the use of linguistic, structural and presentational devices." (DFE & W.O., 1995: 22 & 29)⁸³ In addition, pupils are expected to use 'extra-textual' material, since "they should be taught to use information or contextual clues to deduce authorial points of view." (DES & W.O., 1990: 33) Even though authors do not feature in a leading position in the discourse of policy documents, and texts and readers are at the centre of attention, they are still conceptualised as individuals whose intentions and attitudes are discernible and the subject for discussion. They are the agency behind literary texts and pupils have to refer to them while reflecting on their work and choices.

2.B.iv. Constructing the image of the 'ideal' reader

In policy documents, an image of the 'ideal' reader is constructed that is complex and multifarious, since literature reading is thought to serve a whole range of aims. The 'ideal' reader not only has the habit of reading but also knows 'how' to read and is morally, socially and culturally developed. In the 'Cox' Report, it is acknowledged that children have "an instinctive pleasure in rhythm, pattern and rhyme" as well as "natural enthusiasms for story structures and role-play." (DES & W.O., 1989, §7.1) However, these qualities need to be nurtured so as to develop into "an appreciation of the richness of poetry" and "a full and active engagement with a constantly expanding range of texts or literary genres." (ibid.) Notwithstanding their natural inclinations, a young reader needs to be trained on how to read and once she learns that, then reading will have a beneficial effect upon her as an individual and as a member of society, because it seems that, despite its recent loss of ground to media studies, literature is still thought to have wide-ranging and profound effects on readers.

First of all, familiarity with a selection of texts and genres is set as one of the aims. This can only be attained gradually, and thus it is suggested that pupils' reading diet expands as they progress through school, dealing with a constantly wider range of texts.⁸⁴ Pupils should come into contact

Australia, 2 from the Caribbean and 1 British writer who was born and raised abroad.

⁸² See also DES & W.O., 1990: 33.

⁸³ See also DES & W.O., 1990: 9 (§5.e), 10 (§7.e, §8.b), 11 (§9.b, §10.b).

⁸⁴ See DES & W.O., 1989, §7.1, 7.15; DES & W.O., 1990: 31; DFE & W.O., 1995: 19.

with texts from the English literary heritage, from different periods, from different parts of the world, and from different genres. The significance assigned to knowledge of texts is indicated by the care shown to specify the kinds of texts and authors to be studied or the number of texts to be covered. Time in an English class is not to be spent reading *any* literary text by *any* writer with *any* background, since there are specific suggestions on which texts are to form part of a literature lesson. As has already been discussed, the main emphasis is on texts from the English literary heritage, while those from 'other/different' cultures and traditions receive a rather different treatment. Notwithstanding the insistence of the National Curriculum on the development of skills, it seems that policy makers consider pupils' acquaintance with a range of texts to be of great significance, and as a result they feel compelled to issue specific directions, instead of leaving it to the discretion of teachers and pupils. The prevalent assumption might be that literature has great power and potential, but it seems that some literary texts, such as Shakespeare's plays, are more powerful than others and pupils' acquaintance with these is imperative.

However, familiarisation with a set of texts is not seen as an end in itself and the sole aim for literature teaching, and the reading of certain texts, no matter how significant these might be, is not thought to be enough unless pupils learn 'how' to read them. Pupils are expected to learn a 'way' of reading literature that involves a critical approach to texts as well as a personal involvement in the process. On the one hand, it is pointed out that pupils need to develop 'objective analytical skills', to learn a terminology and a method of analysis, which should be based on their understanding of the author's craft and of how she uses language to create an imaginative, stylistically original text and to project ideas and issues.⁸⁵ The descriptions used to set pupils at the different levels of attainment relate to their progress in 'understanding' a text and in 'showing' this understanding. Gradually, pupils are expected to understand the 'main/essential points', 'significant ideas', 'key features', 'themes', 'events', and 'characters', to show awareness of 'thematic', 'structural', and 'linguistic' features, as well as to use inference and deduction.⁸⁶

On the other hand, apart from analysing, explaining, identifying or appreciating, pupils are expected to have an 'active' engagement with and a 'personal' response to literature, an idea that can be found in the 'Cox' Report, but there are only short references to it in the subsequent NCs.⁸⁷ Pupils are expected to participate in discussions and to express preferences, sharing their opinions with others and justifying their views. In the 'Cox' Report, emphasis is put on 'participatory' and 'exploratory' approaches, which could lead finally to more traditional formal analysis. (DES &

⁸⁵ See DES & W.O., 1989, §7.7, 7.9, 7.10, 7.16; DFEE & QCA, 1999: 34

⁸⁶ See the section 'Level Descriptions, Attainment Target 2: Reading' in DFE & W.O., 1995: 28-29 and in DFEE & QCA, 1999: 57-58.

⁸⁷ See DES & W.O., 1989, §7.1, 7.3, 7.20; DES & W.O., 1990: 8-10; DFE & W.O., 1995: 21 & 28; DFEE & QCA, 1999: 57-58.

W.O., 1989, §7.16, 7.20, 7.22) Similar suggestions are made in the 1990 NC, where pupils at attainment level 8 are expected to give “evidence of personal response” (DES & W.O., 1990: 10), and in the 1995 Revised NC, where it is stated that pupils should respond ‘both imaginatively and intellectually’ to what they read. (DFE & W.O., 1995: 21) As part of their ‘active’ involvement with literature, pupils are expected to create their own pieces of creative writing, which means that texts function both as a stimulus and as a model for pupils’ writing. Thus, for the development of the key skill of writing, pupils are expected to write narrative, poetry, scripts and dialogue, being encouraged “to draw on their experience” and knowledge of such literary forms, “to develop their use of techniques”, and to write in response to the texts under study. (DFE & W.O., 1995: 23)⁸⁸ Creative writing is seen as one way of responding to texts that leads to formal writing.⁸⁹ Once again policy documents construct a binary opposition, one between creative and formal writing, based on the assumption that these are two distinct ways of responding to a literary text. A ‘creative’ response is thought to pertain to the lower levels of attainment that could open the way to a ‘critical’ response, while pupils moving on to the higher levels of attainment such as level 7 should be able to “articulate [both] personal and critical responses to poems, plays and novels.” (DFE & W.O., 1995: 28) It is also interesting to note that references to ‘personal’ response and an ‘active’ engagement with literature might occupy a central position in the 1989 ‘Cox’ Report, but they are toned down in all subsequent versions of the NC, being virtually excluded from the 1999 NC and giving way to an emphasis on a ‘critical’ approach.

Acquiring knowledge of some literary texts and learning a way to approach them are principal aims set but they are not the only ones. Policy documents are also based on the assumption that literature has the power and potential to have a lasting and deep effect upon readers. Through their reading of literature, pupils can gain a good overview of human thought and feeling, while the whole process can also have a transformative influence upon them. In the ‘Cox’ Report, the idea that was put forward in the Kingman Report is repeated, according to which wide reading is essential to “a *full knowledge* of the range of possible *patterns of thought and feeling* made accessible by the power and range of language.” (DES, 1988: 11; also cited in DES & W.O., 1989, §7.2; my italics) As has been discussed in previous sections, reading a wide range of texts is thought to bring pupils into contact with various perspectives on experience, and thus, it seems that the more pupils read the more they become enlightened as to the essence and the various expressions of humanity.

In addition to providing readers with reflections of the world and knowledge of the human condition, the study of literature is also thought to have the power to ‘change’ readers, shaping them as individuals and as social beings. In the ‘Cox’ Report, we are told about pupils growing

⁸⁸ For similar references, look at DES & W.O., 1989, §7.8 & Appendix 6; DES & W.O., 1990: 14, 39; DFEE & QCA, 1999: 37.

“through literature – both emotionally and aesthetically, both morally and socially” (DES & W.O., 1989, §7.3), while in the 1995 NC, it is advised that works to be studied should “extend pupils’ ideas and their moral and emotional understanding.” (DFE & W.O., 1995: 19) In the 1999 version of the NC, policy makers quote two passages, one by an academic and another by a novelist, both of them affirming the power of literature. First there is Professor Lisa Jardine who explains that:

A good book, studied with a good English teacher, takes you on a journey *in search of answers to the crucial questions in life* you didn’t even know you wanted (or needed) to ask. (DFEE & QCA, 1999: 15, my italics)

And then there is Ian McEwan reminiscing:

Studying English literature at school was my first, and probably my biggest, step *towards mental freedom and independence*. It was like *falling in love with life*. (ibid., p.15; my italics)

So literature makes readers think about and problematise life itself, provided that a ‘good’ book is studied with the aid of a ‘good’ teacher. It can even have a transformative influence upon readers, leading them to mental freedom and independence, both consequential notions. The fact that these effects of literature reading are expressed in the context of quotations means that policy makers do not have to explain or justify them. Apart from these quotations, it is also stated that the study of texts provides opportunities to promote pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; pupils’ whole-person development, in short. (ibid., p.8) What is interesting about these rather ambitious and far-reaching aims for literature teaching is the total absence of any such references from the descriptions of the attainment levels for ‘Reading’. Literature might be seen as having a profound and wide-ranging influence upon pupils but it is only their mastery of a specific reading technique that counts towards the levels of attainment.

Another element of the reading process that can be read in the margins of some official documents is pleasure. Generally, it is suggested that pupils should be encouraged to become interested and enthusiastic readers who realise the value and gains of literature reading. In the ‘Cox’ Report, enjoyment, a developing interest and a love of reading for its own sake feature in the priorities of the subject.⁸⁹ Enjoyment in literature reading reappears in the 1995 Revised NC, where we read that pupils “should be encouraged to read widely and independently solely for enjoyment” or that pupils’ contact with texts from the English heritage should be “through activities that emphasise the interest and pleasure of reading them.” (DFE & W.O., 1995: 19 & 20) However, any reference to pleasure is left out both from the 1990 NC, which adopts a more utilitarian approach, and from the 1999 NC, where pupils are expected to read texts for meaning or in order to understand the author’s craft. (DFEE & QCA, 1999: 34) Moreover, enjoyment does not feature at all among the descriptions used to determine a pupil’s level of attainment, which means that it might be sometimes set as an aim but is not really to be counted in the end-result. Thus, it seems that the

⁸⁹ See DES & W.O., 1989, §7.10, 7.16.

⁹⁰ See DES & W.O., 1989, §7.3, §7.15 & §7.19.

model of literature reading promoted by policy makers is mainly functional, expecting pupils to act in a detached and dispassionate way.

So, ideally, a literature reader should be acquainted with a range of texts from the English literary heritage as well as from different genres, historical periods, cultures and traditions. In addition, she should be able to approach them critically and comment on aspects of their content, structure and style, while it is also emphasised, in some NC versions more than in others, that pupils should show consideration of a text's function, evaluation and reception. Through their contact with literature, readers become aware of different perspectives on human experience, gaining thus a fuller view of life and humanity. Moreover, they change as individuals and as members of society, by becoming more mature at a spiritual, moral, social and cultural level. Even though policy documents present a whole array of aims that a literature reader should fulfil, still the description of attainment levels for reading refer only to some of these aims.⁹¹ Thus, in these statements, pupils are rated mainly on the basis of their familiarity with certain texts and of their ability to approach these texts critically, focusing on specific textual aspects. Occasionally, it is indicated that pupils should express their response, opinions and preferences, or give personal responses, but what is meant by 'personal' is left rather hazy. However, in these descriptions of attainment levels there are no references at all either to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development or to pleasure and active involvement, even though these are often mentioned with regard to literature reading in other parts of the documents. It seems that the National Curriculum keeps alive the Arnoldian rhetoric of literary education as a way to maturation and betterment, but at the same time tries to downplay it in the attainment targets, where a more utilitarian and technical approach is promoted.

2.B.v. Pupils – a genus of their own

In nearly all the policy documents examined, pupils are treated as a homogeneous and unified group that follows the programme of study designed by central authorities. All references are to 'pupils' as if all children attending state schools belong to a group with common characteristics, thus forming a genus. They are all expected to conform to a specific model of development as speakers, readers and writers, a model that conceptualises growth as a progress through a linear series of stages. Even though it is not stated clearly whether the suggested levels of attainment have a descriptive or a prescriptive character, the modality of verb phrases leaves no doubt in the reader. All the 'shoulds' that are used so extensively create an image of school as a regulatory institution with a formative effect on pupils, even though there is care to present the whole model of development as incontestable and natural.

⁹¹ See DES & W.O., 1990: 7-10; DFE & W.O., 1995: 28-29; DFEE & QCA, 1999: 57-58.

On the whole, official discourse does not really admit pupils' home cultures into school as there are just a few such references and these can only be found in the first stages of schooling. For example, in the 1990 NC it is suggested that at key stage 1 "reading activities should build on the oral language and experiences which pupils bring from home" and that:

Teachers should take account of the important link between home and school, actively encouraging parents to participate and share in their child's reading, and supporting pupils where this is not possible. (DES & W.O., 1990: 29)

A similarly insignificant role is attributed to pupils' home cultures in the 1995 Revised NC, where the only reference is the suggestion that materials should also include "interesting subject matter and settings, which may be related to pupils' own experience or extend beyond their knowledge of the everyday." (DFE & W.O., 1995: 6) With the exception of these few references to home culture, pupils are discussed as *tabulae rasae* that need to be guided to an understanding of the English literary heritage, while they will occasionally be encouraged to look to texts from other cultures to enrich their perspectives. As has already been discussed, these 'other/different' cultures that are to be represented in a literature class are only specified in the 1999 NC and they include texts from former British colonies across the world. There is nowhere the suggestion that these particular texts and cultures might have been included on account of being the home cultures of a substantial percentage of pupils attending British schools. Pupils are not discussed as having a culture of their own, let alone one that might be different from school culture. The only indication that there might be discordance between school and home culture can be read in the paragraphs on the issue of Standard English. Apart from the references to dialect, official documents construct a rather rigid and uniform image of pupils, as if there are no gender, social, or cultural differences between them. Teachers' concerns with the exclusion of pupils' identities from a class have been voiced in the context of the heated debate that ensued from the introduction of NC with regard to its treatment of Standard English as opposed to other dialects.

The only document where differences between pupils are addressed is the 1999 NC, which includes a section called 'Inclusion: providing effective learning opportunities for all pupils'. (DFEE & QCA, 1999: 42-50) It is pointed out that teachers should take into account any differences between pupils that might relate to their gender, social or cultural background, ethnicity, SEN, disabilities, or linguistic background. Thus, it is suggested that:

teachers need to be aware that pupils bring to school different experiences, interests and strengths which will influence the way in which they learn. Teachers should plan their approaches to teaching and learning so that all pupils can take part in lessons fully and effectively. (ibid., p.43)

However, this acknowledgement of diversity does not really permeate the whole curriculum, being instead a side element that does not affect the linear approach to development. Teachers might have the flexibility to choose "knowledge, skills and understanding from earlier or later key stages so that individual pupils can make progress and show what they can achieve", but the notion of having a settled hierarchical framework is not questioned. (ibid., p.42) The aim is to

ensure equality of access to the curriculum for all pupils by attending to their diverse needs, seen as a result of their different backgrounds.⁹² What remains, though, a permanent quality of the curriculum is the centrality and uniqueness of 'English' culture as 'the' school culture. Moreover, the 1999 NC does not really pose a challenge to the fact that the national curriculum prescribes a naturalised path of development for all pupils, denying them the opportunity to co-author it.

2.B.vi. Telling silences

The National Curriculum is published by central authority bodies, after a consultation process with teachers, academics and other interested groups. An effort is obviously made to find a compromise among different trends and interests, and amendments are added to appease pressure that comes mainly from teachers, even though their influence is more direct on some documents than on others. For example, in the first version of the NC for English no list of suggested texts and authors was included, as a result of teachers' strong reactions against such pronounced prescriptiveness. Out of all the NC versions, it was in the writing of the 1999 NC that English teachers and their national association, NATE, had a more direct influence and effect. (Moore, 2001) Official documents also reflect a government's agenda and frame for thinking about education, which means that a change of government is also followed by change of the dominant discourse on education. The first two versions of the NC were issued while a Conservative government was in power, whereas the last one was composed under a New Labour government. Interestingly, both political parties have kept faith with the notion of a curriculum common to all pupils and determined by central authorities, being limited only to partial changes of policy. Nevertheless, it is impossible to give a clear-cut account of the politics involved in the production of official documents, since a number of conflicting tendencies operate at any time and compromises are constantly made, resulting in a shifting ground.⁹³ Overall, though, and despite the fact that consultation for the writing of these texts could be described as relatively open, the texts that come out of this process are closed, setting texts for study and prescribing fixed frameworks for reading.

What is surprising is how reductionist and unimaginative the National Curriculum documents are, which is even more striking when one remembers that they come out after a fecund and lively debate on the teaching of literature that has gone on for more than a century. In an effort to create a set of guidelines that would be acceptable to all and would not raise serious opposition, the writers of these four documents have tried to make a distillation of 'commonly held' assumptions

⁹² Kearney criticises this 'entitlement curriculum' as a disguised form of exclusion and points out that the change of government in 1997 did not bring a change "in any ideological or practical sense" with it. (2000: 25)

⁹³ An interesting account of the politics and shifts in the writing of the NC versions can be found in Brian Cox (1995). At some point, he condemns the fact that there is often secrecy about the consultations and negotiations made. "It is typical of curriculum development under NCC, SEAC and SCAA that

and of the ‘best’ practice, but have come up with something blunt, evasive and contradictory. Even though any version of the NC is a constructed ‘ideological’ text, still their rhetoric assumes an air of objectivity and neutrality, as if they are describing a set of indisputable principles. It is interesting to note that they do not give a history of the subject as similar official documents in older times used to do⁹⁴, creating the impression that it is possible to abstract the present from its historical context. Moreover, in all these official documents, there is utter silence about the theoretical framework that underpins the dictated model of reading, which has the form of definite statements rather than suggestions open to discussion or subject to change. Under an assumed air of simplicity and naturalness, the impression is created that any discussion of the rationale underlying the suggested practice is irrelevant. The document with the most explicit discussion is the ‘Cox’ Report, which is also the one closer to the ‘personal growth’ model, with its insistence on enjoyment, experience, personal and social development, creative response etc.⁹⁵, while the 1999 version tends towards the ‘socio-cultural awareness’ model with its emphasis on cultural and social diversity.⁹⁶ However, irrespective of the slight variations between these documents:

successive governments have developed a homogeneous, Anglocentric, and increasingly rigid curriculum, tested through a narrow set of assessment procedures and policed by an inspection with an equally narrow definition of ‘excellence’. (Kearney, 2000: 20)

The result is that all four versions of the NC are full of silences, and a whole range of notions is left unaddressed and vague. Why is only literature written in English included in the curriculum, to the exclusion of all literatures written in other languages? What is the relationship between English and these ‘other/different’ literatures, which are included but are left unnamed? What are the criteria applied for the selection of the suggested authors? Is it a matter of quality, of representativeness, of diversity, of relevance, of sampling the history of literature? And how is any of these to be evaluated? For example, in the 1990 and 1995 NCs there are many references to ‘high quality and ‘major writers’, hinting at a ‘literary canon’, but there is no explicit discussion of how these are to be evaluated. What is the relationship between literary texts and reality or culture? What is a reader’s role in the reading process? The prevalent view in the studied NC versions is that a reader needs to ‘extract’ the meanings to be found *in* a text, without the slightest consideration of who or what determines these meanings. And yet, this goes against the view established in recent writings on literature teaching that readers interact with a text, having a crucial role in the construction of its meaning. What is meant by ‘moral’ or ‘emotional’

responsibility for changes of this kind is kept secret.... this secrecy seems to me completely unacceptable in a democratic society.” (ibid., p.140)

⁹⁴ For example, *The ‘Newbolt’ Report* (1921) included a section on the history of English as a subject and so did *The ‘Hadow’ Report* (1926).

⁹⁵ Commenting on the ‘Cox’ Report, Brian Cox argues that it “combined the best of traditional and progressive approaches to education”, reflecting the 1980s consensus about good practice in the classroom. (Cox, 1995: 3)

⁹⁶ As for the 1995 Revised NC, Kirtley argues that it is dominated by the cultural heritage model of English, thus being “increasingly remote from some of the language demands facing students as the millennium approaches.” (1996: 1)

development through reading? Why are notions like ‘moral’ or ‘social’ development left out of the descriptions of the attainment levels, even though they are part of the aims? The liberal humanist view of literature as a means for social, personal or moral development is endorsed in these official documents, and yet it seems that only lip service is paid to it and the attainment level descriptions promote a rather utilitarian and technical approach to literature reading, based on end-results rather than process.⁹⁷ Why is enjoyment and pleasure to be found only in the margins of some of the NC versions and why are these completely left out of the other versions or the attainment levels? It is not only that official documents do not discuss these issues at all; most importantly, they do not even consider that these issues should be brought into question.

Pupils may be present in most sentences of the official documents, but they are in the subject position of passive voice constructions: pupils ‘should be alerted’, ‘will be exposed’, ‘should be given opportunities’, ‘should be encouraged’, ‘should be taught’, ‘should be given access’, ‘should be introduced’ and so on. The agent in these constructions is either the teachers or is left unspecified, blurring the issue of authority. It seems that teachers are those in charge of ushering pupils through the path of development suggested by official discourse. However, they do not have the space or the responsibility to determine their pupils’ particular needs and to work out a course of action in cooperation with their pupils, since they have to operate in the context of a specific curriculum and syllabus. A whole mechanism of controls, such as inspections, nationally organised tests, publication of quantified test results and so on, has been put in place to verify their conformity to dominant discourse.⁹⁸ Thus, official documents promote a view of literacy as “a unitary, single skill defined by what a reader can or cannot read”, “a monolithic, once-and-for-all literacy which it is the duty of school to provide.” (Fox, 1996: 173, 174)⁹⁹ Even in the 1999 version, where diversity among pupils is acknowledged, albeit along deficiency lines, even there, the promoted model of literature reading allows for no diversification and leaves no room for the exploration of identity as a multifaceted, contradictory and fluid phenomenon.

⁹⁷ Brian Cox describes the attainment level descriptions as “wooden and often gloriously imprecise. There is lack of examples and specific detail.” (1995: 150) Or, “the generalisations sound grandly significant, but are just woolly.” (ibid., p.151) Moreover, he argues that progression is described in a very ambiguous and questionable way. (ibid., pp.151-153)

⁹⁸ This could be seen as part of the recent governments’ insistence on surveillance and authoritarian restraint, that favour measures like child curfews, suspensions, discipline etc.

⁹⁹ Dombey (1996) also holds a similar view of the promoted framework.

Chapter 3

The English teachers' perspective

As I explained in the introductory chapter, I interviewed seven English teachers, all of whom work in state secondary schools in the London area. Four interviews took place in June 1995 and the rest in May-June 1998.¹ Out of the seven English teachers I interviewed, four were heads of English departments. All of them were white English and there were five women and two men. Most of the time these discussions were part of my visits to their schools and would take place alongside classroom observations. All interviews started with a discussion of their childhood and their memories of reading literature as children, both at home and at school. In response to some very open questions, they talked about their childhood books, their parents' attitude to reading, their teachers at school, the books they read there and what they would do with these.

PART 3.A. – TEXTS AND AUTHORS

3.A.i. *Textual meaning*

A careful reading of the interviews shows that there is no uniform conception of textual meaning to be found in all of them, even though there seems to be agreement on the relative importance of some aspects. Thus, the view that textual meaning is fixed and inherent in a text is voiced alongside the idea that a reader is vital in the creation of multiple interpretations. Interestingly, these seemingly contrasting views are sometimes to be read in the very same interview.

Meaning is sometimes discussed as something that can be found *in* a text, something that ought to be brought 'out of it'. Accepting that meaning is definite implies that a text can be 'known', a knowledge that is acquired through a trained reading that grants power to a reader. According to such a view, it is possible to grasp a text in its entirety and to understand it 'fully', so long as a reader reads it many times and closely. (e.g. Claire/247)² For example, Claire teaches Dickens to a class "going through it in great detail, making them see *all* the jokes and really getting them to talk about, I suppose, *every little thing, every little detail*" (Claire/244; my emphasis), Cathy wants her students "to *know everything* about that book and to *have it at their fingertips*." (Cathy/243; my emphasis)³ The idea that meaning is to be found in a text validates certain readings while rejecting others, as there is the issue of a reader getting "to *really* appreciate

¹ See Appendix 1.B. for the timetable of the interviews, Appendix 4.A. for a short presentation of the English interviewees, and Appendix 5.A. for the full text of the interviews.

² All references to the English interviews are given as follows: interviewee's invented name/page number. Page numbers refer to Appendix 5.A., where the full text of the English interviews can be found.

³ See also Liz/228.

literature” and to “*actually ... understand the poem.*” (Claire/246, 247; my emphasis) Such an approach opens up the big and problematic questions of who has the authority to decide which readings are right and which are not, what are the appropriate criteria to be applied, or what should be the purpose of reading. It should be noted, though, that it is only in some of the interviews that this view of textual meaning as fixed is expressed or hinted at, and even then, it is not voiced in a very assertive way, while the questions that would arise from this viewpoint remain untouched. For example, Cathy thinks it is possible to know everything about a text and she, as a teacher, emphasises certain features in a text, bringing things out for students. She admits that:

sometimes, [...] there is a danger that one can underline and state and prescribe too much, because one doesn't have the courage to take the risk of letting some miss the point and some find the point in their own way... (Cathy/243)

However, she never explains who is to decide which points ought to be known about a text, or how these are to be determined and verified. The issue of authority and power is left unaddressed, as though it is self-evident.

So, it is often assumed that there are certain things about a text that need to be known, comments whose omission from the analysis could prove serious. Interestingly, this insistence on identifying a number of fixed points about a text is voiced more urgently and by more interviewees when the issue of centrally organised examinations is introduced. As both Cathy and David point out, teachers feel the pressure of examination requirements very strongly upon them and admit they sometimes resort to prescription to help their students get through them. (Cathy/242; David/233) And according to Jennifer, the closer terminal examinations are, the more teachers have to ensure that students are in a position to reproduce the ‘right’ analysis of a text in writing, even if this is at the expense of a more creative exploration of textual meaning.

...we are going to give them room for that [i.e. for different readings]. But, when you're doing GCSE exam work you haven't got room for that. *You've got a right answer really, to give it to them.* [...] So, lower down there is room for interpretation and there's certainly space for different readings. [...] [But you cannot always do that] because *you are constrained by the right answer.* [...] Because their questions have mark schemes very tightly connected to them. [...] there are certain things you have to say in order to be able to get a high grade... [...] *they literally tick these exam questions with a list next to them of points that they're supposed to have raised.* (Jennifer/255; my emphasis)

It seems that there is no uniform approach to texts in all years of secondary education, as the effect of examinations is catalytic and makes the idea that texts are open to different readings give way to an unquestioning submission to the ‘right’ answer. Even Jennifer, a teacher who comes out in the interview as an enthusiast for creative ways of reading, succumbs to the philosophy of the examination system that promotes the view of a ‘right’ interpretation.

Interviewees refer to texts as entities that have a presence of their own in a class and expect student-readers to approach and get to know them. Rather than students creating these texts through reading, it is a matter of them listening to the distinct voice of literary texts and engaging

in a dialogue with them. Often the verb phrases used to describe the reading process present texts as having an independent existence while the challenge for readers is to recognise these structures and understand them. David speaks of 'interrogating' (David/233) and 'questioning' (David/233, 234, 235) a text, Jennifer of 'interpreting' it (Jennifer/255), and Claire of 'making statements' and 'asking questions about it'. (Claire/250) Texts are present in a class to answer questions, which readers are expected to ask either in a gentle or, sometimes, in a more forceful way. Student-readers are challenged to 'look at' a text and its constituents – its themes, plot, characters, humour etc. – and to 'understand' it. The more knowledge one has of a text, the more authority she has and the more she advances to a higher level of response. Thus, success in reading results in a text 'coming alive' (Jennifer/252) and a reader getting to know what it 'means' or what it 'is' (Cathy/243), both notions based on the idea of a text as a presence that should be pinpointed with clarity and lucidity. At other times, texts are discussed as worlds, places of interest that student-readers should visit and familiarise themselves with. Then, reading becomes a journey through the paths of a strange land while readers are seen as travellers whose whole attitude, beliefs and habits, are affected by this experience. Susan talks about texts that might not open up right after the first page (Susan/239), Jennifer about 'going into a text' (Jennifer/254), and Claire about 'accessing' a text and 'getting deeper and deeper in it.' (Claire/244, 245, 247 etc.)

However, the view most commonly expressed in the interviews goes against such a closed conception of reading, arguing instead for openness. Most of the time most interviewees support the idea that a text gives rise to a range of interpretations and that there is no natural meaning in a text.⁴ Not only can textual evidence be used in different ways, but also a text "does not communicate the same thing and to everybody in the same way." (David/235) Especially when students are given time to work in groups instead of doing whole-class work, a number of different readings comes across, which means that the flourishing of multiplicity in interpretation is a result of the nature of activities set and of the space given to students to construct and express their own readings. (Jennifer/255) And yet, as Jennifer points out, this approach does not mean that 'everything goes' and that students can say anything they want; any interpretation needs to be grounded in the text under study for it to be valid.

So that there is a danger that students could take something like that and get the wrong impression and I'm not going to say 'Oh, yes Whatever you say is right! You can interpret this in any way you want.' Because I don't want that message. It's too important for them to get it wrong. So, we do point things out. It's very flexible, I think, depending on the text that you're reading. (Jennifer/255)

Sometimes, the different readings of a text are thought to differ in terms of depth of analysis. Thus, Claire accepts the idea of multiple meanings but is prompt in explaining that these are only different layers of meaning and the deeper one gets in her reading the more levels she will understand. (Claire/247)

⁴ See, for example, David/233-4; Jennifer/255.

Occasionally, interviewees fall into contradictions or are ambivalent about the fixedness or openness of textual meaning. For example, at some point in his interview, David asserts that “there isn’t simply a kind of natural meaning to a text”, arguing for the existence of strong alternative readings and of personal readings. (David/235) However, a couple of minutes later he discusses his efforts to make students look at “what they were needing to sort of fully understand and appreciate the story”, alluding to the possibility of a ‘full’ understanding and appreciation of a text. (David/235) Similarly, Claire is somewhat wavering in her discussion of textual meaning.

I think your different experiences will necessarily mean that the way you approach a text or things you can relate to in a text... or it will have a certain meaning for you that someone else may not see. However, I think there are meanings in texts... There are different interpretations, of course, because people have different experiences. But two things about that really. One is that I think that underlying that there is basically a meaning there which... you’re trying to understand something deeper than individual, different experiences. Like different experiences are coming from a different ethnic group, being a man or being a woman, there’s sort of underlying, human characteristics or issues about being a human being, and being in a relationship, that I think, in a way, are more important for me personally. (Claire/249)

Despite her admission that interpretations differ as a result of a reader’s personal experiences and background, she nevertheless asserts the existence of certain ideas to be found *in* a text, which it is a reader’s task to discover. These ideas are not changed or affected in any way since they relate to experiences that are deeper and more universal than those of gender or ethnicity. (Claire/247, 249) Students should be encouraged to relate to a text and to express their personal interpretations, especially in group discussions, provided that they are also directed to its core meaning. “They may not agree but I think you can channel them to access ideas.” (Claire/250) However, Claire is not clear about who has the authority to decide what is the intrinsic meaning of a text that must not be missed or what are the essentials of human nature that all students should get to know.

And if I ask them questions, set them activities which ask them questions, they’re usually directing them towards something that I understand in the text, but I appreciate that I may read it differently because my experiences will be different to theirs. However, I’d probably think that my reading was more valid than theirs though, but I wouldn’t say that to them... But I would believe that, you know. [...] But I would keep it to myself. And, in that sense, I’ve never oppressed them and say ‘your opinion is not valid.’ (Claire/250)

Even though she sees her reading as more valid than the students’ and guides them to it, she recognises that it is determined by her own experiences, being a personal reading all the same. It never becomes clear how the essential and indisputable meaning of a text is to be resolved, who is to do it or against what criteria.

Whatever the approach, seen as a presence with a distinct voice or as a strange world, having a settled meaning or being open to many interpretations, a literary text is assumed to proffer a whole range of experiences to readers. Cathy points out that “words open windows of experience” (Cathy/242), while both Susan and David argue that literature comprises the written products of anyone’s imagination that communicate experience to others. (Susan/237; David/231) Similarly,

for Claire, "literature is very important in life", as it can help readers understand life, relationships etc. (Claire/246) These experiences might or might not be relevant to those of student-readers. Whatever the case, it is seen as a precondition for a successful reading to *make* the texts under study relevant to them. It is thought to be essential to find a connection between texts and students, their lives and beliefs, bridging the possible distance in terms of time or place.⁵ As a starting point in the study of a text, Jennifer tries to find a link with students, relating it to their lives and identity.

There's a range of things you could grab from their experiences before you go into a text. [...] And, you'd be looking at how you can go in there and connect with the students and address their identity as well. You're looking at their identity and how... what... if you look at the text and you're thinking *what relevance has this got to our students, how does this address their core identity...* what... how can we make this relevant. And once it's relevant, then they become interested in it and they know how it connects with their lives. (Jennifer/254; my emphasis)⁶

It is assumed that a text can address a reader's core identity and it is mainly by means of such a connection that students find an interest in reading. Unless this sense of relevance is established, there is a danger that students might feel a text as being too remote and unapproachable, as having nothing to say to them. It is considered always possible for students to identify a relation between their personal experiences and those presented in texts, even with those texts that might be remote in time, place or cultural representations. Cathy declares: "I believe very strongly in presenting children with literature that is good, exciting and *relevant to them*, and *it is not, for me, an issue whether... the date when it was written.*" (Cathy/242; my emphasis) According to Claire, another factor that contributes to students' relating to literary texts is their quality. Even if a student does not have much in common with a text, still she can relate to it so long as the text is 'good' and she manages to 'understand' it. (Claire/249)

The idea that some relevance of experience can always be worked out between readers and texts, no matter what the differences regarding their background, culture or position in time and place, is based on the assumption that there is such a thing as an essential human nature. Readers are expected to recognise part of themselves in the texts they read, partaking in the common human experience that is communicated in literary texts. However, interviewees do not talk about what determines the differences between readers or what the common ground is that all readers share that makes them feel connected with literary texts. Although it is often stated that students' experiences and background are instrumental in their reading, still it is usually left unaddressed in what ways these determine any differences in the process of meaning making. Moreover, even though it is often pointed out that students should make the association between their personal experiences and those portrayed in a literary text, what is not really discussed is how these common experiences come into being, what they depend on or how we perceive them.

⁵ See, for example, Claire/244, 248.

⁶ See also Claire/248.

Only Mark's interview differs as he addresses an issue that remains untouched in the others, that of intertextuality and power. For him, there might be a correspondence between a student's experiences and those of a text.

In some cases I have been really clearly and strongly aware of a direct... a student making sense of a text and a student feeling the power of the text because of a kind of one-to-one correspondence between something in the text and something in his or her immediate direct lived experience, whatever that means. (Mark/262)

However, he points out that this is not always the case and so it should not be the sole justification for the inclusion of texts encoding and embodying a diversity of cultural experiences in the literature curriculum. Texts do not simply furnish us with clear reflections of the world that exists out there and of human experience of it; instead, they are part of a tradition, making use of generic conventions and having links with other texts, literary and others. At any time a text has its part in a power game, and they might give a sense of new possibilities and openness or of closure.

It's also to do with the extent to which we can read a text because of our ability to place it within a tradition, a set of generic conventions with which we are familiar. [...] A narrative can provide a link with other narratives, other stories, other ways of telling as well as with what lies outside the literary or the filmic world and in the... world." (Mark/261, 262)

Thus, he introduces the idea of power in a discussion that otherwise would have concluded that the relationship between experience and its articulation in texts is unproblematic and straightforward.

3.A.ii. *Authors in class*

Reading the interviews, one is surprised at the unimportance of authors in the reading of literature in class. Whether they discuss their aims, strategies or teaching practice, teachers rarely refer to authors and their art. In most cases, authors' names are used as a denotation of a corpus of texts rather than of some real individuals with a physical presence. For example, when Jennifer says "we do not read Shakespeare sitting down behind desks" (Jennifer/254) or when David says "most teachers do Shakespeare at GCSE" (David/232), they refer to his texts rather than to the individual. There is no sense of authors as persons with intentions, feelings or thoughts, and student-readers do not face the task of identifying the authors' intended meanings. Students are invited to look at texts and the context of their creation rather than to try to reconstruct their creators' inner life. For example, when Jennifer wants to read a poem by Seamus Heaney about his father, she does not ask her students to think about the poet and his father, but instead invites them to discuss their own father instead. (Jennifer/254) Students and texts are the centrepiece of class readings rather than the authors' experiences and intentions.

As an exception to the above pattern, there are two interviews where writers are treated as living individuals, whose intentions can be read in their texts. Cathy wants her students to study "the way that a skilled writer manipulates words" so as to "learn about thinking processes, about the

way words grow up towards a clarification and [...] how words enrich your thinking.” (Cathy/242) In this example, writers occupy the position of an acting subject who makes conscious decisions and who can benefit students with her skill. Such a treatment of writers is more pronounced in Claire’s interview, where students are expected to read a text many times, because in this way they can learn “to appreciate how a writer has chosen language for a specific purpose, why they’ve put language together in that way” and “begin to understand the kind of images the poet has used and why they’ve used them.” (Claire/247; see also Claire/245) So in these two interviews, authors are seen as an agency having certain intentions and using their skill to achieve a certain effect on readers. As for students, they are expected to study a text diligently in order to make out its creator’s intentions and to appreciate her choices and the beauty of her language.

Notwithstanding the above interviews, in the other few cases when writers appear in the interviews, they are not discussed as individuals, whose intentions can be discerned and whose unique skills can be beneficial to readers, but as persons who belong to social and cultural groups, often being identified with reference to their gender or ethnic identity. For example, Liz talks about ‘women’ writers (Liz/227), and David about finding a “balance between male and female writers” or ending up with the ‘old syndrome’ of teaching the ‘dead white males’. (David/236) Finally, Mark emphasises the importance of the curriculum including texts that represent and reflect on “experiences of otherness, experiences outside any sort of narrowly defined or circumscribed notion of Englishness or European-ness”, not only for multicultural classes but also for classes with a unified student culture. (Mark/260, 261) He discusses the impact that the reading of ‘black African Caribbean’, ‘Irish’ or any other-than-white-English author can have on students, inspiring them to bring their own identities and subjectivities to bear on their class reading. (Mark/260, 262) In most interviews, writers are not seen as individuals who function in a purely private sphere, and readers are not treated as a-sexual, a-cultural and a-social beings who read their texts and gain from their enlightened reflections. Instead, writers are defined in terms of their culture, or else of the position they create for themselves in culture, and the reading process cannot be conceived irrespective of its agents’ identity.

Once authors are understood as persons with a social identity instead of as gifted individuals, the construction of the literary canon and of the National Curriculum is questioned as well. There might still be teachers like Cathy who talk about ‘great writers’ unquestioningly, while David talks about a feeling of entrapment in the ‘canon’ that most teachers have and a weakness in making a confident and clearly justified choice of a text outside it. (David/236)⁷ However, this

⁷ In particular, David points out that, influenced by their own upbringing and trapped in the dominant tradition, English teachers might be at home with classic texts from the 18th and the 19th centuries, but still find it difficult to suggest a modern text for class study or to be clear and positive about their choice and the criteria applied. He senses that teachers feel compelled to use texts that “have a certain way to them. Not

attitude seems not to be the rule. Most interviewees problematise the notion of literature, what it includes or how the corpus of literature is constructed. For example, Susan, David and Liz describe how they have gone through a change of mind over the years, continuously widening their understanding of the literary to include a wide range of texts. They have reached a point where they argue that nobody can give an unambiguous definition of 'good' literature as our concept of literature is a formed one. The way they see things now literature can be anything creative, anything that gives pleasure and enjoyment, the written product of anyone's experience and imagination.⁸ Their questioning is indicative of the move to reconsider the idea of the 'literary canon' that prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s. Mark commends the work that was done in the 1980s and the 90s in many classrooms, and particularly in areas like Inner London, where "there has been a much more serious attention paid to writers of literary texts who have come from outside any sort of narrowly defined notion of Englishness." (Mark/260) He is critical of the new National Curriculum as offering fewer opportunities for such exploration and promoting the idea of the English cultural heritage as a white construct. (Mark/260, 262)⁹ In such a framework, students' writings are also seen as literary products, and authorship is thought to be accessible to all. Instead of treating literariness as an unproblematic concept and the privilege of some outstanding individuals, literary texts are seen as the products of persons who have a position in the nexus of socio-cultural power relationships. Instead of asking students to search for and try to re-construct the authors' intentions and inner thoughts, most interviewees invite them to focus on the texts themselves and their context, treating authors as social beings whose identity is defined along the lines of gender and ethnicity.

3.A.iii. *Text selection*

Even though the National Curriculum and examination requirements or certain practical issues circumscribe English teachers in their choice of text¹⁰, still they enjoy a certain degree of freedom to choose the specific texts to be used in class. Their decision is determined by a range of factors that relate to syllabus demands as well as to their students' particular needs. First, the age of the group they work with affects their decisions, as they see their students being interested in different texts. For example, students who are more than twelve years old despise stories with animals even

necessarily just great literature but a certain sort of importance or a certain level." He points to some unspoken consent among teachers to follow a tradition, whose criteria of evaluation he considers to be left obscure. (David/236)

⁸ See Susan/237; David/231; Liz/227.

⁹ See also David/236.

¹⁰ The interviewees' views on the NC and examinations will be discussed later. (see 'Under the demands of the National Curriculum and of examinations') Certain practical issues, such as lack of time or availability of texts in cupboards, are mentioned in the interviews as a restriction on teachers' choices. (Claire/248; Liz/227, 228) So for example, teachers might have to use texts that are short and simple in terms of syntax and vocabulary instead of more demanding ones, because all students have to follow the same pace and the weaker ones cannot cope with difficult texts. (Liz/228-9) Or they might have to use short stories instead of novels, because there might not be enough time for the re-readings needed for students to really 'appreciate' it and "to see the significance of things." (Claire/248)

if they are interesting ones (Susan/239), while advanced classes like discussing more difficult texts that do not fit in any category. (Liz/227) Interviewees distinguish between literary texts on the basis of their intended reading public, considering that different groups favour different genres, and notions like 'adult', 'teenage' or 'children's' literature are not uncommon in the interviews.¹¹ Another factor that influences their choice of text is the gender of the group they teach. There seems to be common agreement that boys and girls do not approach texts in the same way, having different reading habits and preferences. Some interviewees point out that in mixed schools texts are chosen with different criteria in order to interest boys, a selection process dictated by the need to discipline them. Things are much better in girls' schools where a wider range of texts can be covered, because girls are more eager and open.¹²

Keeping in mind the above, interviewees apply three criteria for the selection of texts, even though each puts more emphasis on one or the other. First, almost all of them argue for the study of texts that are 'relevant' to students, their culture and experiences, as a means to excite their interest and assist them in discussing not only texts and characters but also themselves.¹³ As Jennifer points out, the use of 'relevance' as a criterion in the choice of texts is one of the things that distinguishes the teaching of literature nowadays from older times. (Jennifer/254) The idea is that students are more motivated to read texts that are 'relevant' to them and these are thought to be the texts that depict characters of the same background, culture, gender etc. As David explains:

Although we want to extend what sixteen, fifteen, sixteen-year-olds read we want them to be able to get a grasp on it as well. We don't want it to be too far removed from what they feel and they understand and what they can get to grips with. So, we're often looking for things that we think 'yes, they will at least get that initial enthusiasm for...', whilst hopefully extending them as well. (David/236)¹⁴

It should be said, though, that interviewees use the notion of 'relevance' differently, depending on how they conceive identity and culture, an issue that will be discussed later, in the section on 'Students as readers'.

Second, the criterion of 'diversity' is put forward, with Mark arguing for texts to be selected on the basis of their function as 'openings' into a place of exploration and searching. Admitting that sometimes there might indeed be "a one-for-one identification" between a reader and a figure in a text, still this is not the only function and aim of reading, because:

...the way that any of us reads texts isn't simply to do with a kind of naïve identification with characters, their predicaments or a sense that the world of a text represents in some way a reflection of the world that we know. (Mark/261)

¹¹ See, for example, David/230; Jennifer/254, 256.

¹² See Liz/227; Susan/238.

¹³ See Claire/249; Jennifer/254; Cathy/241-2; Mark/261-2; David/234.

¹⁴ See also Jennifer/254.

So on the one hand, the texts chosen should offer representations that open up space for students to explore issues of their interest, such as gender or sexuality.¹⁵ In addition, and maybe more importantly, a wide range of texts and authors should be chosen that would give students the opportunity to explore their own subjectivities and contribute to their empowerment. (Mark/261-2) The very idea that a person who is non-English might possess authorship, and thus in some sense authority, can be very intriguing and empowering for students. (Mark/260) However, he argues that the use of texts offering a range of different perspectives should not be limited to schools with a multicultural intake, since their study can also prove fruitful in all-white schools, even if for different reasons. "Partly because, however all-white the school and the local community might be, it's still part of a society which is absolutely clearly and forever a multicultural society." (Mark/261) In Mark's framework, the criterion of 'relevance' is not seen as exhaustive and texts are also expected to open up new perspectives and to invite students to a consideration of otherness and of difference. Other interviewees also talk about their efforts to bring students into contact with a broad range of genres, periods, literatures and cultures, even though they do not give the same significance to this diversity and treat it in a more neutral way.¹⁶ Through such exposure, students gain experience in reading and enrich their habits, a real need for some who are thought to be 'years behind in relation to their approach to texts when they come to school.' (Susan/239)

Apart from 'relevance' and 'diversity', the criterion of 'quality' is also brought up when discussing the selection process. Interviewees like Susan and David opt for texts that are 'good', meaning those texts that abide by the equal opportunities principles and are non-racist and non-sexist. So they might use texts that present strong female heroes or might try to achieve a balance between male and female writers.¹⁷ However, there are other interviewees who use the notion of 'quality' ambiguously. For example, Claire thinks that 'relevant' texts are 'easier' for students because of community of experience, but she always makes sure that the texts she uses in class are 'good'. "I would never choose a text unless I thought it was a valid text in its own right, it was a good book", she says. (Claire/249) 'Good quality' is a priority for her and she expects all students to become familiar with the 'good' texts included in the syllabus, if they are not to 'miss out'. (Claire/246, 249) Similarly, Cathy talks about all children acquiring some knowledge of the 'great writers' and laments the way 'pre-twentieth' literature is being treated nowadays.

...it was taken for granted that we would read pre-twentieth literature in my day. It was not labelled 'pre-twentieth literature'. It was simply 'good literature'. Now, it is put into a

¹⁵ Mark gives a number of examples of such selections. For example, he argues that with teenagers it is better to use *Romeo and Juliet* than *Othello*, because the latter deals with "problems that confront older people in a relationship", whereas the former gives "a dynamic representation of adolescent sexuality", thus being more relevant to their concerns. (Mark/261) Similarly, it is important to use texts that offer representations of a multitude of characters, both male and female, because texts like *Henry IV (Part I)* who have very few female parts might bore and exclude girls from the reading process. (Mark/261)

¹⁶ See, for example, Susan/238; Jennifer/254; David/235.

¹⁷ See Susan/238; David/236.

sort of ghetto called 'pre-twentieth-century literature'... Special courses are provided to help teachers to teach it. And... yet the whole labelling process seems to me to make it more remote from children. I believe very strongly in presenting children with literature that is good, exciting and relevant to them, and it is not, for me, an issue whether... the date when it was written. (Cathy/242)

For her, there are 'good' texts that are recognised as such at all times and by all readers. However, neither she nor Claire explain what it is that makes a text 'good' so that readers ought to read it, and the function of such texts is left undiscussed.

Through the interviews, it becomes obvious that English teachers have spent time thinking about the texts that should be included in the literature curriculum and have tried to have their say in this, recognising the constantly developing character of the subject. It is recognised that books read in a 1990s class are very different from those read in a 1950s class, as a result of the dramatic changes that took place after the mid 1960s in the teaching of English, making English a more interesting and exciting subject than it was.¹⁸ Criticising the construction of the national corpus of class literature on the principle of an imperialistic overarching Englishness that is rigid and censorial in the way it presents Otherness, efforts have been made in areas like Inner London to pay attention to "writers of literary texts who have come from outside any sort of narrowly defined notion of Englishness." (Mark/260) Such readings prove particularly rewarding to students at multicultural schools, since:

... the simple fact that they have had the opportunity to read texts that represented and reflected on experiences of otherness, experiences outside any sort of narrowly defined or circumscribed notion of Englishness, or European-ness, has been important, has been a validating experience, has encouraged students to see themselves as learners in a more positive light, I suppose. (Mark/260)

In conclusion, it seems that interviewees are constrained by a range of factors in their choice of texts for class study, such as student's age and gender, time constraints, examination and syllabus requirements. Bearing these in mind, they single out texts on account of their 'relevance' to students, their 'quality', their 'relevance', or the openings they provide for a consideration of notions such as identity, otherness or authorship.

PART 3.B. – WHERE THE PRACTICE MEETS THE AIMS...

All interviewees have a number of aims rather than a single one, some of which are rather ambitious. Literature teaching is not seen as limited to the simple reading of some texts – even if we assumed that there is such a thing as a 'simple' reading – but is considered to have wide-ranging effects upon readers. Through literature teaching, students can acquire a good 'knowledge' of texts, can develop the skill as well as the habit of reading throughout their lives, can think about the reading process itself and what it involves and so on. The effects of literature teaching are thought to be multifaceted, contributing to students' linguistic as well as personal development. The general impression is that interviewees are satisfied with the progress and

¹⁸ See David/231; Susan/238; Jennifer/254.

current shape of literature teaching, considering that it serves well the aims they set. Present practices are discussed as 'more open-ended', 'adventurous' and 'personal', with 'infinitely wider approaches' (Cathy/241), 'giving access' (David/232), being 'imaginative' (David/231), 'active' (David/233; Jennifer/254), 'relevant' (Jennifer/254; Claire/248), 'interactive' and 'essentially collaborative' (Susan/238; Mark/259), creative (Susan/238), 'much more alive' (Jennifer/254), giving a sense of 'fun' (Mark/259) and so on. The general mood is completely changed from that of their discussion of past practices, indicating a different conception of texts, of the reading process and of a reader's role in it.

A wide range of approaches is employed, depending on students' level of ability as well as on other factors.¹⁹ David stresses that teaching in classes, where there is a mixed range of abilities and a number of ESL or SEN students²⁰, is different from teaching literature at A' level, where one deals with the most able students. In an effort to make literature accessible to all, teachers might vary their teaching strategies, having different expectations from different groups of students. For example, in a mixed ability GCSE class there might be more group and pair activities than in an A' level class where there might be more teacher-led work. (David/232, 233) Another factor that determines teaching practices is the students' cultural background and the ethos of a school. Thus, in a multicultural London school, the agenda of a literature class might be different from that at a denominational school or at a school outside London. (Liz/229) The management of an English department is also indicated as a determinant factor for the prevalent teaching practices. For example, Liz observes that the approach in the Roman Catholic school where she used to work in the past and where the English department was man-led was very different from that in the inner London school with its woman-led English department where she works now. In the former, most of the work done was 'morally straight' and involved mainly comprehension, a far cry from the active learning approach of the latter. (Liz/229)

3.B.i. *Acquiring a habit and a skill*

Most interviewees make it clear that they do not consider it enough for their students to be acquainted with a set of literary texts. They also want them to get into the habit of reading, a habit to have for the rest of their lives, because "literature always has something to say to you, to help you understand your life, to help you understand relationships." (Claire/246) In addition to the knowledge of a corpus of texts, students should also become independent and autonomous readers, able to read texts on their own and without any guidance. (Liz/228) For this, their confidence needs to be boosted and they should get a sense of power as readers in order that they will not be intimidated by a difficult text and give up easily. (Susan/239, Mark/259) Unless they feel motivated and skilled in the reading of literature, they will be dismissive of texts and refuse to

¹⁹ See David/232; Liz/228; Cathy/241.

²⁰ That is, students with English as a second language (ESL) or with special educational needs (SEN).

devote the time and effort necessary for the task. (Claire/249) Interviewees explain that literature is used to foster literacy and a whole range of activities, such as dramatisation, reading in groups etc, is put into practice to secure this outcome.²¹ Susan says she does not mind students reading 'junk' texts so long as they practise reading. (Susan/238) Her pejorative reference to some texts as 'junk' and at the same time her effort to justify her consent to such readings show how she is willing to do everything, even to compromise her standards, in order to foster the habit of reading in her students. Claire thinks that by doing a close and detailed analysis of some texts in class, students will realise that there is something worthwhile in reading.

...they'll think that there's something there for them to read. They won't just dismiss it immediately: 'Oh, it's boring, I can't access it, or I don't know what it's about and I won't read it. (Claire/245)

She also points out that people should read literature, even if they do not study it, thus distinguishing the act of reading texts from that of studying them. (Claire/246) So despite their differences, all interviewees agree on two things: they all want their students to get into the habit of reading literature, and second, they all think that the teaching of literature fosters literacy.

3.B.ii. The pleasure of reading

Enjoyment also features in a prominent position in the list of aims that the interviewees put forward, as literary texts have a beauty that is worth taking delight in, a poetry worth listening to.²² Susan even argues that the umbrella of her whole literature teaching is her wish to develop enjoyment in children of literature and suggests that there should not be too many interventions in class reading in order to avoid destroying students' enjoyment of literature. (Susan/238) Apart from the strictly functional effects that literature is expected to have upon readers, interviewees want their students to learn how to get pleasure out of reading, which is seen as the least gain they should have from reading, even if they do not manage to advance in their reading skills.²³ It is interesting to note that both the habit of reading and the skill of taking pleasure from texts are discussed as something to be learnt and developed, and not as something natural and instinctive. Still, the idea of pleasure is left a little hazy and does not necessarily sit well with some of the other aims that interviewees set for literature teaching.

3.B.iii. Levels of understanding

The reading of a literary text in class is described as a series of stages, with each step rendering a new understanding of the text under study as well as of the very nature of literature. Interviewees talk about their efforts to mould lessons on the model of a reading act and about their students gradually advancing towards a satisfying grasp of a literary text. At the first stage, they try to

²¹ See, for example, Mark/259; Susan/237-8.

²² See, for example, Susan/237; Liz/228; Mark/259.

²³ For example, Liz regrets the fact that her previous students in a working-class school were not very keen on literature lessons, arguing that it would have been worthwhile if they had acquired the habit of reading for pleasure. (Liz/229)

make their students establish a connection between the text under study and their own lives, experiences and culture.²⁴ It is assumed that in this way students are captured and become interested in carrying on with the reading. Claire describes a lesson where students were invited to discuss the function of mirrors in their own lives, before they even looked at Sylvia Plath's poem 'Mirror'. First, they talked about themselves, why they look in mirrors, whether they think mirrors tell the truth or not, about looking at your life in a mirror and searching for who you are, and then, they speculated on what the poem could possibly be about, based on its title. It was only after a long discussion about themselves and their expectations of the poem that they read the poem itself. (Claire/248) Thus, before they even read a text, there is an attempt to make students see that the issues tackled in it bear some relevance to their own preoccupations and interests, so that they will have the motivation to carry on with the reading, expecting that the text under study will have something to say to them. Even from the start, it can be seen that a lesson in literature is not limited to the *reading of a text* but is a *reading of one's life*. Students in Claire's class do not just read Sylvia Plath's poem, but are encouraged to review their own lives, starting from very simple and everyday activities, such as looking into a mirror, and moving on to the most abstract and philosophical matters, such as the relation between reality and appearances or the search for oneself and so on. This reviewing takes place in a public context, making the reading of one's life a collective affair.

Most interviewees grade responses to a text at different levels, identifying some as higher than others. As students grow older, they mature and become more experienced as readers, thus achieving a more 'detailed' and 'elaborate' response. At the low end of the scale, students are expected to look at a text as a whole or at big sections of it, being able to understand the basic story, the situations presented and the characters involved.²⁵ At this level, teachers want their students to grasp the characters and the relations between them, as well as to consider their motives, reactions etc. To this end, they might draw diagrams of the characters' relationships or make use of a range of back-up materials, such as film, stage or animated versions of the text under study, shortened or taped versions etc.²⁶ Most interviewees stress that unless students become familiar with the story and its characters, they cannot really move on in their reading. In Jennifer's words: "once you understand the situation, it's like a puzzle, a crossword puzzle of some kind, unravelling things." (Jennifer/254) There is some sort of reflection on readers and reading at this level, but this is not made explicit yet. (David/234) It is interesting to note that interviewees refer to these textual elements such as the 'story' and the characters as being unambiguous and open to all readers, and some of them discuss their efforts to 'get these across' to students. For example, Claire depicts vividly her students' difficulty in perceiving what goes on in a text:

²⁴ Jennifer calls this part 'the launch' as it opens the way into a text. (Jennifer/254)

²⁵ See David/232, 234; Jennifer/254; Claire/246.

But, the other thing [...] *is giving them* an understanding of the text. Because a lot of them find it very difficult with that kind of text *to even understand* what's going on, to really place the characters. [...] And, I find a lot of the time they don't even really understand who's talking and who's who. So if they don't get that sorted out at the beginning, they just tend to switch off. So I would spend a long time of course *checking* that they understand who's who, maybe drawing diagrams of... if it's a complicated story, once they've read it, who the characters are, *making sure* they understand who the characters are, how they relate to each other. So that, as well as the skills of learning what to look for, they also have a pretty good understanding of who's who and *what's going on really*. (Claire/246; my emphasis)

For her, getting a grasp of a text's storyline and characters is the first step in reading, something that is indisputable. Apart from the story, interviewees also want their students to look at the context of the text under study and its historical background – a task that is not always easy because of a text's remoteness in time and place.²⁷ It seems that at this level a text is being treated as a narrative, where a narrator tells a story about some characters, a story that revolves around similar issues to those that preoccupy students and the people around them. This narrative is not treated as an abstract entity but is seen as an artefact that has its position among human constructs.

This is the initial level of response, described as 'less detailed' or 'more kind of imaginative', that all students are expected to achieve; even those who might never manage to develop their response any further. However, some interviewees stress that not all students move on to the high level of response which is mainly developed at A' level. For example, David admits that from most students they "don't expect a hugely great response", being satisfied with a simple recounting of the story and something simple written on a character, without much detail. (David/234) Claire argues that in order for students to reach this high level they need to have both discipline and motivation:

the motivation would have to come from them and in a way that is excluding lots of children who would never have the motivation from within themselves because they've never got it from... maybe, from home... And, they think they can't do it. They think they can't access. (Claire/246)

Even though she goes on to say that this skill can also be taught, still she claims that "very few of them will really appreciate literature", admitting that most students are left out. (Claire/246)

At the next stage of reading, students are urged to look at the language of the text under study and at the authors' stylistic choices, having a response that is more 'sophisticated', 'grounded' and 'intensive'. (David/234) It is only after they have a good grasp of the story, its context and characters, that students are expected to "go in and start pulling a text apart", regarding its metaphorical language (Jennifer/254), questioning it closely (David/233), looking into the deeper layers of meaning (Claire/247), talking about an author's choice of specific words "and all the implications that those words normally have for them" (Claire/245), as well as analysing its structural features, such as the narrator, the point of view or how a writer builds up suspense.

²⁶ See David/232; Claire/246, 248.

(Claire/245) They do not necessarily expect their students to bow to the writers' artistry in the use of language. For example, David asks them to treat it as another form of language, pretty much like their own, in some "sort of a demystifying process." (David/232) The broad consideration of whole sections of a text that we had at earlier stages gives way to a more detailed and intensive study of smaller parts and to the renewed understandings offered by successive readings.²⁸ It is among the A' level students that one can look for such a high level of response, as opposed to the more general readings made at GCSE. (David/234) Here, students are expected to support their views with 'evidence' from the text under consideration, keeping thus their reading 'in' the text and making close references to it. (David/233-4)²⁹ So, at this stage, students are invited to think of a text as something more than a narrative, taking heed of the particular features that make it a distinct construction of literary value.

At the final level of response, interviewees expect their students, especially those doing A' level, to move beyond the text under study and on to a reflection of the nature of literature, of interpretation and the construction of the literary canon. There is also encouragement to examine what reading entails and what a reader does while she is involved in the process. An effort is also made to problematise the relationship between a reader and a text, between readers and different interpretations, or even the very nature of a literary text.³⁰ Even though issues of interpretation might also be tackled to some extent at GCSE (David/234), it is mainly at A' level that students consider questions such as whether literature should include only 'the received canon' or anything written, what a text is and whether a film or a programme should also be treated as 'texts' and so on. (Susan/237) It is also at A' level that students are expected to look at the relation between a reader and a text, considering how 'a' particular reading comes out and placing their own interpretation alongside other alternative ones. (David/234) Interviewees do not consider literature reading as something simple and self-evident that comes 'naturally' to anyone; instead, they see it as the outcome of an acquired and gradual process that is first learnt at a conscious level to be then applied subconsciously. In class teachers guide students to break down the process, looking at the structure of a text, making predictions etc, with the hope that students will later follow this process in their personal readings.³¹ So we see that students progress by degrees: they begin by identifying some relevance between a text and their own lives, move on to understand it as a bare narrative, then as an artistic creation, and finally they end up with a consideration of the nature of literature and the function of interpretation.

²⁷ See David/233; Jennifer/254.

²⁸ See Claire/245, 246, 248; David/234; Jennifer/254.

²⁹ For Claire the skill of detailed and complex reading is taught in English but not in Media studies. (Claire/246)

³⁰ See, for example, Mark/259; David/234.

³¹ See Susan/238; Claire/245, 246.

3.B.iv. Activities for active readers

Most teaching practices described by interviewees are based on students assuming an active role in the reading process throughout, from the introductory point to the final stages of stylistic analysis and written expression. Teachers have moved away from the practices of the past, where they had the dominant role in the production of the authoritative reading and literature lessons had a rigid question-and-answer format. Instead, interviewees talk about students as active participants in the shared readings constructed in the context of a literature class, and most of the activities that are set serve this end. From the very beginning students are asked to get involved in the process by considering the text under study in the light of their own lives and experiences and identifying points of relevance. It is considered better for students to start off from *their* standpoint before they move into the world of a text, an act that demonstrates readers' decisive role in the reading process and its outcome. When the time comes for reading a text, it is sometimes the teacher who presents it to a class as a whole, while at other times, students take turns in reading it to the rest of a group, a practice that is commended for its good results with weaker students as it boosts their confidence. (Susan/237-8)³² If the text under study is a play, then different students act parts out.³³ Apart from a teacher it is also the students who read a text aloud in class, all these different voices creating different meanings out of it. Moreover, the fact that a text is read not once but many times gives students the opportunity to see something new in it at each reading. (Claire/248) While reading a text in class, teachers sometimes face a dilemma regarding the explanations they ought to give. As Liz points out, all students need to follow at the same pace. If a text is too difficult, then a teacher has to explain difficult vocabulary, a practice that might prove tedious and an enemy of enjoyment. On the other hand, if they do not explain anything, then students do not have a clue about what they read. As a result, one needs to be very careful to keep the balance and facilitate students in their reading, without, though, making too many interventions.³⁴ It is only when a text is too long that students read it at home on their own before they work on it in class. However, in those cases teachers take care to choose interesting and engaging texts in order to motivate students into reading.³⁵

Once students have become familiar with a text, they engage in a dialogue *with* it as well as *about* it. Discussions might be in the context of a whole class, in groups or in pairs, allowing enough space for participants to elaborate their personal readings.³⁶ Students are expected not only to think about a text but also to share and debate their views with the others, contributing to a collective reading. David urges his students to be deeply interested in reading, articulating strong views:

³² See also Liz/228; Claire/248.

³³ See Liz/228; David/233.

³⁴ See Liz/228-9; Susan/238.

³⁵ See Liz/228.

³⁶ See Liz/228; David/233-4; Jennifer/255; Claire/248.

What you want ideally to do is obviously to get an argument going about it, you want strong views to come across, you want them to care about the way things come across and feel strongly about them. (David/234)

Similarly, Susan singles out the interactive parts of a lesson as the most enjoyable and successful ones, when everyone works together and is totally involved in the reading process, describing them as the 'magic moments'. They might last for only three minutes in a term, but still their effect is so strong that they make up for all the work a teacher has to do. (Susan/238) Mark goes further than that and describes all reading of literature in class as a collective activity:

the reading that happens in the classroom is essentially collaborative. [...] It isn't just that collaboration is something that happens round the edges of the process of reading which can be characterised as simply leading towards the classic bourgeois reader, individual, isolated, a consumer of novels in splendid isolation. (Mark/259)

Such a view of reading as a collaborative project alludes to a joint creation of meanings that need to be seen in context. At the same time, though, Mark is highly critical of the National Curriculum for the model it projects and promotes of 'a' reader with 'a' text, with the text delivering up its meaning to the reader. (Mark/259) Teachers have now and then criticised this misrepresentation, but still he thinks that it "isn't recognised anything like enough" while the examination requirements often force teachers and students to disregard the interactive nature of class reading in favour of an artificial situation, a contradiction they need to balance. (Mark/259)

Interviewees describe a range of tasks they set to their students, which encourage a study of characters, of structure and plot as well as of language. Regarding the study of characters, students are invited to interview them, to put themselves into their shoes and engage in role-playing etc, thus being encouraged to look at their reactions, motives and psychology.³⁷ Concerning the structure and plot, students are asked to make predictions on what is to follow, to continue the text under study, or to insert a 'missing' part or chapter.³⁸ As for the language study, they might translate parts of a text into other forms of English, into their own language, or even into other genres, to see the significance of the code employed.³⁹ For example, David talks about translating Shakespeare's language into Modern English, Cockney or West Indian English (David/232), while Jennifer talks about turning *Julius Caesar* into *East Enders* and making use of the soap operas, a genre that students love. (Jennifer/254)

Interestingly, most of the tasks are drama-type activities, where student-readers are invited to participate in the production of the text under study, visualising and giving a voice and body to it. Students might act out parts of a text, recreate scenes, transfer a scene into another context, design the setting, play music to accompany its reading, etc.⁴⁰ Texts are not treated as something to talk

³⁷ See David/233; Jennifer/255.

³⁸ See Susan/238; Jennifer/255.

³⁹ See Jennifer/254-255; David/232.

⁴⁰ See Susan/237-8; David/233; Liz/228; Jennifer/254.

about, but as something to *do* things with. Jennifer's description of a lesson on Shakespeare is representative of this attitude:

We do not read Shakespeare sitting down behind desks, but we're up *doing things with it the whole time*. There's *an active thing* because it's supposed to be read like that. So, we have people up from their seats running around the room. It's chaos when we do Shakespeare. It's just completely people running about shouting, and we have musical instruments. And... it's *much more alive* and the students love it. They really do. (Jennifer/254; my emphasis)

Reading a text is not exhausted in acquiring a 'thorough knowledge' of it, but is also seen as an opportunity to use and expand the imagination. "We get into kind of acting... the text itself kind of interacting with them... a notion of extending and using their imagination." (David/233) These tasks are in fact dictated by the interviewees' view of reading as an active learning process. "It's that sort of more active involvement with the text rather than the details or specific language features." (David/233)

In general, it seems that in a literature class there are not only the voices coming from texts and teachers to be heard; students' voices have to be added to these. Jennifer remembers that when she was in school "we were very respectful of Shakespeare and we just don't do that any more." (Jennifer/254) This mention of 'disrespect' shows the sense of increased freedom enjoyed by students in their interaction with texts and the expectations for them to be more vocal in their reading. Throughout a literature lesson, at every opportunity students are encouraged to play around and engage in a dialogue with texts. They are expected to be 'present' in a literature class and not to leave themselves outside the classroom door; that is, to be present as individuals who have a voice of their own and who can feel as well as think.

3.B.v. *Putting it in writing*

After the discussions and other oral activities in class, students are expected to put their reading into writing. Many interviewees distinguish between two forms of writing, the creative and the formal. As examples of creative writing they mention students continuing a novel, devising a different ending, inserting 'missing' scenes, chapters or dialogues, keeping a character's diary, making the storyboard of a poem etc.⁴¹ Such writing makes them familiar with different points of view, among other things. Formal writing on a text is used only with older students, from Year 9 upwards, and includes the traditional critical essay, the difference nowadays being that there is more explicit teaching of the rules of essay-writing, with the use of brainstorming, paragraphing, talking about essays, redrafting etc.⁴² Even though most interviewees argue for the use of both forms of writing in class, it seems that some like Liz, Claire and David do not treat them as similar in quality or degree of difficulty. So creative writing is considered a relatively easy task for students, whereas formal writing is thought to be more exacting for them. The former might be

⁴¹ See David/233; Liz/228.

⁴² See Liz/228.

enjoyable and suitable for use with weaker students, but it does not include detail or clear argumentation, and students' work lacks any sort of structure, as they just put things down randomly. On the other hand, the latter requires the highest level of response and systematic argument, which means that students need to learn how to write in a logical way.⁴³ Taking into consideration the difference between creative and formal writing, Liz argues for a balance between the two, while Claire insists that students should do imaginative writing only after they have understood "what's actually on the page" and have produced a detailed commentary on it, lamenting that "most of the time they're not asked to do that; they're just asked to do imaginative writing pieces." (Claire/247) And even when they do creative writing, she would prefer them to do only a bit of that so as "to motivate them" and "to get them interested", but then to move on to more academic writing on literature earlier on in school. (Claire/248, 246)⁴⁴ Both Claire and Liz explain their deep commitment to formal writing with reference to their own education, a testimony to the significant influence that teachers' past experiences have on their practice.

3.B.vi. *Knowledge and personal development*

As has been discussed, interviewees want their students to acquire the habit of reading and to enjoy it, while at the same time, a lot of emphasis is put on their reaching the 'higher' levels of response. Students are taught to approach a text, being encouraged to move from 'simple' to 'detailed' readings. For this to be achieved, students' active involvement is considered indispensable. The assumption seems to be that the more actively students get involved in the reading process and with a text, the more they will develop at a personal level, a development that is linguistic, cognitive, spiritual and emotional. First, at a cognitive level, students are expected to get to know a number of literary texts, chosen from those indicated by central authorities. As was discussed in the previous section, there are different trends among teachers regarding their conception of 'literature', with some defining it in a more inclusive and wide-ranging way than others. Faced with the task of teaching a set of texts, teachers describe and justify their practice differently, depending on their understanding of the literary phenomenon. Those who subscribe to the established literary tradition uncritically, consider students' familiarisation with it to be necessary simply because "those texts are worth reading." (Claire/246) For example, Claire argues: "I think that it's about giving them access to something and if it's worth reading, it will be worth reading to everybody" (Claire/249), while Cathy expects her students to obtain "some nodding acquaintance with some of the *great* writers, such as Shakespeare and Dickens." (Cathy/242; my emphasis) On the other hand, though, interviewees like Mark and David adopt a different stance, introducing the idea of empowerment and deconstruction.

⁴³ See David/234; Liz/228.

⁴⁴ It should be noted that even though she does not depreciate the value of imaginative writing, still she does not consider it to be directly relevant to the reading of literature. Instead, she thinks it is more fit for a lesson on art or in primary education. (Claire/247)

Other aims... I suppose particularly thinking about literature with a capital L, the canon, whatever. Giving the students we might teach a sense that they're not excluded, that the canon isn't something that exists for other people, that it's something that they can have access to and can have useful and valuable things to say about, and that their ways of reading a canonical text are no less valid than other readers' ways of doing it. (Mark/259)

Instead of bowing to the canon, he aims at demystifying its reading and empowering his students in their role as readers and critics.

In addition to knowledge of a corpus of texts, some interviewees want their students "to have some awareness about how literature has developed", pointing to the teaching of a sketchy history of English literature. (Cathy/242) Such knowledge comes through their reading of texts over a long time, including older as well as modern ones. (Susan/238) Other interviewees, such as Susan and Liz, aim for their students to come into contact with a wide range of genres and styles. The rationale behind such variety is that students have wider perspectives the more texts they read and the more enriched reading habits they have. (Susan/238, 239; Liz/228; David/232)

Interviewees are rather ambitious and expect a lot from the reading of literature, as it is thought to foster readers' linguistic and personal development, having a deep influence on their appreciation of language as well as on their thoughts, attitudes and feelings. In the first place, the development that comes through reading relates to children's grasp of language. Through the teaching of literature students become "curious and alert to different uses of language" (Cathy/242), while they appreciate languages, others' as well as their own. (David/232)

Further to students' linguistic progress, literature reading is thought to contribute to their personal development, an idea that is emphasised in all interviews. Admitting to the influence of the educational thought of the sixties and the idea of whole-person development (Cathy/241-2), Cathy explains that "reading is part of personal development. It teaches in a very tangible way how to think and how to feel." (Cathy/242) David expects his students to look closely at a text and to try to understand the characters it depicts, getting into their shoes, a process that helps them encounter different behavioural patterns, attitudes, reactions and interactions. (David/233) Thus, the reading of a text provides the space for a reading of life, people and the world. Literature broadens children's minds (Susan/237), extends them and their imagination (David/233, 236), gives them space in which to think, address issues and develop empathy (Liz/228; Mark/259), helps readers understand their life and relationships (Claire/246). It also gives the opportunity to write and talk about major social issues, such as sexism, racism etc (Susan/237; Liz/228), and about feelings like ambition, guilt etc. (Cathy/242) Through their interaction with literary texts and as they come into contact with wider perspectives, students learn how to think about life while their fixed ideas and prejudices are challenged. (Susan/237) They have the opportunity to consider how the themes that are presented in texts emerge in their own culture and compare the different contexts. (Jennifer/255) In the context of literature teaching in class, texts connect with

students' lives and address their core identity. (Jennifer/254) Thus, the reading of literature provides children with an extending and developing experience that has a formative effect upon the whole of them. However, this idea of personal development can sometimes be open to question. For example, why should we assume that students would be willing to have their philosophy of life challenged and still consider the reading of literature to be pleasurable? Or, how should the students' relation to the textualised 'life' and 'characters' be understood?

PART 3.C. – CASTING THE ROLES

3.C.i. Students as readers in time and place

A significant part of the interviews is covered by a discussion of students' particular reading habits and responses to literature. The notion of difference pervades students' presence in literature classes: their backgrounds are different, and so are their experiences and levels of ability, all differences that determine their response to texts. Differences do not feature in the same way in all interviews; they are seen sometimes as a matter of individual particularities and a result of personal experiences (e.g. Cathy or Claire), and at other times as dependant on students' identities and sense of belonging to different social groups (e.g. Mark or Susan); sometimes as a drawback and a problem that needs special attention (e.g. Claire or David), while at other times as an asset they can capitalise on. (e.g. Mark or Jennifer) Teachers take these differences into account and select texts that are relevant to their students' experiences in order to interest and motivate them to read, or vary their teaching approaches, depending on the group and its level of ability.

All interviewees emphasise the multicultural nature of their schools, all of which are in inner London.⁴⁵ They all recognise the significance of such diversity and take it into account when they decide which texts to study or how to approach them. When they try to detail the differences between students, they employ the traditional descriptive categories of ethnicity, gender and class. First of all, many of them distinguish between boys' and girls' relation to reading, arguing that it results in their uneven performance at school. It is with boys that things are difficult, whereas girls are well motivated, read a lot and have greater potential to tackle issues and discuss ideas. These gender differences compel teachers to select different texts and teaching strategies depending on the kind of school they teach at and whether it is boys', girls' or mixed.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that interviewees speak of these differences casually as of something that is common knowledge and has been much discussed. They do not delve into the causes of these differences either, treating it as a given. Only once, in the interview with Liz, I suggest that they might be due to a different education and upbringing, with which Liz agrees. (Liz/227)

⁴⁵ See, for example, Jennifer/254; Mark/260; Claire/249; David/232-3.

⁴⁶ See Susan/238; Liz/227; Jennifer/255.

Apart from gender, interviewees note that there are systematic differences between students depending on their class. In particular, working-class children's performance in a literature class is seen as very different from that of middle-class children. The former are described as children with low expectations for their lives, who are not very willing to read literature, thinking that reading is 'uncool'. On the contrary, middle-class children are 'active' readers, who are surrounded by plenty of books at home and consider reading to be 'cool'.⁴⁷ Liz remarks that when there is a majority of middle-class students in a school, then the working-class children are inspired with an eagerness to read as well. (Liz/229) In general, students' home background is thought to have a decisive role in their attitude towards literature and reading. Those children who have plenty of books made available to them at home, who are encouraged to read or are taught to use a wide vocabulary, feel more comfortable with 'difficult' texts and see reading as a pleasurable worth-while activity.⁴⁸ These students are familiar with a wide range of genres and styles as a result of their home education, whereas others come to school years behind in terms of their approach to texts.⁴⁹

Another factor that contributes to students responding differently to literature is their culture, an issue that is discussed by nearly all interviewees, though not in the same way. There seems to be wide agreement that students from different ethnic groups do not approach literature in the same way, because of their different culture and experiences. Most interviewees regard this difference as a problem that needs special attention. For example, when it comes to a discussion of differences between students, Susan and Claire talk about the difficulties that children from immigrant communities encounter with literature reading. In class, these children may not be vocal, may have very low-esteem, may get low grades or they may "barely do anything in class." (Claire/249; see also Susan/239)⁵⁰ The result is that the gap between them and the other students is large. Susan speculates that, for example, the Bengali girls' poor performance may be due to financial difficulties at buying books, to their lack of freedom and heavy family duties, or even to their long absences from school. David points to immigrant children's limited English as one of the reasons for their difficulties (David/232), but goes on to argue that other problems may also hinder their progress. Regarding new arrivals, for example, it might be their experience of other educational traditions, where literature does not have the status of a 'serious' area of the curriculum.

Sometimes there are differences in terms of literature traditions, but also the way they see or what they see in literature as being. I think pupils that often come from some cultures see language teaching both in their own languages but also in the learning of English as a very formal exercise and don't necessarily see literature as a part of that. So, it seems strange to them that we do a course, particularly at GCSE, which has quite a heavy

⁴⁷ See Liz/229; Susan/239.

⁴⁸ See Susan/237, 239; Cathy/240; David/232.

⁴⁹ See Susan/239.

⁵⁰ Saying this, Susan has in mind the Bengali girls at her school, while Claire refers to the black Afro Caribbean students of her previous school, who made up 90% of school population.

literature content. [...] I'm particularly thinking of a lot of African people... (David/232-3)

Even though English may be the language used in the education system of their home country, still its definition as a subject may be based on the study of grammar, without literature being part of the way it is taught or should be taught and this may put them off reading. Another difficulty that students of a non-British background have to deal with is their lack of familiarity with the context of a text, either of the times when it was written or of the times it might refer to. Their experiences may be so remote from the background of a text that they fail to achieve "any kind of cultural grasp." (David/233)⁵¹ Claire, Susan and David, they all discuss cultural difference as engendering problems that need to be analysed and solved, as associated with weaknesses and gaps that need to be dealt with. In their effort to deal with these obstacles interviewees talk about special departmental meetings that are held to address the problem (Susan/239), about special projects done so that students from 'elsewhere' can get a grasp of the cultural context of the texts under study (David/233), or about students who simply stop at some point and cannot make it any further. (David/234; Claire/250)

The above understandings of gender, class and cultural differences seem to rest on a conception of identity as a rather clear-cut and stable set of features that can be easily identified. For example, Claire talks about reading the novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* with a group of black children, because she thinks "they may be interested in the experiences of this black child growing up in America, and experience of alienation that perhaps they can relate to, because of their own experiences." (Claire/249) Similarly, she would choose to read *Educating Rita*, "because it's got a lot of issues about class and the importance of education, with a group of kids that I know *are basically like Rita*." (Claire/249; my emphasis) For Claire, a person is shaped by her colour of skin, age, class etc, all features that designate her as a member of a social group and are recognisable by those around her. So a teacher is thought to be in the position to discern her students' identity and she should use this knowledge to choose texts whose characters are *like* them. By making the appropriate selection, a teacher can always ensure that a connection is worked out between students and texts, even when students fail to see any relevance.

I think that the ideas will come from the pupils in the way they relate to the words on the page, but I think that for a lot of students they will never get that far *unless we teach them* how to read and how to look at a text. Because they'll dismiss texts and think that they are inaccessible, think that they don't have anything to say. Because they don't see how their lives or their ideas will relate to this text. (Claire/247)

⁵¹ David explains that it is not only students who come from 'elsewhere' who may face this problem; any student who is not knowledgeable about history may also have similar difficulties. This problem was more rare in the past because students doing A' level Literature would most probably do A' level in History as well. (David/233)

It seems as if teachers can help students read not only texts but also their own lives, identifying patterns and links they cannot discern when left on their own; an approach based on the assumption that teachers know both texts and students well.⁵²

Contrary to the above view that foregrounds the problematics of difference, Jennifer and Mark discuss it as something to be cherished rather than stifled, as an integral part of class reading rather than an element that is allowed some space only because it cannot be helped. For example, Jennifer explains that cultural difference can prove beneficial, facilitating students' understanding of such difficult texts as Shakespeare's plays. So long as students get a grasp of the language, they may be more at home with the themes than their white classmates of the indigenous community, since these may be more of an issue in their own communities. So Asian students can easily understand the theme of arranged marriages, the idea of a forbidden relationship, the question of honour and male pride and so on, all themes that occupy a central position in plays like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Othello*.

So, one *can* make misconceptions... We can think that the background *does* affect but *not* in the way that most people think, that if you're coming from a household where you speak a different language, then they're going to find it very difficult to understand these things. In fact, that's not always the case, because the culture might even be so advantageous to them that it will help them to gain a deeper understanding in some cases. (Jennifer/255; her emphasis)

So a teacher should be careful not to fall into the trap of having prejudices or misconceptions about students' cultures or abilities, as they might be surprised at their response. (Jennifer/255) Rephrasing my question⁵³, Mark argues that reading in class is not simply about 'accommodating difference', but about using "students' sense of their differences as an active constituent in the reading process." (Mark/262) He talks about choosing such a wide range of authors and texts that will make it possible for students "to bring their diverse identities, subjectivities into the classroom and to make use of them together in reading the texts that we read together." (Mark/262; see also Mark/260, 261) So, in Jennifer's and Mark's interviews, it is not a matter of regretting the obstacles raised by cultural differences and seeking ways to overcome them, but an issue of using differences as the fundamental element upon which to structure collective class reading. The underlying idea behind this approach seems to be that 'identity' cannot be easily pinned down. Rather than trying to contain students in simplifying descriptions, it is better to create the necessary space for them to explore and review their identity themselves.

⁵² While teaching at the Greek community schools of London, I would often ask my students whether they discussed what we did in our Greek classes with their teachers and classmates at their English schools. Without exception, they would all deny mentioning anything about their Greek schools and what they did there. This is an issue that Claire does not seem to take into account: the idea that students might censor what they let others see of their home life and culture. It is questionable whether a teacher can claim full knowledge of a student's life and experiences.

⁵³ My question was: "Do you mean that the differences can be accommodated in a class? Differences in all sorts of ways, differences in terms of the students' background, cultural and social background, and differences in terms of the ways of reading, approaching a text, and so on. Is it possible to accommodate

In sum, interviewees do not discuss students as individuals who operate in a vacuum. Instead, they see them as subjects who, apart from being members of a literature class, are also part of a community, which in its turn is part of a wider multicultural society. Reading subjects are determined to a degree by their environment, while their identity, ability and understanding of the world is directly related to their sociocultural background. In most of the interviews, subjectivity is discussed as constituted by experiences of gender, class and culture, all of these analytical categories being understood in a rather set and rigid way. Due to their different background, students experience texts differently, bringing about a range of responses. Their responses are often thought to be different in terms of quality and are hierarchised, with some seen as more sophisticated and advanced than others, as if progress in reading follows a single path. Thus, girls, middle-class children and those of English origin are discussed as more successful in their reading than boys, working-class children or children of other communities. In the context of a competitive education system, differences in students' responses are recognised, only to be ranked. The 'better' and 'more interpretative' students are the more they can do on their own successfully, whereas those who are 'weak' need the help of a teacher to guide them in their reading in order not to miss the point. However, there are interviewees who see differences in a positive light, as the source of new meanings in students' exploration of identity. It should be added that all interviewees stress that they make these remarks based on their personal readings, observations and discussions with colleagues, without setting them forth as absolute truths. These remarks are indicative of their efforts to understand the multiplicity of reading in class, suggestions rather than categorical statements.

3.C.ii. The community of English teachers

Even though all my questions are addressed to interviewees as individuals, very often they answer using the first person plural, which sometimes refers to the English teachers of their school, while at other times it refers to all 'English teachers' as a group. First of all, it seems that many aspects of literature teaching depend on departmental policy, since teachers reach some sort of agreement not only on the texts to be studied, but also on the teaching materials, the methods and strategies used.⁵⁴ At each school, a departmental ethos develops through meetings, discussions and collaboration, and the role of the head of English is crucial to this consensus. Being a head of English, Susan takes part in the interviews of new teachers, and so has a say in who is to work in the department. (Susan/238) Liz also discusses the role that a head plays in the development of harmonious relationships between teachers, adding that she feels women leaders are better at it. (Liz/229) Interviewees do not sound resentful of the idea of working together with their

these differences, given the restrictions, the constraints of the National Curriculum?" (See Appendix 5.A., p.257)

⁵⁴ See Susan/238; David/235; Liz/227, 229; Jennifer/256.

colleagues. On the contrary, this cooperation creates a feeling of security and confidence, and is decisive in their development as teachers.⁵⁵

Further to a consensus at departmental level, English teachers seem to share certain interests and points of reference at a wider level as well. Susan explains that most English teachers are members of NATE, they attend courses organised by it, or read articles in its publications. (Susan/238) Liz and Mark point out that teachers who work at London schools share particular agendas, related to their multicultural intake. (Liz/229; Mark/262) Finally, David refers to teachers' publishing groups developing understandings of literature teaching that are commonly accepted by teachers across the country. Thus, teachers develop their understanding and practice of literature teaching in the context of a discourse, which is the outcome of interaction and joint elaboration. Interestingly enough, teachers are always 'teachers', seen either individually or collectively. They almost never identify themselves with reference to their gender, class background or culture. It is only Claire, when she argues that the techniques for reading need to be taught explicitly for the sake of working-class children, who invokes her working-class background as a justification for her knowing better. (Claire/250) However, apart from this remark, interviewees talk about themselves either as individuals or as 'teachers', but not as persons with a gender or a culture.

3.C.iii. Under the demands of the National Curriculum and of examinations

Despite teachers' leading position in class or their sense of belonging in a dynamic group, there is an authority more powerful than theirs: a centrally determined official policy that is manifested in the National Curriculum and the examination syllabuses. Many interviewees talk about it in a rather critical way as a philosophy that is imposed upon them but is not welcome. They know they have to operate within this regulatory framework but usually they are critical of these conditions and sometimes try to circumvent them. (e.g. Susan/238; Liz/228) First of all, the changes effected in the late 1980s and 1990s and the imposition of the National Curriculum receive sharp criticism from interviewees. When the interviews took place, it was the 1995 National Curriculum that was in use and it is to this that interviewees refer. According to Cathy:

the stresses over the teaching profession have become steadily worse and the emphasis in recent years seems to have become so much on administrative work and on record keeping of various kinds... and I'm being extremely uncomfortable for what we do. (Cathy/241-2)

She argues that these new duties distract teachers from their efforts to find new adventurous ways of making literature accessible to students. (Cathy/241-2) Moreover, by promoting a more technocratic approach to English and insisting on dry details, the National Curriculum "devalues by omission so much of the imaginative side of English and [of] the personal development that comes about through good English teaching." (Cathy/242) Even though she agrees with the

⁵⁵ See Liz/227; David/235; Susan/238.

teaching of the English literary tradition, Cathy criticises the idea of all children being expected to go through the same stages at the same time.⁵⁶ (Cathy/242)

Mark is more specific in his critique of the National Curriculum, questioning its text selection as well as the model of the reading process that it promotes. First, he attacks the selection of authors for its 'white' bias, considering it "in extraordinarily overt ways an encoding of a British imperialism, an English imperialism with a kind of blatantness that is quite shocking really." (Mark/260)⁵⁷ Besides, its representation of the reading that takes place in classrooms is false and misleading.

The conception of reading that underpins and is embodied in the National Curriculum documents, that actually doesn't recognise the extent to which reading happens amongst people, between people; that the model of reading in the National Curriculum is 'a' reader with 'a' text. The text delivers up its meaning to the reader. He'll comprehend its meaning more or less entirely, more or less correctly, almost. (Mark/259)

Not only does the National Curriculum impose a biased selection of texts and a fabricated model of reading, it also has a major impact on the power relationships developed in a class, in the sense that it releases teachers from their accountability to students. Mark remembers that in the 1980s when he handed out a set of books for study, he had to be prepared to explain to students why they would be reading that particular text. Teachers often found themselves in the position where they had to justify their choices, and this compelled them to pay more attention to text selection and the diversity of student population. However, after the National Curriculum came into force, things have changed.

What's happened in the 90s effectively is that if students asked that question both the easiest answer and the most truthful answer for a teacher to give is 'Because we have to. We have to.' And, it isn't just that that's uncomfortable for me. It's also that that closes off possibilities and it deprives students of power as well as taking away power initiative from teachers. (Mark/262)

So, the more prescriptive the National Curriculum, the less power teachers and students have and the less they feel involved in the whole process of reading literature.

The pressure felt from examination syllabuses is brought up again and again in the interviews. All interviewees stress that examination requirements have a marked effect on their choice of texts, on teaching methods and strategies, their expectations from students, as well as on the interpretations made in class.⁵⁸ Examination boards have rather strict marking schemes that deem only certain answers to be 'correct', and teachers are forced to become more and more prescriptive when examinations loom, contrary to their belief in a reader-centred and more open

⁵⁶ In particular, she says: "I don't think that it's necessary for every child to study a sort of set portion, [...] at exactly the same stage in their lives and jump through exactly the same hoop." (Cathy/242)

⁵⁷ At a later point in his interview, Mark also disapproves of the exclusion of the poet Seamus Heaney from the new NEAB GCSE anthology, which is to be used from 1999, on the grounds of its offering fewer opportunities to students "to bring their diverse identities, subjectivities into the classroom." (Mark/262)

⁵⁸ See Susan/238; Liz/228; Jennifer/255; Cathy/242-3; Mark/259-260.

approach to reading.⁵⁹ Other disagreements are also voiced: Susan points out that teachers might have to teach texts they do not like simply because they are on the syllabus (Susan/238)⁶⁰, Liz comments on the feeling of uncertainty generated by the constant changes of syllabuses and disapproves of the reduction in the number of texts to be studied for GCSE and A' level examinations (Liz/228), while David questions the block on studying texts in translation. (David/235-6) A strong regret is voiced for the fact that coursework has been left out of the new literature curriculum as it gave students more freedom to focus on texts and issues of their choosing and interest, making it possible for them "to follow their individual enthusiasms." (David/236; Liz/228) And Mark argues that the current system of accreditation does not support readers in gaining a sense of power over texts.⁶¹ (Mark/259-260)

And yet, even when teachers disagree with examination requirements and even if they try to circumvent them, they know that examination results are important for their students' lives, and as a result, they have to operate in this framework. (Susan/238; Mark/259-260) Thus, we see that teachers' authority gives way to the directives of the National Curriculum and of examination syllabuses that are imposed upon them. What is striking, though, is that the only references made are to the National Curriculum and the nationally organised examinations, while the centres of power that set down these directives, their nature and function, are left undiscussed; thus, the DFES, the educational bodies, or the examination boards are never mentioned. This silence might be because they felt that I would not be keen on delving into these matters, being a stranger to this education system. Or it might be a result of the anonymity shrouding all official documents, whose process of writing is obscured.

3.C.iv. *Living through contradictions*

In the context of a literature class, it is teachers who select which texts are to be studied, determine the pace of reading, ease students' way into texts, set the tasks to be dealt with, validate interpretations and so on. In a way, it could be argued that it is they who pull the strings in a literature class, since they determine the process of reading and confirm what is meaningful and what not. Students are expected to follow their directions and become acquainted with a number of texts, but most importantly, to learn what reading means and how it is done. However, all interviewees acknowledge that a very prescriptive approach is resented by students and meets with their reaction. Remembering how they themselves used to get bored and turn off when they

⁵⁹ See Cathy/243; Jennifer/255; Mark/259-260, 262.

⁶⁰ Susan explains that she has to read Hardy's novels in class, despite her dislike of them. In the Sixth Form she tells them her opinion, and then there is a debate, since some of them might hold a different view. (Susan/243)

⁶¹ In particular, he says: "The sense that I've just nodded in the direction of... the sense of readers having power over texts, readers having valid ways of reading a text, is clearly to some extent in conflict with a system of accreditation which is largely based on terminal exams, on ways of assessing students as readers that depend on them giving answers to questions that are posed by unseen unknown examiners in exam papers in exam rooms." (Mark/259-260)

read texts at school as students, they know that the reading process cannot be fruitful unless students appropriate it, fully participating in it. They all emphasise the need for students to see the relevance between their personal lives and the texts under study, while they set open-ended and inclusive tasks that ask for students' active involvement, allowing for different interpretations to come out.⁶² Consequently, they aim at the reading of literature being reader-centred and text-centred rather than teacher-centred, and at students having a major role in class.

This attitude, though, changes in the classes preparing for national examinations, where teachers feel they have to furnish their students with specific points on the texts to be examined in order to meet the demands of a rather rigid marking scheme that asks for the 'right' answer. (Jennifer/255) David remarks that teaching practices undergo a change at A' level and lessons become more 'teacher-led' and less based on 'group and pair activities' than before. He vividly describes the tension between what teachers would ideally want to do and what they end up doing.

I guess what we say overall is more or less ideally we're trying to get more group and pair activities for them to actively work together rather than them being teacher-led, 'in front of the class' stuff. I think it tends to happen quite a lot at GCSE, but it's more difficult for A' level because the groups are not that much sure, and maybe, we feel we have to get across more information. So, I think there is a tendency, I know by looking at people's practice, we're still doing much teacher-led work but ideally we want them again to be involved with text and do this kind of activities and actually look at the text themselves in groups or in pairs mostly as well. (David/233)

On account of students' feeling of uncertainty and the examination requirements, it seems that some teachers opt for a more didactic approach, doing most of the talking in class, to make sure things come out right and students know all the 'necessary' points before they enter the examination room. Mark knows that his understanding of the reading process is at odds with that promoted by the official policy, and yet, he has to find a balance between the two. As a result, he is aware that in his practice he oscillates between different stances and often he makes this clear to his students.

...for Year 11 students, students approaching their GCSE exams, my immediate aim, because of the imperatives of the exams, is to say 'This is an artificial situation. It's not in a sense like the real reading that happens in a classroom. What I can do is to offer you some tips on how to get through this process.' And, you know, that's different from what I might try to do, say, with a Year 9 group and introducing them to *Romeo and Juliet* for the first time, where there is more space for them to explore what's going on, there's more space in which they can operate as real readers of texts. (Mark/260)

Some teachers, like Jennifer, Mark and David, might resort to a more prescriptive approach but they do this only under the pressure of examinations. Rather than being happy with it, they are critical of such prescriptiveness and see it as an imposed situation that does not bear much relation to the reading process itself, being artificial and restrictive.

⁶² All these have been discussed in previous sections in this chapter. See 'Textual meaning' and 'Activities for active readers'.

Unlike the other interviewees who are conscious of the balancing acts they make, Cathy and Claire waver between different approaches, unaware of the compromises, thus falling into contradictions. Claire criticises the prevalent student-centred approach as “incredible” and “a big mistake”. (Claire/246) She goes against the view that wants children to be always entertained in class so that they will not be bored, arguing instead that children need to do more detailed, academic work from the early years of secondary education. For Claire, it is up to a teacher to identify the points of relevance between a text and students’ personal experiences, to bring these up in order to motivate them (Claire/246, 249-250), to provide them with “the frameworks for thinking about how to look at a text” (Claire/247), and to channel them to access the ideas in a text by giving them hints and leading questions. (Claire/245, 250) Her principal assumption is that a teacher knows what the authoritative interpretation of a text is and should take a more directive role, leading students to it in one way or another. And yet, at some points her assertive tone changes and she sounds ambivalent about her guiding role. Even though she thinks that her reading of a text is more valid, still she “wouldn’t say that to them”, keeping it to herself. (Claire/250) Even though she gives students clues that lead to the meaning she makes of a text, still she accepts that “it’s not for me to tell them the meaning.” (Claire/247) Even though she now adopts a didactic approach, still as a student she resented such a teacherly attitude. (Claire/244, 245)

Cathy admits to the pressure she feels as she is confronted with different views on the teaching of texts and has to answer crucial questions. Should she adopt a ‘stretched-finger’ approach, telling students what the meaning(s) of a text are? Or, should she encourage students to discover these meanings on their own, restricting herself to the role of an aid that gives hints and subtle support? At some point, she clearly opts for the second approach:

I love the moment when a child’s face is radiant with discovery and they say something like ‘so, that last paragraph tells us that...’, or ‘that means...’, or ‘now, I understand what that bit means...’, and they think they’ve done it for themselves and what you’ve done is no more than almost place the stepping stones in the river and they’ve got across themselves. It is *such a thrill!* (Cathy/243; her emphasis)

And yet, even though she would prefer to leave students alone to tread the path to discovery of textual meaning, she feels obliged to adopt a didactic attitude for two reasons. (Cathy/242-3) First, it is her experiences of reading literature at school as a child, in a setting where she managed to succeed, despite the fact that it was “very arid, very un-adventurous, and probably killed for many children their interest in literature”. (Cathy/240, 243) Second, she puts it down to the pressure of examinations.

And certainly when you’re teaching for an exam, you *do have to* be prescriptive. [...] I can’t afford, for instance, when I’m teaching *To Kill A Mockingbird*, to let children miss certain points because they have to go through an exam and they have to do as well as they can and I want them to know everything about that book and to have it at their fingertips so that in an exam they can write well. Therefore my duty *is* to prescribe and to say ‘this means...’, ‘that is...’, ‘you must remember this, this and this points...’. [...] In

limited time one wants desperately to get certain points across to children. (Cathy/243; her emphasis)

There is too much tension and ambivalence in this interview, a tension that is manifested in the very phrases she uses: 'I can't afford', 'therefore, my duty is...', 'one wants desperately', 'there is a danger', 'one doesn't have the courage to take the risk', etc. These phrases create the picture of a person who feels trapped, split between her wishes and the duty that she conceives for herself. On the one hand, there is her upbringing and education that have instilled in her a didactic approach to teaching, an attitude that is reinforced by official policy, as she understands it. On the other hand, there are her experiences of colleagues who have different approaches and of students with radiant eyes who 'discover' things for themselves. What is common in both alternatives that she identifies is the fixedness of textual meaning. For her, authoritative enlightened teachers are always expected to grant this knowledge to students, either through direct instruction or through subtle steering. Whatever the case, the meaning(s) to be 'dis-covered' in a text or their construction are never at issue. However, the assumption that is common in the two alternatives goes unnoticed, and Cathy experiences a dilemma, feeling torn between two options and considering it to be an either/or issue.

In general, the texts of the interviews are full of tension and ambivalence, instead of presenting a coherent and unproblematic framework as one would expect. Interviewees find themselves in a position where they have to deal with contrasting views and to strike a balance between them. Often there seems to be a gap between what they believe to be best and what they have to do in class, or between the approaches to texts they have experienced as children and what they presently do with their own students. Sometimes interviewees are aware of these pulls, acknowledging their ambivalence or intentional compromise, but at other times, they seem unaware of these conflicts, falling into contradictions. Either knowingly or not, they make continuous shifts in their approach to the reading process, prioritising their aims differently at each moment and conceiving students' and teachers' agency in divers configurations, which are often conflicting. In all interviews, there seem to be contradictions and efforts to strike a balance between these contradictory pulls, with different results each time.

PART 3.D. – INTERVIEW-TEXTS AND OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Without doubt not all the official documents I studied are the same, and neither are all the interviews: the 1999 NC is very dissimilar from the 1995 one, and so is Mark's interview from Cathy's. Despite the variation within the two sets, I think some patterns emerge that mark out the official documents as distinguishable from the interviews. English teachers seem to diverge from official discourse in their rationale about literature education, approaching the fundamental questions of 'what', 'how', 'why' or 'who' of reading differently. Compared with the interview-texts, the policy documents seem simplifying and superficial in their elaboration of literature reading as they avoid tackling some of the most essential issues, such as the criteria used for the

selection of texts or the factors determining a response to literature. And even when an issue is brought up, this is done in a vague and ambiguous way, as for example is the case with the relation between the 'English' and the 'other/different' literary traditions or with the notion of 'quality'. So any issue that is controversial is left untouched or is discussed in an evasive way. English teachers, on the other hand, seem to have more elaborate and complex views on why they prefer certain texts to others, what they want their students to do in a class and for what purpose and so on. Especially if one takes into account that respondents were unprepared for the interview, there was a lot of time pressure and they did not have the opportunity to review their responses, then the intricacy of the interview-texts, compared with the policy documents, becomes more noticeable. It could be argued that a National Curriculum document has to be simple and brief, as it gives only general directions which it is up to teachers to translate into practice. Moreover, teachers want such texts to be streamlined and brief, because otherwise they are not workable. For example, the 'Cox' Report, which was the most lengthy and detailed one, was criticised for being too demanding and there were urgent calls to make it more compact. However, if the outcome is such a questionable and hazy text, then one wonders about the usefulness of having a 'national curriculum', at least as far as literature teaching is concerned.

Both the interview-texts and the official documents have contradictions and gaps, and yet it is the former that assume an air of neutrality and naturalness, whereas teachers often foreground their dilemmas and preoccupations. Teachers realise that literature teaching is not an obvious task and feel a lot of pressure from many sides. Some fall into contradictions without being aware of it, but others understand the conflicting pulls that lead them off into different directions and try to find a compromise. A good example of this tension is their discussion of textual meaning. The reader response theories, which prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s, having found a receptive ground thanks to progressive education, seem to have influenced most interviewees, who thus stress the openness of meaning and readers' role in creating alternative interpretations. More than just a belief, this assumption forms a structural element of their practice, as they set tasks that invite students to play and interact with texts. However, there are times when some interviewees talk about meanings to be found *in* a text and students being directed to its core meaning, without realising that these do not fit well with their previous assertions. At the same time, others acknowledge that they have to opt for fixedness and closure, contrary to what they may think is best, in order to meet the requirements posed by examinations.

The two sets of texts also differ with regard to their presentation of the issue of authority in a literature class. In the interviews, classes are described as places where a play of power is constantly going on. Students are sometimes discussed as individuals with independent voices, sometimes as members of social groups with a distinct culture, and at other times, as members of the group of 'students', with a collective noun being used to denote the entire student population.

Sometimes they have to go along with their teachers' directions, as participants in a more or less uniform process, despite their differences, and at other times they have the space to create meanings of their own. Similarly, teachers are sometimes discussed as the ones who call the tune, while at other times they give way for students' voices to be better heard. Sometimes they talk as individuals, while at other times, they invoke their identity as 'teachers' belonging to the group of English teachers. In the interviews, there are constant shifts of the agents that are put in the position of the acting subject, while the notion of subjectivity is understood in many ways. On the other hand, in the official documents the issue of authority is blurred, and we mainly have a list of what students 'should be taught'. A picture of a literature class is projected that is harmonious and free of tension and conflict.

Another difference has to do with the representation of students. In the official documents, there is no sense of students having differences that might determine their response – maybe because readers are virtually absent from these texts. Instead, reading is described as a completely depersonalised, individual affair that has no context, no place and time in history. It is only in the 'Cox' Report and the 1999 NC that there is any indication of the need to contextualise reading, when they call for a critical consideration of the literary canon/heritage, looking at why these texts have been influential or how their reception might change through time. However, even in these two documents there is no sense of students' literature readings being seen in context, as a social practice that acquires meaning in a localised perspective. On the other hand, the interviewed teachers talk about collective readings that take place in real classes with real people who have an identity of their own. They discuss students as having a presence in class and making their own meanings, endorsing or resisting what is on offer. They see students as having different identities, shaped upon their experiences of gender, class, race, ethnicity and culture, and even though many of them adopt a deficiency perspective – like the 1999 NC – there are still others who cherish diversity and consider it a structural element of class reading.

Finally, English teachers seem to have a somewhat divergent agenda for literature as a school subject, focusing their attention on aspects of reading that occupy a marginal position in policy texts. So they favour the idea of reading for pleasure and do everything they can to instil the habit of reading into their students, whereas pleasure is mentioned only in passing in the 'Cox' Report and the 1995 NC, and is entirely absent from the others. In addition, teachers put very high in their priorities students' personal development as individuals and as members of a community, considering reading in class to be instrumental in this. Similarly, they regard it as important that students participate in reading actively, finding relevance between their lives and a text and engaging in a dialogue with it and about it. On the other hand, the policy documents might mention 'moral' and 'emotional' development or extension of ideas when it comes to text selection or in the introduction, but leave all these out of the attainment levels where a technical

and utilitarian approach to reading is promoted. And if one takes into account that it is the attainment level descriptions that are used for the ranking of students, which is subsequently made public through the league tables, then it becomes obvious that this part of the NC is assigned more significance than any other.

In general, teachers seem to be more reader-centred in their discussion of literature reading as they continually refer to students, focusing their attention on them and their responses. It seems that, when it comes to literature teaching, English teachers adopt the 'personal growth' approach with its emphasis on personal involvement, creativity, whole-person development and so on. They also seem to operate in the context of the liberal humanist tradition that expects literary education to have a formative or transformative effect upon students, liberating them of their misconceptions and helping them to gain new insights into themselves and the world around them. On the other hand, official documents are text-centred in their approach as they keep on talking about what one should do with a text, without heeding much the effects that reading has on students or what they might bring to their reading. The 1999 NC adopts a different stance on this, discussing the 'spiritual', 'moral' 'social' and 'cultural' development that comes through reading and including a section on diversity between students, and thus it catches up with English teachers and their practice. However, despite the divergences, this document is still very close to the previous ones as it reproduces the same attainment level descriptions, treats diversity as a matter of deficiency and an obstacle to be overcome, and is not radically different from all the other NCs, when it comes to the particulars of 'Reading'.

In the last two chapters I have looked at literature teaching in the English education system from three perspectives, considering how it emerges in a range of past texts, in official documents of the 1990s and in a set of interviews I took from English teachers. I concentrated on the treatment of issues like textual meaning, the role of a reader, text selection, aims and practice etc. In the next two chapters, I will do the same with the teaching of literature in the Greek paradigm, and then I will proceed to make a comparative interpretation of the two in the final chapter.

Chapter 4

The Greek paradigm: History and policies

PART 4.A. – A SUBJECT WITH A SHORT HISTORY

Literature, both Ancient Greek and Modern Greek, is an indisputable part of the curriculum in all years of secondary education.¹ Ancient Greek is an independent school subject that includes the study of Ancient Greek language as well as of texts read either in translation or in the original.² However, it is mainly the texts studied in the area of Modern Greek literature that are read for their ‘literary’ value. Modern Greek literature shares an area of the curriculum with Modern Greek language but has a separate textbook and is examined separately in end-of-year examinations. It is a subject taught to all pupils in two teaching periods per week in all years of Gymnasium and Lyceum.³ Despite the separate textbooks, examinations and teaching periods, Modern Greek literature could not be considered an independent subject, since in the final report its grades are calculated together with those in Modern Greek language. As professed in the note ‘To teachers’ at the end of the textbook for Year 1 of Gymnasium:

The ‘Modern Greek Literature Texts’ is now a self-contained and independent branch of the subject of Modern Greek. It has a central position in the curriculum of Gymnasium and a specific direction. (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], *Modern Greek Literature Texts*, Gymnasium Year 1: 316)⁴

Literature might be in a central position but it is still seen as part of a subject called ‘Modern Greek’, where the study of literature is placed alongside the study of language.⁵ Moreover, it is not ‘literature’ but ‘Greek literature’ that is studied, even though nowhere is it explained which

¹ See Appendix 2 for information on the Greek education system and its curriculum.

² In Gymnasium pupils study Ancient Greek texts in translation whereas in Lyceum they do texts in the original. For example, in Gymnasium writers like Homer and Herodotus are read in a Modern Greek translation, while at a later stage it is the original texts by writers like Xenophon, Sophocles and Aristotle that are studied. In all years pupils are also taught the history of the ancient Greek genres as well as the historical background of texts and their writers. In addition, they study Ancient Greek language (its grammar and syntax), both in Gymnasium and in Lyceum. The study of Ancient Greek language and literature occupies the same space in the timetable as Modern Greek language and literature.

³ Apart from the compulsory subject of Modern Greek literature, there are two more subjects on literature. First, there is a subject called ‘Modern European Literature’, which is an option for students of the Arts and Sciences Directions in Year 2 of Lyceum. Second, there is a subject called ‘Modern Greek Literature’, which is compulsory for students of the Arts Direction and is offered as an option to students of the Sciences Direction in Year 3 of Lyceum. I will not look at these two subjects as they are optional and are not offered to all pupils. It should be noted, though, that the discourse on these two subjects is similar to that of the compulsory ones.

⁴ All translations from the Greek documents are mine. Regarding references to the Greek bibliography, authors’ names are written in English followed by their names in Greek in square brackets. A list of the full bibliographical references can be found in a separate section called ‘References in Greek’, where both the Greek references and their English translation are included.

⁵ See also MNER-PI, 1997: 25.

texts qualify as such. Is it texts written by Greek citizens or by Greek-speaking people, texts that come out of Greek culture or texts that refer to issues that interest the Greek people?

It was mainly after the 1976 Education Reform that Modern Greek literature was granted a place of its own. Prior to that, it had an inferior position to Ancient Greek which was the cornerstone of the education system and the school subject seen as responsible for young people's education. For decades, the position of Modern Greek literature in the curriculum was precarious, its course tied to that of the 'Language Question' and the attempts to introduce the *demotic* language in place of the *katharevousa*, the latter upheld by the conservative elitist forces as it served their interests.⁶ Attempts to democratise the education system and to make it more open to children of all strata would be constantly annulled in the long periods of dictatorial governments, of war and instability.⁷ Thus, even though the beginnings of the Greek education system go back to 1822⁸, it was as late as 1884 that Modern Greek literature was admitted to the early years of secondary school, initially as a branch of Ancient Greek, and it was only in 1923 that it was recognised as an independent subject to be assessed separately from Ancient Greek.⁹ (Lambraki [Λαμπράκη], 1989) For a long time, the teaching periods allocated to Modern Greek were significantly less than those devoted to the study of Ancient Greek.¹⁰ Teachers and pupils were obliged to use a series of textbooks titled *Modern Greek Readings*, which included a range of texts, not exclusively literary, most of them written in *katharevousa*.¹¹ These texts were to be used as a model of 'good' language use, and most importantly, for pupils' moral edification and shaping of

⁶ When the Greek State was born after the successful Revolution of 1821 against the Ottomans, a debate started concerning the national language. First, there was the classicising approach that "wanted the resurrection of Classical Greek – the only 'pure' form of Greek, uncontaminated by 'impure' admixtures". Then, there was a second approach that "recognised the priority of the spoken language, the 'demotic', but wanted to 'cleanse' it, to 'purify' it (*katharevousa*), to 'rectify' it", rejecting all loans and grafting classicising forms onto the spoken language. The very term '*katharevousa*' comes from '*katharos*' which means 'pure, clean'. "Finally, the third approach argued in favour of the spoken language as the only legitimate candidate for assuming the function of the national language." Of course "the linguistic arguments put forward in this debate were the tips of wider icebergs defining conflicting ideological, social and political commitments." (Christidis [Χρηστίδης], 1996: 72-73)

⁷ See Appendix 3 for a synoptic outline of Modern Greek history.

⁸ In 16 March 1822, just a year after the start of the Greek revolution for independence from the Ottoman Empire, the first legislative body of the newly-independent state established free state education. The development of the education system was difficult and slow because of the poor state of the economy.

⁹ Another date significant in the history of literature teaching is 1927 when the first Chair in Modern Greek and Byzantine Philology was established at the University of Athens and the study of Modern Greek was introduced in the last two years of secondary education. (Lambraki [Λαμπράκη], 1989)

¹⁰ For example, in the 1897 programme, at the lower secondary school 9 teaching periods per week were devoted to Ancient Greek and only 3/2 to Modern Greek (3 in the first two years and 2 in the last one). As for the pupils of upper secondary school, they were to do Ancient Greek for 12 hours per week and no Modern Greek at all. Similarly, according to the 1935 programme, pupils did 8 and 9 hours of Ancient Greek per week, at lower and upper secondary school respectively, and only 3 hours of Modern Greek. (Dimaras [Δημαράς], 1990b: 15, 182)

¹¹ Under the general title *Modern Greek Readings* (*Νεοελληνικά Αναγνώσματα*) literary texts were anthologised alongside history texts. Even though there were no explicit headings, the texts included could be organised in four thematic units: nature, national life, religious life and social life. (Lambraki [Λαμπράκη], 1989; Milionis [Μηλιώνης], 1989)

national consciousness. Pupils were expected to read these texts not in order to appreciate their literary value, but so that they would learn to love their country and become virtuous people.

Things changed radically with the 1976 Education Reform, when the language spoken by the people, the demotic, was recognised as the official language, compulsory education was extended to nine years and Ancient Greek texts started being studied in translation and not in the original in the lower secondary school, Gymnasium. Modern Greek language and literature were recognised as the spine of the education system and Modern Greek literature was upgraded to a curriculum subject, with two teaching periods allocated to its study in all years of secondary education. Twenty years later, in 1997, another Education Reform also focused on a change of the curriculum and the examination system, starting with a revision of the programme at the upper secondary school, Lyceum.¹² The objective has been to renew the education system in accordance with the increased needs of the times, a process that entails ‘modernisation’ both of the methods and of the areas of study. (MNER-PI, 1997b: 191)¹³ This reform has meant new instructions on the teaching of literature and a new way of examining it, even though the same textbooks (*MGLT*) are still being used.

PART 4.B. – A FRAMEWORK COMPULSORY FOR ALL: GREEK POLICY DOCUMENTS

On the whole, the Greek education system has always been highly centralised, with very limited autonomy granted to teachers or schools.¹⁴ Every year the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (MNER), in association with the Pedagogical Institute (PI), issues instructions with a statutory power, to be followed by all Greek teachers in both the state and the public sector.¹⁵ In these *Instructions*, literature is framed as an area of study and its discourse is elaborated, as they detail its aims, methodology and syllabi.¹⁶ Moreover, in classes all over the country the same anthologies of literary texts are used that were compiled in the late 1970s and

¹² This has been a much criticised reform. One of the criticisms is of the fact that it started from the upper secondary school and the entry examinations to Higher Education, instead of having a more holistic approach.

¹³ MNER stands for Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs and PI for Pedagogical Institute. In Greek they are: ΥΠ.Ε.Π.Θ. (i.e. Υπουργείο Εθνικής Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων) and Π.Ι. (i.e. Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο). References to the books published by these two bodies can be found in the section ‘References in Greek’.

¹⁴ It should be noted that in Greek schools the teaching staff is not organised in departments on the basis of their area of specialisation. So, there is no ‘Greek’ department that comprises all teachers of Ancient or Modern Greek, holding separate meetings, deciding on the school policy and so on.

¹⁵ The Pedagogical Institute (PI) is a government organisation, staffed by civil servants, whose role is similar to that of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in Britain. It was first established in 1964 but was soon closed in 1967, with the start of the seven-year military dictatorship. For the period 1967-1975, no such advisory body operated. Following the overthrow of the junta in 1974, the Centre for Educational Research and In-Service Training was established that advised the government on educational policy for the period 1975-1985. In 1985, the Pedagogical Institute was re-established and has been operating ever since.

¹⁶ It should be noted, though, that they do not all have the same structure. Some of them expand on issues of literary theory, such as genre, plot, author etc. (see MNER-PI, 1998; MNER-PI, 2000b), while others

early 1980s, as part of the 1976 Education Reform.¹⁷ They are entitled *Modern Greek Literature Texts (MGLT)* and there is one textbook for each year of Gymnasium and Lyceum. These anthologies have even survived the 1997 Education Reform, being in continuous use for more than twenty-five years. In the last reform, it was decided that Modern Greek literature would be one of the subjects to be examined for University entry in the examinations that take place in the last two years of Lyceum.¹⁸ Thus, for the years 1998-99 and 1999-2000, the MNER issued lists of texts to be studied in the last two years of Lyceum. These lists comprised between fifteen and twenty texts for each year, all of them to be found in the set anthologies. Even though Modern Greek literature was once again excluded from the nationally examined subjects after only two examination periods, the MNER has continued to prescribe lists of texts, extending this practice to all three years of Lyceum.¹⁹ Apart from the school textbooks, the lists of prescribed texts and the instructions sent to teachers, the MNER has published four teachers' books that include critiques of the texts that are included in the anthologies. These *Teachers' Books* could be seen either as an effort to help teachers who do literature or as an attempt to fully control their approach to literature. (Hodolidou [Χοντολίδου], 1989: 42) In this chapter I look at the *Instructions* issued by the MNER and the PI for Lyceum Greek teachers for the years 1997-98 (MNER-PI, 1997a and 1997b), 1998-99 (MNER-PI, 1998), 1999-2000 (MNER-PI, 1999) and 2000-01 (MNER-PI, 2000a). For the school year 1997-98, two *Instructions* books were issued: the first one (MNER-PI, 1997a) is part of the pre-1997 system, an official document that was reprinted for a number of years, whereas the second one (1997b) referred only to Year 1 of Lyceum and reflected the spirit of the reformed curriculum.

4.B.i. *Textual meaning*

In official documents, texts are treated as a reflection of reality and a source of valuable information on it, assuming there is "a correspondence between the textual and extra-textual world." (MNER-PI, 2000a: 240) By reading, pupils can become aware of those parts of the world and of life that writers perceive and encompass in their writings. (MNER-PI, 1997b: 192) Through literature, pupils become familiar with the character, ethos and values of the Greek people (MNER-PI, 1997a: 88), while they also "gain all sorts of information on important historical, social, political, existential and other issues." (MNER-PI, 1998: 59) Not all texts provide us with a convincing depiction of reality and it is a reader's task to judge their veracity.

exclude any discussion of such matters and contain interpretative comments on various texts included in the syllabus. (see MNER-PI, 2000a; MNER-PI, 1999)

¹⁷ These anthologies include a wide selection of short stories and poems as well as extracts from longer works. See Appendix 2, Part D, for the organisation of their material.

¹⁸ In the 1997 Education Reform, the examination system for entry into Higher Education changed and literature was included in the twelve-fourteen subjects examined at national level in years 2 and 3 of Lyceum. This lasted for only two examination periods, Summer 1999 and Summer 2000, when literature was again excluded from the nationally examined subjects.

[Pupils should develop a variety of reading skills, so as to be able:]

to make an evaluation of the ‘truth’ of a text, or in other words, to make an evaluation of the quality and convincingness of a text, either by using criteria of the same text or in comparison with other similar texts. (MNER-PI, 1998: 59)

It seems that some texts are more successful in their representation of the world than others and readers can distinguish the accurate ones by employing their knowledge of history and of literary theory. (ibid., p.59) What is never questioned in the official documents is the reflective nature of texts and the existence of a reality out there that can be truthfully depicted. In general, the model of communication, which underlies the curriculum, is rather straightforward and uncomplicated. For example, it is stated that if the right attitude is nurtured, then:

[...] an individual can pore over the meaning of words, can register them emotionally in his experience, and can give verbal existence to his own thoughts and feelings, developing thus *his ethos as a listener, a speaker, a scholar and a writer of texts*. (MNER-PI, 1999: 141; italics in the original)

First, it is noticeable that policy makers talk about an ‘individual’ and his relation with ‘words’, as if these can be seen in isolation, irrespective of any sense of community, of context or intertextuality. Second, the relation between a signifier and a signified is one of direct correspondence without any sense of arbitrariness or differentiability; words have an identifiable meaning, thoughts and feelings have a verbal existence.

In the context of this framework, textual meaning is seen as fixed and the secure object of critical inquiry. In the pre-1997 discourse, the idea of having a ‘correct’ reading of texts was more pronounced. For example, in the 1997 *Instructions* for Gymnasium, it is stated that:

All questions should refer to the text under study and a pupil should look to it so as to give the *correct* answer. As a result, the use of books with ready-made analyses and answers is not only superfluous but also harmful. [...] Finally, the *correct* answers must be noted down in the notebooks or on the board, if this is possible. (MNER-PI, 1997a: 28/29; my italics)

Texts are seen as monosemous and only certain readings are sanctioned. As for pupils, they need to look no further than a text to access its inherent meanings. In the discourse elaborated after the 1997 Reform, things are put in a more subtle way and some references are made to polysemy. (e.g. MNER-PI, 2000a: 232) However, the idea that there is an intrinsic meaning or meanings to be found *in* a text has survived the reform. For example, in the 1998 *Instructions*, the aim set for pupil-readers is to observe texts closely, “comment on the various aspects of their composition and interpret them in a methodical and global way.” (MNER-PI, 1998: 59) It is taken for granted that a ‘spherical’ interpretation of a text is possible, provided that one is careful and diligent in one’s approach. A reader can get to a point where she ‘knows’ a text and can confidently talk about its creation as well as its main points and aims. The very suggestion that pupils should identify the principal and the secondary points in a text (MNER-PI, 1997a: 28; MNER-PI, 1999:

¹⁹ This exception was part of an attempt to lessen the burden on candidates by reducing the examined subjects from twelve-fourteen to nine. Now, as was the case before the 1997 Education Reform, literature is examined in all years in the end-of-year examinations that are organised and marked internally.

141) is based on the assumption that there can be general agreement on textual meanings and their relative importance.

This view of meaning as finite and concrete is reinforced by the idea that a text talks directly to its readers, which assumes that no other factors interfere in this straightforward and unproblematic communication of meaning. Addressing Greek teachers, the compilers of the literature textbooks explain that “each text on its own has those elements that can talk directly to a student” and “each question must start from the text, refer to it and return to it.” (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], *MGLT*, Gymnasium Year 1: 316/317) Thus, they recommend that teachers do not strain pupils with specialised information, making the text under study seem tiring and boring under the burden of knowledge. This stress on an unencumbered dialogue between reader and text suggests that the context of reading is not of any significance in the construction of meaning. Both in the pre- and in the post-1997 official documents, a text is treated as the ultimate source of meaning, some kind of metaphysical presence. For example, in the pre-1997 policy document, we read that “reading a text aloud must be made *with naturalness and following the demands of the text*” (MNER-PI, 1997a: 28; my italics), or

A short story should not always be taught in the same way. Sometimes it is possible to insist on its structure, sometimes on its representative types and sometimes on the issues it tackles. (*The short story itself will guide us in this matter.*) (ibid., p.28; my italics)

Or,

in the teaching of poetry, and in particular of modern poetry, a teacher should *avoid rationalisation*, as far as this is possible, and to offer a poem in a way *that talks to pupils' sensitivity*. (ibid., p.28; my italics)

It is not simply that one can find in a text the keys for its interpretation. More than that, a text has a presence of its own that pertains to the natural world, an independent will that makes demands and gives directions, an entity that needs to be approached emotionally rather than rationally.

A similar image of a text is developed in the post-1997 policy documents. For example, we read that “each time a teacher should set the secondary aims based on the basis of the text under study. In fact, *a text itself dictates the aims of its teaching.*” (MNER-PI, 1997b: 196; my italics) Or, Greek teachers are advised that “together with pupils *we can ask the poem itself to gradually reveal to us the secrets of its technique*”(MNER-PI, 2000a: 241)²⁰ Here, as in the pre-1997 framework, a literary text is once again depicted as the ultimate and only authority that lays down *the way to be read and interpreted*, even assuming the role of a ‘demanding mistress’ for its creators and being a site of ecstasy for its readers.

Poetry is a demanding mistress for its creators, because it presupposes devotion, loneliness, constant search and exploration of the ineffable, so that it becomes said, ‘poetic discourse’. This discourse is disinterested, pure, interminable; it is an excursion to which we, creators and readers, turn, so as to enjoy it and to find ecstasy. (MNER-PI, 2000a: 233)

²⁰ See also MNER-PI, 2000a: 232, 236, 244, 245, or MNER-PI, 1999: 141-2 for similar examples.

So, it is a text itself that determines the aims of a lesson, the interpretations to be made and the conclusions to be reached. A literary text is thought to be a presence in class that is throbbing with life and pupils should enter into a direct dialogue with it so as to reap the knowledge it generously offers and reach enlightenment. Thus, class discussion should not stray to irrelevant matters but should “*stay in the text and its comprehension*. A text is neither the pretext nor the occasion, but the educational good per se.” (MNER-PI, 1999: 142; my italics)

Policy documents are fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions as regards the notion of textual meaning. Thus, on the one hand, there is insistence on treating a text as the centrepiece of class reading and focusing all attention on its features, and yet, on the other hand, policy makers call for the study of ‘extra-textual’ elements together with the ‘textual’ and argue for the need to turn to the history and theory of literature. (MNER-PI, 1999: 140; MNER-PI, 2000a: 232) As is explained in the 2000-01 *Instructions*, what is meant by ‘extra-textual’ features is the writer’s biographical information, historical and social information about the era in which a text was written, the characteristics of the genre to which it belongs and so on. (MNER-PI, 2000a: 237) One moment they assert that all one needs to do is to observe a text closely, entering into an unobstructed direct dialogue with it, and the next moment they bring out the requirement for a study of other elements external to it. And yet, they never explain what the relationship is between a text and those ‘extra-textual’ elements or how textual meaning is determined by the latter.

Another contradiction that blurs the projected image of the reading process relates to the closure or openness of meaning. In the post-1997 policy documents it is often explained that a literature class is open to different interpretations so long as they are supported by adequate textual evidence. For example, it is categorically stated that:

It is by now widely accepted that there is no single interpretation of a text, that there no longer exists ‘what an author wants to say’ or ‘what a text says’. A text is *open* and the better a text is the more open it is to new meanings. It is known that texts are *polysemous*. Every era, every society, every reader, and even the same reader in every different reading might give different meanings. Thus, *a reader* does not simply have a right in interpretation but ultimately he is *the sole agency of interpretation, the creator of a text*. (MNER-PI, 1997b: 195; my italics)

And the policy maker goes on to say that all pupils are entitled to express their own interpretation of a text, and in fact, they should be encouraged to do so freely, provided that their views are grounded in the text. (ibid., p.195) We come across similar affirmations of the creative and dynamic nature of interpretation at other parts of the post-1997 policy documents as well.²¹ Despite these affirmations of polysemy and of a reader’s active role, textual meaning is most of the time presented as fixed and the outcome of close study. This insistence on set readings is manifest not only in the statements discussed so far but also in the specific analyses included in the *Instructions* books. For example, in the *Instructions* for the year 2000-01, policy makers have

²¹ See also MNER-PI, 1998: 61 or MNER-PI, 2000a: 232, 233.

included critical notes on the extracts of the prescribed lists, which they expect teachers to include in their teaching. There are three to fifteen remarks on each extract, in bullet form, each remark approximately three lines long.²² Some of these remarks include very brief information on writers, their work and their position in the history of literature, others relate to the narrative and stylistic devices of a text, its themes and characters, and others point to possible comparisons with other texts. The tone employed in these notes is such that their teaching is imperative rather than an option. ‘It is worth calling to attention...’, ‘it should be noted...’, ‘it is advisable to mention...’, ‘it is indispensable to make a reference to...’, ‘the main features will be presented...’, ‘the reflections on... will be used to...’ and so on and so forth. Apart from the critical notes, there are also more detailed critical readings on a few extracts, each of them about four pages long, where all stages of a lesson plan are given together with a reading of the texts under study. (MNER-PI, 2000a: 232-250) Rather than suggestions or personal readings, these criticisms are closed interpretations that are included in these official documents unsigned, depriving teachers and pupils of the opportunity to enter into a dialogue with them. There seems to be an insistence on teachers becoming familiar with and teaching certain readings of each text, as if policy makers are worried about something important being left out, thus going against their assertions of polysemy and encouragement of active reading.²³

To sum up, literary texts are treated as if they are transparent to a fixed meaning and as a reflection of reality that exists outside and prior to them. They are discussed as having a metaphysical presence in class and pupil-readers are expected to engage in a dialogue with them, to discover the ‘truths’ they reveal. In official discourse, the texts under study are placed in a position of ultimate authority in the process of meaning making, while it is nowhere discussed where they draw this power from. While silencing any hint of ambiguity or controversy, policy makers assume that if a reader asks a text she will get unambiguously explicit answers from the text itself. The change in the post-1997 policy documents, with the appearance of more references to polysemy and openness, fails to create a framework where a reader has a more active and significant role to play in the reading process. This recent turn to reader-response approaches results in contradictions because, while they give assurances of a reader’s enhanced role, policy makers once again reiterate the idea of meaning being fixedly located *in* a text and prescribe lists of notes to be taught in all the literature classes in the country.

²² See MNER-PI, 2000a: 186-196, 198-203 and 211-219. This practice started in 1999 when they included such critical notes on the prescribed texts to be studied in the subject ‘Modern Greek Literature’ (Optional subject, Year 3 of Lyceum).

²³ It seems that in-service training seminars for literature teachers also focus on ‘knowledge’ (i.e. textual interpretation) rather than methodology or critical issues. Thus, teachers are being told what pupils should know about each text but not how they can help their pupils approach them or why they should acquire this knowledge. (Giannakaki [Γιαννακάκη], 1999)

4.B.ii. The imposed anthologies and text selection

Teachers and pupils have always been obliged to use textbooks that are prepared and provided by central authorities. Following the 1976 Education Reform, a committee was appointed to edit a set of anthologies that would reflect the democratising spirit of the reform.²⁴ Under the directions of the Centre for Educational Research and In-Service Training²⁵, the compilers set the following aims for the writing of the literature textbooks: first, to select texts whose content is of remarkable quality; to include, among others, modern texts that are closer to the problems of today's world; to contribute to teaching by including an introductory note, vocabulary and questions on each text. (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], *MGLT*, Gymnasium Year 1: 316-317)

In the next years (1977-1982) six anthologies were compiled²⁶, one for each year of secondary education, that were received with great enthusiasm as they were very different from those they replaced.²⁷ (Plisis [Πλησής], 1981; Hodolidou [Χοντολίδου], 1989; Lambraki [Λαμπράκη], 1989; Varmazis [Βαρμάζης], 1998; Papageorgakis [Παπαγεωργάκης], 1999) Texts in the previous textbooks portrayed an idyllic picture of agricultural life in bygone times, assuming a strongly didactic tone on religious and national values, whereas the new textbooks focused on Modern Greek life and culture, “free of the sterile didacticism and the ideological moralism of the past.” (Kalfas [Κάλας], 1998; see also Plisis [Πλησής], 1981; Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], 1984) Moreover, in place of the mediocre texts used to propagandise the dominant ideology in the old textbooks, the compilers made an effort to present a wide range of first-rate literary texts in a methodical way. (Plakas [Πλακάς], 1984) For the first time, authors banished until then because of their ideological stance are included, together with modern texts and especially modern poetry. (Plisis [Πλησής], 1981)²⁸ Compilers tried to make the selection of texts on the basis of their

²⁴ Six people took part in the compilation of the anthologies. N. Grigoriadis, D. Karvelis, K. Balaskas, and G. Paganos were involved in the editing of all six anthologies. Ch. Milionis was involved in the editing of five anthologies and G. Papakostas in the last two of them. At the time, they all worked as Greek teachers in secondary schools, while two of them, Grigoriadis and Karvelis, are poets and one of them, Milionis, is a novelist.

²⁵ The Centre for Educational Research and In-Service Training (i.e. ‘KEME’, ‘Κέντρο Εκπαιδευτικών Μελετών και Επιμορφώσεως’) was established in 1975. In 1985 it was closed and its powers were transferred to the newly-established Pedagogical Institute (i.e. ‘ΠΙ’, ‘Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο’). See also note No. 14 in this chapter.

²⁶ See Appendix 2, Part D, for the organisation of the contents of the six anthologies.

²⁷ The previous literary anthologies had been in use since 1956/1957. Those old textbooks were the object of much criticism for being badly organised and full of printing errors and omissions. The anthologised texts were of poor literary worth, corrupt, heavily didactic and moralistic. Moreover, those anthologies included many older texts that were written in Byzantine Greek or in katharevousa, while literary texts were put alongside others about science, geography etc. Modernistic or more recent texts were totally excluded. Despite the strong criticisms made against those anthologies, they remained in use for over twenty years, from 1956/1957 until they were replaced in 1977-1982. (Toyas [Τόγιας], 1990: 636-655)

²⁸ So, it was the first time that well-established and prolific writers such as Varnalis, Ritsos, Alexiou and others were studied at school. Even though these writers were popular, they had been excluded because of their left ideology. Moreover, it was the first time that poems in free verse were included in school textbooks. Georgousopoulos (1990) describes the old textbooks as being subject to ‘aesthetic censorship’, whereby all modern literature was ruled out no matter what. However, he is also critical of the way things

aesthetic value and not their ideology, having as their guiding principle that literature should be treated as art and not as the vehicle of ideology or morality. The historical organisation of texts that was employed in some of the textbooks was also applauded, as it would give pupils the opportunity to see the whole course of Modern Greek literature, its birth and its development. (Plisis [Πλησής], 1981) Even their presentation and layout were more appealing and included copies of paintings, etchings, as well as photographs of writers, of autographs etc., thus contributing more to teaching instead of having a purely decorative role. (Plisis [Πλησής], 1981; Hodolidou [Χοντολίδου], 1989)²⁹

However, after being in continuous use for nearly twenty years, many criticisms have also been voiced about these anthologies. First of all, there have been disagreements about the particular selections made. Those who have raised objections to the included texts are not opposed to the idea of using an anthology of extracts, or to the idea of having a bias that such a selection always entails, but consider that a different ideology should permeate the textbooks. For example, Touloumakos [Τουλουμάκος] (1992) disapproves of the compilers' selections, arguing that these texts:

undermine love for the country, mock religion and moral values, disparage bourgeois society, ridicule the 1821 revolution and the Greek flag, identify the Greeks with card sharpers, while they put communists on a pedestal, praise anything that is left-wing, promote only the views of Marxist as well as of fascist (!) writers! (ibid., p.41)

He gives examples of texts included in the school anthologies that provoke his moral and patriotic feelings, and chastises the compilers, the Pedagogical Institute and the MNER for allowing the promotion of such dangerous ideas. Having as his starting point that texts have a direct influence upon readers, he argues that the anthologised texts undermine the social establishment by wiping out young people's creativity, diminishing their national sensitivity and depriving them of access to a stable moral and intellectual direction. From a different viewpoint, Sakkas [Σακκάς] (1986a; 1986b) argues that the selected texts promote the middle-class conservative ideology in an oblique but pervasive way.

With a few exceptions, they [i.e. the anthologised texts] advocate middle-class ideology, very often under a cloak of progressiveness that deceives not only unsuspecting pupils but also teachers, so that it obliterates the power of resistance. (Sakkas [Σακκάς], 1986b: 80)

He goes on to argue that texts have been selected and are studied on account of their aesthetic value, following the principle of 'art for art's sake', and there is little consideration for their content, the social issues that emerge from them or the historical factors that determined their writing. They present a pessimistic and quietist view of life and even when exploitation or the life of the aristocracy is their subject matter, still the questions included do not encourage a critical

stand now, arguing against the current obsession with modern texts and the uncritical exclusion of traditional forms of writing.

²⁹ In the 1997 *Instructions* for Gymnasium, it is suggested that: "Illustrations, whenever there are any, should become the object of observation, for the sake of pupils' aesthetic cultivation." (MNER-PI, 1997a: 29) It should be noted, though, that it was the compilers who selected the illustrations and no artistic adviser was employed in the preparation of these anthologies. (Milionis [Μηλιώνης], 1989)

reading, focusing instead on aspects of form. Progressive writers are under-represented and even when there are extracts selected from their work, these are safe for the system and do not undermine the interests of the ruling class. So Sakkas disagrees both with the criteria applied for selection and with the interpretative stance promoted by the questions at the end of the texts; instead, he argues for a different ideological stance, that would foster an optimistic fighting spirit in pupils, making them sensitive to social issues and eager to act on their future. Even though Touloumakos and Sakkas are strongly critical of the anthologies, still their framework is not very different, having selectivity and didacticism as their main structural principles. They both assume that texts have a direct formative influence upon readers and so it is of vital importance to ensure that pupils gain access to the 'right' texts.

At the same time, there have been others who argue against the very idea of using extracts instead of whole works, as they give a very fragmentary picture of the works to pupils and discourage them from becoming readers of literature.³⁰ The use of extracts was initially seen as the ideal solution for giving pupils the opportunity to become acquainted with a wide range of texts in the limited time available as well as for allowing teachers to make their choices from a wide selection of texts. (Milionis [Μηλιώνης], 1989) Policy makers even expected pupils to be tempted into reading the texts that are anthologised in their spare time, including those not studied in class. (MNER-PI, 1997a: 27, 91) However, the use of extracts has been found to impoverish the experience as well as to amputate texts and distort their meanings.³¹ Moreover, the use of extracts might easily create confusion about the differences between genres while they do not allow pupils to form an elaborate picture of a writer's 'mythology' and ideology. (Papageorgakis [Παπαγεωργάκης], 1999) Many teachers and academics ask for the study of complete works in schools and the abandonment of extracts, attacking the use of a 'single textbook' and its inflated authority.³² The more a school textbook is under the suffocating control of the state, the more it is considered to be subject to censorship and to bear the dominant ideology/ies. (Georgousopoulos [Γεωργουσόπουλος], 1990) An indication of the negative function that school textbooks have is pupils' reactions, which are sometimes expressed with violent acts such as burning them after the end-of-year examinations.³³

³⁰ See Varmazis [Βαρμάζης], 1998; Parisis [Παρίσης], 1998; Loppa-Goudarouli [Λόππα-Γκουνταρούλη], 1998; Zervou, A. [Ζερβού, Α.], 1999; Papageorgakis [Παπαγεωργάκης], 1999.

³¹ See Zervou, A. [Ζερβού, Α.], 1999; Papageorgakis [Παπαγεωργάκης], 1999; Giatromanolakis [Γιατρομανωλάκης], 1991; Parisis [Παρίσης], 1998.

³² See, for example, Sideri [Σιδέρη], 1980; Papageorgakis [Παπαγεωργάκης], 1999.

³³ Pupils do not see school textbooks as a source of pleasure and an incentive for exploration and learning, but as something they have to memorise and reproduce uncritically in the examinations. (Fragkoudaki [Φραγκουδάκη], 1996/97; Katsikas [Κάτσικας], 1996/97) The result is that they do not get to love reading and the number of children who reads books other than the school textbooks decreases as they grow older. Katsikas points out that school textbooks are 'burned' much earlier than at the end of the year fires, as pupils become alienated from school. (Katsikas [Κάτσικας] 1996/97)

The disembodied voices of the extracts are not the only ones to be heard in the school anthologies. In an effort to render these disjointed texts coherent and whole, the compilers have surrounded each of them with an introductory note at the front, a vocabulary at the bottom, and a set of questions, together with a biographical note at the end. In addition, each of them is classified according to theme, genre or the literary movement they belong to in the history of Modern Greek literature.³⁴ The editorial voice is very strong, directing pupils to preferred readings of the texts, as was also asserted in an interview with the compilers, where one of them, Balaskas, stated that the questions on each extract “give a common direction to teaching.” (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], 1984: 59) In the *Instructions* books it is often made clear that, though the use of those questions is not compulsory, they are included in order to point to a common direction and to offer a common basis to teaching. (MNER-PI, 1997a: 29; MNER-PI, 1999: 142) Paganos, another of the compilers, explained that they tried to make “each extract have a unity of its own, so that it can be taught as if it were a complete text”, and they included the introductory notes so as to give a picture of the whole text. (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], 1984: 66) However, one wonders whether such a severed and edited text – no matter how ‘complete’ it might be in its own right – bears any relation to the original text it comes from.

A review of official policies after the 1997 Education Reform shows that, despite assurances to the contrary, the old practice of not allowing teachers to have much of a say on the texts to be used in class is still perpetuated. Teachers not only have to use texts from the compulsory textbooks, which have remained unchanged until the time of writing these lines, but their freedom of choice was further restricted by the 1997 Reform, when it was decided that a list of texts from the anthologies should be prescribed for each year of Lyceum, each of them to be taught in a specified number of teaching periods. So at Gymnasium teachers can still make their own selection of texts from the anthologies, whereas at Lyceum they have to teach specific texts from each anthology.³⁵ It is the MNER that sets these lists, following the suggestions of the Pedagogical Institute, in a process that does not allow any room for practising teachers to voice their preferences. Once the prescribed texts have been covered, there is very little time left for any other texts, and even this is often devoted to revision, since the set texts are to be examined

³⁴ In the first two years of Gymnasium the compilers have opted for a thematic approach to literature, organising texts in 16 thematic categories (such as ‘Man and nature’, ‘Religious faith’, ‘1940-Occupation-Resistance’ etc.). In Year 3 of Gymnasium and the first two years of Lyceum, texts are placed in periods of the history of Greek literature. Finally, in Year 3 of Lyceum, texts are grouped in four parts, namely Poetry, Narrative Prose, Essays, and Foreign Literature. See Appendix 2, Part D, for the structure of the contents of the school anthologies.

³⁵ For example, for the school year 2000-01 at Lyceum, twenty-three texts are set for Year 1 (10 of them pre-20th century texts, 7 poetry, 5 prose and 1 from foreign literature), fifteen texts are set for Year 2 (10 works of poetry and 5 of prose), and finally, sixteen texts are set for Year 3 (11 of them poetry and 5 prose). Teachers are instructed to spend between one to eight teaching periods on each of them, depending on the length of the text. (MNER-PI, 2000a: 185-6, 197, 211)

internally or externally at the end of the year.³⁶ Even though these lists are supposed to be revised annually, still they remain virtually the same, with only a couple of texts being replaced every year.

Looking at the compulsory school anthologies as well as at the prescribed lists of texts for Lyceum, one wonders about the criteria that have been applied for selection. What is interesting is that in all official documents there is an insistence on the use of literary texts of a certain ‘quality’ in class. Whenever the question of text selection is discussed, policy makers emphasise the need to include texts that are ‘representative’, ‘select’, ‘remarkable’ or ‘notable’. Year after year the ‘good quality’ of texts is referred to as the *sine qua non* of literature teaching, while modern texts need to offer a guarantee of ‘quality’ in order to be used.³⁷ As regards the teaching of the history of Greek literature, they prioritise the use of texts that are ‘typical’, ‘characteristic’ of an era or of a literary movement³⁸, and when a writer is to be singled out for study it has to be a ‘great’ one.³⁹ However, in all these documents there is never a word about the way in which the ‘quality’ or ‘representativeness’ of a literary text is to be judged. Even though it is considered a prerequisite to study ‘noteworthy’ and ‘typical’ texts, still there is no discussion about the criteria to be applied for the selection or who is to make the judgement, as if these matters are self-evident and indisputable. There are only a few explicit references made to ‘good quality’ and ‘greatness’ and even these are rather hazy. For example, if a ‘great’ writer is to be studied, then there should be a preference “for those who defined an era or a movement with their work, or for those whose work particularly moves and interests pupils.” (MNER-PI, 1998: 63; MNER-PI, 2000b: 169)

The avoidance of an open discussion on the criteria for selection and the hazy references to ‘quality’ and ‘representativeness’ seem like an effort to cover up the ‘silences’ of the anthologies and the prescribed lists. For policy makers, literature does not include texts by modern writers, fiction for young people or popular genres, while very few texts by women writers qualify for entry. First of all, one is amazed at the absence of any recently published texts. These textbooks were compiled in the late 1970s – early 1980s and compilers set 1960 as the upper limit of their choices. They thought that a twenty-year distance would furnish their selections with “a less subjective character and with greater validity”, being backed up by the critics. (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], 1984: 64) The compilers sought to justify their decisions by referring to literary criticism, presenting it as an external indisputable ‘authority’ that is consistent. As the

³⁶ According to a study, teachers do between fifteen and thirty-one texts per year, with the majority of them doing an average of twenty-two texts. (Papantonakis [Παπαντωνάκης], 2000) Taking into account that the number of prescribed texts for 2000-01 was twenty-three for Year 1 of Lyceum, fifteen for Year 2 and sixteen for Year 3, it must be the case that teachers do not really have the time to do many texts of their choice.

³⁷ See MNER-PI, 1997a: 91, 92, 94; MNER-PI, 1998: 59; MNER-PI, 1999: 140; MNER-PI, 2000a: 182; MNER-PI, 2000b: 163, 169.

³⁸ See MNER-PI, 1997a: 91, 92, 94; MNER-PI, 1999: 140, 142.

³⁹ See MNER-PI, 1998: 63; MNER-PI, 2000b: 169.

school textbooks have not been renewed since then, even the texts considered ‘modern’ in those times are now more than forty years old. Second, women writers are not thought to be ‘good’ enough, or ‘typical’ enough, and thus, very few of them have been allowed in the pantheon of ‘great’ writers. The largest number of women writers can be found in the textbook set for Year 2 of Lyceum, where there are eight women writers out of a total of seventy-five (i.e. 10.7%) and the smallest is in that for Year 3 of Lyceum, where there is only one woman writer out of a total of fifty-seven (i.e. 1.7%). When Milonis, one of the compilers, was asked ‘And what about women writers?’ in an interview they gave in 1984, he answered:

I see what you’re hinting at. Ridiculous things. We include, if I remember well, 32 women. 22 of them are being anthologised for the first time. I think that relatively more men have been left out than women. (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], 1984: 68)

It is interesting that in an interview where everyone assumes a serious tone, the only ‘light’ answer is when this dismissive comment is made, as if a discussion on the representation of women writers is a trifling issue. As these anthologies were compiled in the 1970s and 80s, one would expect that policy makers would try to put the balance right with the 1997 Education Reform.⁴⁰ However, this was not the case and women writers were further marginalised. In the 1999-2000 list of texts set to be studied in Years 2 and 3 of Lyceum, there are no women writers at all; neither are there any included in the 2000-01 list of texts set for Years 1, 2 and 3 of Lyceum.⁴¹

Even more dismissive is the treatment of children’s literature and of literature written with an adolescent audience in mind, which are totally excluded from all school textbooks of secondary education, as if they are of poorer quality than proper literature. Even though some of the writers included have worked on children’s and adolescents’ literature, still they are represented by texts other than their work for a younger audience. (Patsiou [Πάτσιου], 1999) Moreover, whenever childhood is depicted in a text, this is always from an adult’s point of view and in juxtaposition with adulthood, the result being that childhood loses its particular features and is seen as a thing of the past. (ibid.) On the part of the compilers, Grigoriadis explains that pupils have come into contact with proper literature before they start Gymnasium, because some such texts are included in the anthologies used in the last two years of primary school. He goes on to say:

⁴⁰ Such a change of direction would be even more anticipated now, especially after the boom in women’s writing of the last twenty years.

⁴¹ Things are not much different in the new anthology that was compiled as part of the 1997 Reform for the subject ‘Modern Greek literature’ for Year 3 Lyceum. This subject is compulsory only for some of Year 3 students (to those following the Arts pathway) and is offered as an option to some others (to those following the Sciences pathway). Here, an effort has been made to include whole texts instead of extracts, which means that short stories were preferred to novels, and sufficient texts by a poet have been included to allow the in-depth study of a single writer. However, despite the effort made for a facelift, the approach remains the same. There are only two women writers included in a total of sixteen (12.5%); there are still no texts from popular genres or fiction for young people; and the texts are too ‘old’, as only four out of twenty-four were published after 1975 (16%). The MNER has announced that in September 2001 new anthologies will be introduced in all years of secondary education, but one wonders if they will be really ‘new’.

Anyway, many texts from children's literature are not very different from the approved classic literary texts. [...] But even if we thought that the texts included in the secondary school textbooks are different in terms of quality from those they did in primary education, there is no reason to worry.⁴² They should be initiated into literature at some point. (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], 1984: 62)

Despite his acknowledgement that children's literature might be as worthy as 'proper' literature, it is still not seen as part of 'literature'. It seems as if reading children's literature is one thing, but reading 'literature' is something of a different quality, being more demanding and elevated. Still, no matter how 'good' children's literature might be, it has been left out of secondary education. Finally, in all school anthologies used in secondary education there is not a single text from science fiction, fantasy, detective and romance fiction or any other popular genre. It seems that such texts do not qualify as 'remarkable' or 'representative' and the option of being included in the school curriculum is not even considered.⁴³

The *Modern Greek Literature Texts* possess an air of permanence and sanctity as their use is compulsory and they have remained the same for such a long time. These anthologies function in such a closed and static way that they present Greek literature as an established corpus with a long past but no present. Through these anthologies pupils encounter a literary canon, including only 'representative' and 'superior' texts, whose quality is determined by a distant and faceless authority in a process where teachers and pupils have no access at all. Even though many criticisms can be made about the contents of these anthologies, the particular texts included are not really the main issue. It is rather that teachers and pupils are utterly alienated from the production of this corpus and literature is placed in a sphere out of their reach. Literature is presented as something distant and fixed, a depository of timeless values, and not as an aspect of cultural life that is created and shaped by people of a community, having a range of functions that are not immune to change.

4.B.iii. *Text and author*

Authors have a role to play in the reading process, alongside teachers, pupils and texts, being thus 'present' in a literature class. Sometimes, the references made to them in policy documents are very short and general. For example, we are told that it is a teacher's task to give "brief and clear information about the authors and their works" (MNER-PI, 1997a: 91), while one of the aims set

⁴² It is interesting to note the ambivalence in this sentence. Instead of saying 'even if we *thought* that the texts... *were* different ...', in which case he would express his disagreement with the statement, he opts for this ambivalent formation 'even if we *thought* that the texts ... *are* different...', which leaves one wondering where he really stands.

⁴³ In a study he made on the views of Greek teachers on literature teaching in the early 1990s, Papantonakis [Παπαντωνάκης] (2000) found that more than 80% of them would not teach texts from popular genres and concludes that, unfortunately, the circumstances are not ripe for the introduction of these genres into the school curriculum. (ibid., p. 52). This reveals the widespread derision for such genres that is to be found not only among teachers but also in Higher Education institutions and in society at large. Such contempt is rather common, and often 'literature' is described as the antipode of these genres and its teaching as the way to bolster pupils' resistance to them. (Karageorgos [Καραγεώργος], 1997)

for literature teaching is that pupils should get into the position to put forward their general views on a writer in an abstract way. (MNER-PI, 1999: 140) At other times, though, guidance is more detailed. Thus, in the 1998 *Instructions*, it is stressed that:

For the interpretation of a text, one is not interested in a writer's biography or list of works, except for those elements that cast light on the text ('literary biography')⁴⁴ and contribute to its interpretation. The historical, social, political and artistic context of a text is of interest only to the extent that it helps a reader to understand the ideas and form of the work and to account for them. (MNER-PI, 1998: 69)

In order to achieve this, pupils should 'search' for information on the literary movement to which a writer belongs, as well as on the political, philosophical and other ideas of her era that had some influence on her work. Moreover, it is suggested that they interpret her views and feelings by looking at her particular living conditions, her psychology, family or social environment etc. (ibid., p.69) Finally, pupils should try to explain a writer's aesthetic choices as well as "to explore the relation between his text and other works, Greek or foreign, older or contemporary (effects, influences, loans, etc.)." (ibid., p.69) It seems that policy makers overestimate the readers' ability to 'know' a writer and her personal life. What is not explained in this document is *how* a reader can really get to *know* a writer and their environment. Even if a reader could claim that she knows a writer's era well enough, how could she ever be sure which particular aspects of this period had a determinant effect on their work. And even if a reader could claim that she has a good grasp of a writer's ideas through their writings, how could she ever maintain that she has access to their feelings or that she understands their psychology. One wonders at the policy makers' assumption that it is possible not only to know a writer's life, character and psychology, ideas and feelings, but also to isolate which specific elements are responsible for her work.

This insistence on biographical knowledge relates to another idea prevalent in official discourse, the idea that a text is a writer's real voice. Writers work hard to create their texts (MNER-PI, 2000a: 241) and pupil-readers are expected to do their best to enter into their 'poetic workshop', as their texts are called. (ibid., p.242) It is considered possible for readers to listen to the creators' inner world, as it is manifested in their texts, and to recognise their intentions. For example, in the 1997 *Instructions*, teachers are told that it is necessary to look at the imagery and the other stylistic devices "always in conjunction with the aesthetic result and the expression of the poet's psychological mood", indicating that there is a close relationship between a writer's inner world and her written creations. (MNER-PI, 1997a: 28) At other points, we are told that pupils should note the main and the side elements that "an author observes and highlights" (MNER-PI, 1997a: 28), or that they should look at the structure of a text and recognise the oscillations in a writer's mood. (MNER-PI, 2000a: 243) Especially in the 2000-01 *Instructions*, in the interpretative notes given on the texts prescribed for study, authors very often occupy the position of the acting subject in sentences, while it is often assumed that an author's voice can be heard behind the 'I' of

a text, thus identifying the writer with the narrator or the speaking subject. For example, in the interpretation of Cavafy's poem 'Caesarion', we read that:

In the first 14 verses we have *a conscious choice* of a prosaic style that is entirely in agreement with the state of *the speaking subject, who is nobody else than the poet himself*, communing with us his current state of boredom... (MNER-PI, 2000a: 244-245; my italics)

In the interpretative notes, there is abundance of similar examples, where writers are presented as the point of reference and source of meaning.⁴⁵ The assumption is that they speak through their texts, revealing their agonies, preoccupations, feelings, ideology and intentions, in short, everything about themselves.

As authors are considered to have the prime role in the creation of textual meaning, one wonders where the vital information on their personal life and intentions can be found. First of all, a close study of the texts is assumed to expose such information, the idea being that you should listen to the authors' voice-texts carefully in order to get to know what the authors themselves think, feel or want. Apart from that, pupils can find information on writers in their anthologies and from their teachers. Teachers are expected to feed pupils with information on writers and their era⁴⁶, but it is never explained how or where they can acquire such an accurate and deep understanding of a writer and her life as is needed for a 'literary biography'.⁴⁷ In the literature textbooks, the compilers have included very short biographical notes on writers, where they give their real name (in case they use a pseudonym), the time and place of birth (and of death, if they are dead), occupation, studies, the titles of any published works and the dates of publication, a few very general comments on their style, the literary movement they are part of and the literary influences they have been under. These biographical notes are on average ten lines long and all information is presented in a very schematic and sketchy way.⁴⁸ In their effort to give 'objective' and

⁴⁴ The term used in the policy document is 'ποιητική βιογραφία' and its literal translation in English would be 'poetic biography'.

⁴⁵ For example, "these thoughts should be used *to shed light on the poet's agony*" (MNER-PI, 2000a: 198; all italics in these examples are mine), "the role that the poet attributes to himself and to poetry could be identified and stressed" (ibid., p.199), "we will thus approach the elements of Sikelianos' [the poet's] ideology" (ibid., p.200), "this comment gets across the poet's relationship with the young people of his times" (ibid., p.201), "the two worlds that collide in the text should be identified as well as the stance adopted by the *author-narrator*" (ibid., p.203), "a comment should be made on the use of the first person singular in the final verse, in which *the equation of the poet with his character* can be seen" (ibid., p.214), "Varnalis [the poet] criticises the fatalists, the socially marginalised people, *with the intention* to raise their awareness" (ibid., p.214), "it is worth stressing the vagueness and uncertainty of the word 'something', that *the poet consciously chooses so as to reveal* the poetic and social fluidity in which his generation lives" (ibid., p.215), "...elements... that *the poet draws up to the surface from the different layers of his memory*" (ibid., p.215), "the *poet-narrator* is a tragic person" (ibid., p.217) and so on and so forth.

⁴⁶ For such an example, see MNER-PI, 1997a: 92-93. An exception to this general suggestion can be found in the 1997 *Instructions* for Gymnasium, where teachers are told not to give any further biographical information than that included in the school textbooks, because "our aim is the interpretation of the texts themselves and not the supply of biographical and philological knowledge." (MNER-PI, 1997a: 28)

⁴⁷ As is explained in the beginning of this section, a 'literary biography' includes only those elements from a writer's biography that cast light on a text and contribute to its interpretation.

⁴⁸ In his study of Greek teachers' views on literature teaching, Papantonakis [Παπαντωνιάκης] (2000) found that about 95% of teachers try to find a correlation between the content of a text and the biographical

‘unbiased’ accounts of the anthologised writers, the anthology compilers present characters that are totally a-sexual and a-political, with appropriate ideologies and sanitised passions. Whenever something more ‘personal’ is revealed about these writers, then it has to be their patriotism, love for learning, for tradition, freedom, progress and democracy, or faith in the demotic language, all of them cherished qualities that should be instilled in the pupils of a humanistic school. So, we see that teachers and pupils are encouraged to build a writer’s image and to use this construction in their textual interpretation. These ‘literary biographies’ are treated as definite and indisputable records and not as constructed texts that are full of ambiguities, gaps and contradictions, as is anyone’s life.

Moreover, in official discourse, writers are treated as individuals whose work is irrelevant to their experiences of gender, place of origin or ideology. An interesting example of this can be found in an article written by Milionis, one of the anthology compilers, where, among other things, he answers the charges made about text selection in the school textbooks. (Milionis [Μηλιώνης], 1989) Regarding the low percentage of women writers, he says: “such ‘racial’ criteria have not been applied in any History of Literature, so far as I know” (ibid., p.51); as for the representation of Greek Cypriot writers, he explains:

We cannot talk about Modern Greek literature in terms of local boundaries, unless there is such a movement, and there is no such thing today. The literary production of those writers who come from Cyprus, whether they used to live and still live there or not, is part of the whole Greek literary production and is appreciated as such. (ibid., p.52)⁴⁹

Finally, with respect to the representation of progressive writers, he explains:

I think that this criterion is very weak. First of all, because the term itself is not very clear – unless we look to the writers’ party membership cards, which the compilers neither had nor needed. They selected texts of the most remarkable writers according to the philological and critical evaluations that they had at their disposal at the time. (ibid., p.51)⁵⁰

Milionis takes it for granted that a writer’s work can be read in a way that is completely detached from any considerations of social or cultural background. Teachers and pupils are urged to disregard writers’ gender, background and ideology, and to think only of the ‘quality’ of their work, as if literariness is an absolute and transparent value and not a cultural product. Readers are expected to look at an author’s life in order to make sense of her work and to interpret it, but they should pay attention only to those aspects of their lives that are ‘relevant’ and should regard them as individuals whose identity is unconnected to any sense of gender, social or cultural

information given on its writer, which shows how important the role of these biographical notes is in literature teaching.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, in this extract regarding the representation of Greek Cypriot authors in the school textbooks, Milionis rejects the idea that an author’s background could be of any significance, while at the same time, he talks about ‘Modern Greek literature’. He assumes there is a corpus of texts that make up the ‘Greek literary production’ but does not state clearly what is the attribute shared by all these texts. If locality is not an issue, then what is it that grants a place in this corpus to a text? Should it be written in Greek, refer to ‘Greek matters’, depict ‘Greek culture’, or what?

⁵⁰ Even though Milionis refers to ‘them’, still he means ‘we’, as he was one of the compilers and tries to explain their rationale.

background. In any case, authors have a leading role to play in the reading process as it is their voice that can be heard in texts, revealing their inner thoughts, feelings and intentions.

4.B.iv. Constructing the image of the ‘ideal’ reader

The *Instructions* books set the aims for literature teaching, comprising the general aim and the more specific ones, thus depicting the ‘ideal’ reader of literature and what she should be able to do. In the 1997 *Instructions* book, which is representative of the official discourse before the 1997 Reform, the primary aim of literature teaching is to shape pupils’ national identity.

The general aim of the teaching of Modern Greek Language and Literature is to introduce pupils to the Greek world and civilisation, as this took shape and gradually evolved from the late Byzantine centuries until today, while keeping its ties with the ancient Greek tradition, and as this is expressed through the texts. (MNER-PI, 1997a: 88)

In this text, the teaching of literature is strictly built around a sense of ‘Greekness’ that is envisaged in a living continuity from the ancient times, through Byzantium and reaching our times. The Greek-centred bias of the curriculum is further stressed in the first of the specific aims that follow:

Through the teaching of texts the following are sought:

- I. for students to attain a clear and full picture of the beginnings, evolution and present state of Modern Greek literature, so that:
 - a. they get to know its particularity, wealth, variety and dynamism,
 - b. they appreciate the particular character and values of Modern Greek culture and realise its independence,
 - c. they get to know the character and ethos of our people and to consolidate their belief in its vitality and creativity. (MNER-PI, 1997a: 88; see also p.25)

Here, Modern Greek literature is treated as the voice of the Greek people and of their culture, and it is assumed that by getting to know these texts pupils will get to know the Greek people per se. Interestingly enough, both literature and the people it expresses are characterised solely by positive qualities, such as wealth, vitality, dynamism, creativity, particularity etc., thus creating an idealised, romanticised image of them that is free of anything disagreeable or contradictory. When the writers of this official document refer to ‘our people’, they take for granted that all people involved in the Greek education system are members of the same group and share the same ‘character’ and ‘ethos’, assuming the existence of a monocultural, uniform community. The introduction of literature into the school curriculum is thought to contribute to the formation of pupils’ identity, an identity whose character is strongly national, unique and unifying, with long roots that go back to ancient times. Greek culture is presented as autonomous and free of any influence from other cultures, and pupils should “gain self-awareness and a sense of the *self-containment of Modern Greek civilisation*.” (MNER-PI, 1997a: 25; my italics) After the 1997 Education Reform, even though the aims set were revised, there was no radical change of attitude. The references to a shared national heritage and a common identity might be toned down, but still in all subsequent *Instructions* book we read:

The principal aim for the teaching of Literature is pupils’ contact with representative works of our cultural heritage, both national and universal, as well as with modern texts that give assurances of quality and promote discussion on modern issues and new

aesthetic movements; such contact should be as substantial as possible. (MNER-PI, 1998: 59)⁵¹

Once again the reference to ‘*our* cultural heritage’ is set at the heart of the subject, making use of an inclusive ‘we’. It is assumed that everyone involved in the Greek education system belongs to a nation with a common cultural background, while also belonging to a humanity that traverses a common path.

In general, literary texts are not seen as independent and self-sufficient but as constructions that are mainly defined in relation to the context where they first appeared and a picture of literature is presented as a phenomenon that has a strongly historical perspective. With the exception of the first two years of Gymnasium, where a thematic approach is followed, texts are presented as examples of literary production in specific periods of Greek literature, and material is organised in historical periods.⁵² Teachers are asked to put texts under study into context, reviewing their links with the literary movement they are part of as well as their relation to the society and era they came out of. (MNER-PI, 1997a: 91, 92; MNER-PI, 1999: 143) As for pupils, they should take advantage of the history of literature in order to understand a text and its quality. (MNER-PI, 1999: 140) In an effort to justify the historical approach to literature, policy makers explain that it helps pupils to perceive the multiformity of the literary phenomenon.

In this way:

- thinking on the big issues and the different genres is reinforced,
- the transmutations of literary production, both Greek and universal, are perceived, and
- the concept of originality is understood in a more schematic and clear way in relation to tradition. (MNER-PI, 2000b: 165)

Thus, reading literature at school becomes partly synonymous with the study of the history of Greek literature, while there is care to emphasise the length and unbroken continuity of this history, where the Greek people never lose their creativity, whatever the adversities.

Apart from the panorama of Greek literature, pupils are also expected to acquire knowledge about Greek history through the reading of literary texts. In the 1999 *Instructions*, one of the set aims is that pupils should be able:

to obtain all sorts of information about important historical, social, political, existential and other issues that are brought up in literary works, to comment on the various approaches that are put forward in these, to express their own views in a well-documented way and to be sensitised to the presented issues. (MNER-PI, 1999: 140)

Here, literary texts are treated as sources of historical evidence, rendering the study of literature an aid to that of history. Such a proposition is based on two assumptions: first, that the storage of information in literary texts and its subsequent retrieval are unproblematic functions, and second,

⁵¹ References are made to the *Instructions* book issued for school year 1998-99 (MNER-PI, 1998: 59-60), but the section ‘Aims’ was also reproduced without any alterations in the subsequent *Instructions* books for 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02, in pages 141-2, 182-4 and 163-4 respectively.

⁵² Thus, texts are put under headings such as Scholar production – First period (1000-1600), The 19th century until 1880, The New Athenian School (1880-1922) etc.

that such information is unambiguous and transparent. Even though it is Greek history, society and politics – or at least a picture of these – that are placed at the centre of literature teaching, still the qualifier ‘Greek’ is omitted from the official text as superfluous.

Alongside their acquaintance with Greek culture and literature, pupils are also expected to become familiar with literary expression in other traditions. To this end, school anthologies include a few foreign texts that pupils should read, put in context, interpret and, finally, compare with the ‘corresponding’ Greek texts – even though it is never explained how such a correspondence is to be worked out. (MNER-PI, 1997a: 91, 93) The inclusion of foreign texts is at variance with the title *Modern Greek Literature Texts*, but reinforces the idea of universality of the literary phenomenon that is promoted by the textbooks. Their number is very small compared with that of Greek texts, indicating the emphasis laid on home tradition⁵³, a primacy which is also suggested by the total exclusion of foreign texts from the lists of texts that are being prescribed each year for study and examination in Lyceum after the 1997 Reform. Writers are mostly defined in terms of their country of origin, with the exception of those included in the anthologies for the first two years of Gymnasium, where a thematic approach has been used for the compilation and foreign texts are part of these sections. So, for example, in the textbook for Year 2 of Lyceum, there is a separate section called ‘Foreign literature’ with four subsections, namely ‘England’, ‘France’, ‘Germany’ and ‘Russia’, with one to two texts in each of them.⁵⁴ There seems to be an assumption that each country has a distinct literary tradition which can be distilled into a single text or writer. Moreover, not all literary traditions are deemed good enough to be represented in the anthologies. In the 1997 *Instructions* book, it is stated that:

students should come into contact with the literary creation of other *developed* people, should become acquainted with their civilisation and appreciate it. (MNER-PI, 1997: 88; my italics)

In the six textbooks, most writers anthologised are from Western Europe, coming from countries such as France, England, Ireland, Spain, and Germany.⁵⁵ In addition, there are a few texts from Russia and the USA, a few from the Latin tradition and odd ones from Chile, Czechoslovakia and China.⁵⁶ The anthologies promote a West-centred view of literature, leaving completely out of the

⁵³ In Gymnasium, in Year 1 foreign texts are 6 out of a total of 93 (6.5%), in Year 2 they are 6 out of 96 (6.25%), and in Year 3 they are 8 out of 112 (7.15%). In Lyceum, in Year 1 foreign texts are 9 out of a total of 108 (8.33%), in Year 2 they are 6 out of 95 (6.31%), and in Year 3 they are 13 out of 70 (18.57%; despite the fact that this percentage seems high in comparison with that of the previous years, still foreign texts occupy a very small part of the anthology, as they are small extracts whereas Greek texts are much longer).

⁵⁴ In particular, England is represented by a poem by Alfred Tennyson, France by a poem by Charles Baudelaire and four extracts from Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*, Germany by an extract from Goethe’s *Faust*, and Russia by an extract from Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* and two extracts from Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.

⁵⁵ In particular, the following writers are anthologised (with the number of texts in brackets): FRANCE: Balzac (1), Baudelaire (2), Camus (1), Eluard (1), Hugo (1), Molière (1), Montaigne (1), Prévert (1), Saint-Exupéry (1), Sartre (1), Stendhal (1); ENGLAND: Byron (1), T.S. Eliot (1), Shakespeare (1), Tennyson (1); IRELAND: Joyce (1), Wilde (1); GERMANY: Böll (1), Brecht (1), Goethe (1); SPAIN: Cervantes (2), Lorca (2); ITALY: Dante (1), Petrarch (1); SWEDEN: Gullberg; DENMARK: Andersen (1).

⁵⁶ In particular, the following writers are anthologised (with the number of texts in brackets):

picture the literatures of the neighbouring Balkan countries or traditions from other continents. So the official discourse is based on the assumption that there is such a thing as a ‘universal’ cultural heritage⁵⁷, which includes literary texts created by ‘developed’ people. It is mainly dead white men of Western origin that qualify for entry in this pantheon, whereas works from the rest of the world or other social groups are left out.

Another major aim set for literature teaching is the development of pupils’ linguistic skills. Even though the 1976 Education Reform recognised literature as a separate area of the curriculum, its study is still expected to foster pupils’ use of language. Thus, ‘literature’ functions as a complement to ‘language’, the latter having its own slot in the timetable and being taught with two series of textbooks, one for Gymnasium called *Modern Greek language* and another one for Lyceum called *Expression–Essay writing*. At the end of the literary anthology for Year 1 of Gymnasium, the compilers have included a note ‘To teachers’, where they explain that:

[with the *Modern Greek Literature Texts*, pupils’] language education is completed, their expressive skills are reinforced and their abilities for *correct* communication are expanded, their spirituality is developed, they are sensitised to the problems of the people, of the place and of the times, they are connected to their roots; and at the same time, they are aesthetically cultivated. (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], *MGLT*, Gymnasium Year 1: 316; my italics)

Once again we encounter the idea that literature should foster pupils’ sense of national identity, bringing them into contact with their ‘roots’. Once again we see that ‘Greekness’ is understood in an unequivocal, self-evident way and notions such as ‘people’, ‘place’ or ‘times’ are used in an abstract, all-inclusive way without any qualification at all. It is interesting, though, to note that out of a total of seven aims set for literature teaching in this note, the first three relate to the use of literature as a means for language study. Studying literary texts completes language education, reinforces expressive skills and expands one’s abilities for communication. Communication is understood in a decontextualised way, based on a notion of ‘correctness’ that is left undiscussed and oblique. Moreover, it is not explained in what ways the reading of a literary text could contribute to the development of language use. Do the compilers expect pupils to start talking like books or is a literary style appropriate for all forms of communication? Before the 1976 Education Reform, when there was insistence on *katharevousa*, the texts included in the former textbooks *Modern Greek Readings* were expected to function as examples for ‘proper’ use of language and were selected with this in mind. After the 1976 Reform, with the demotic language being recognised as the official language, we see that the notion of ‘correct’ communication is brought up once more, without any consideration of context or power.

RUSSIA: Chekhov (1), Dostoyevsky (1), Gorky (1), Mayakovsky (1), Pushkin (1), Sholokhov (1), Tolstoy (1); USA: Dos Passos (1), Hemingway (1), Pound (1), Saroyan (1), White (1), the chief of an Indian tribe whose name is not mentioned (1); LATIN literature: Lucretius (1), Plautus (1), Virgil (1); CZECHOSLOVAKIA: Kafka (1); CHILE: Neruda (1); CHINA: a poem of the 8th century B.C that is four lines long.

The idea of using literature to improve pupils' language use becomes even more pronounced in Year 3 of Lyceum, where a large percentage of the texts included in the school textbook are essays. At the beginning, the compilers have included a text called 'Instructions on the use of this textbook' where they explain that the selection of essays was made on the basis of their topic, trying to highlight "contemporary issues or issues that still interest today's man and in particular the Greek man." (Grigoriadis et al. [Γρηγοριάδης κ.α.], *MGLT*, Lyceum Year 1: 5) They also point out that "the main aim of this textbook is to connect the teaching of texts with that of Essay writing" and that "it is advisable that sufficient essays are taught, so that pupils will get more practice in the style of essays." (ibid., p.5) A similar idea is to be found in the 1997 *Instructions* book where it is stated that "the primary aim of the textbook is to connect the teaching of texts with the 'Expression-Essay writing'." (MNER-PI, 1997a: 94) Thus, the definition of literature is widened to include treatises, and literature is put to the service of language teaching and in particular of essay writing, as if no other form of writing could be pursued in the context of a literature lesson.

The use of literature for the development of pupils' linguistic skills has been criticised as a threat to its curricular independence at all levels of the education system.⁵⁸ Literature might have its own textbooks and its own slot in the timetable, but it often serves to enhance pupils' use of language⁵⁹ and its grade is calculated together with that of Modern Greek language, resulting in literature and language being 'the two Siamese parts of Modern Greek.' (Papantonakis [Παπαντωνάκης], 2000) Many have disagreed with the current situation, asking instead for a complete divorce between the two. Looking at literary texts for exemplary uses of language makes its teaching subservient to that of language and debilitates its power as art. (Sideri [Σιδέρη], 1980) It has been argued that language and literature should form the subject matter of two independent areas of the curriculum, with different aims, names, textbooks etc., and according to a study, it seems that more than half the teachers agree with such a demarcation. (Papantonakis [Παπαντωνάκης], 2000; see also Sideri [Σιδέρη], 1980)

Another aim is that pupils should learn to appreciate literature and its particularity. In the pre-1997 official documents, there is an insistence on aesthetics and the 'beautiful'. For example, we are told that:

⁵⁷ See MNER-PI, 1998: 59.

⁵⁸ Primary school pupils use a series of textbooks, entitled *My language*, that include texts followed by exercises. Most of the texts included are literary but they are not mainly studied as such. Exercises aim at the acquisition of language and acquaintance with literature comes eighth in the list of aims for the subject in the primary school curriculum. There is also a series of three *Anthologies*, which are intended for pupils' contact with literature, but they are also used as an accessory to the improvement of language skills. Many teachers, on their own initiative, try to cultivate the habit of reading among their pupils but these are only piecemeal initiatives and are not enough. (Papadatos [Παπαδάτος], 1997)

Pupils should get to know the wealth and variety of Modern Greek literature and to grasp its value, so that their sensitivity is developed, so that they will be in the position to appreciate and take delight in the ‘beautiful’ in writing. (MNER-PI, 1997a: 25; see also p.88)

Policy makers assume there is general agreement on notions of ‘beauty’ and ‘good taste’, as if they are subject to indisputable criteria shared by everyone. A pupil’s acquaintance with Modern Greek literature – which, interestingly enough, is presented with only positive attributes – is thought to be enough for her to understand these notions, even though it is never explained how this is attained. In the official documents published after the 1997 Reform, there is a change of approach and aesthetics is not mentioned any more. Instead, literary theory is presented as the *sine qua non* of literature teaching and pupils are expected to be cognizant of poetics, narratology, semiotics, stylistics etc. The knowledge of such ‘reading techniques’, together with more specific knowledge on the text under study, will help them comprehend a text, and later it will be transferable to the reading of other texts. (MNER-PI, 1997b: 192-3; MNER-PI, 1998: 59; MNER-PI, 1999: 140, 142) All these structuralist, semiotic, and stylistic ‘techniques’ are seen as part of a single method of analysis called ‘interpretative’ that is treated as the self-evident way of approaching a text. Despite the post-1997 ‘modernisation’ of literature teaching, the Greek official discourse rules out any sense of a critical approach, completely disregarding the contribution of feminist, Marxist or psychoanalytic critiques to literary theory.⁶⁰

Literature teaching puts further demands on pupils, as they are expected to be wholeheartedly involved in their reading. As the writers of official documents explain, literature by nature calls for readers’ “emotional and experiential participation and response”, which means that pupils, more than simply taking in the knowledge on offer, should also approach a text prepared to be moved and transformed both intellectually and emotionally, expanding their own personal experience. (MNER-PI, 1998: 59) Literature is seen as the perfect ground for such an enterprise because it provides pupils with the opportunity to reflect on present and past societal issues (MNER-PI, 1997a: 88) as well as “to live through others’ experiences and circumstances.” (MNER-PI, 1997b: 192) In the discourse elaborated after the 1997 Reform, pupils are expected to assume a more critical role and evaluate the ideas expressed in a text, accepting or rejecting them,

⁵⁹ There are references to the ‘common secret’ that occasionally Greek teachers make use of teaching periods allocated to the study of literature in order to supplement those used for language study. (Papantonakis [Παπαντωνάκης], 2000)

⁶⁰ As part of the effort to ‘objectivise’ literature teaching, a new textbook entitled *Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Parisis & Parisis [Παρίσης & Παρίσης], 1999) has been distributed to pupils with definitions of literary terms. One of the aims set for this publication is “the introduction of a uniform teaching terminology” to be used in all schools (*ibid.*, p.4), but it is evidence of the increased role attributed to a more ‘technocratic’ approach to literature. Moreover, the new framework promoted for the examination of literature after the 1997 Reform is also indicative of the effort to make its teaching more ‘scientific’, as questions of an ‘objective type’, like multiple choice or ‘right/wrong’ ones, are introduced alongside the more open ones. (Hodolidou [Χοντολίδου], 1999) Changing the assessment framework was a major aspect of the 1997 Reform at the expense of other essential aspects of the educational praxis, like the programmes of study, the textbooks, teacher training, the school ethos and so on. As Hodolidou points out “the one-

but still there is no doubt as to the far-reaching influence of literature upon their own psychology and attitude. Thus, literature reading helps pupils “develop their personal stance and beliefs on fundamental issues of individual and social life as well as set up their own system of values.” (MNER-PI, 1998: 60) An idea that is brought up in this discourse about personal transformation is that of ‘sensitivity’, seen as the natural outcome of reading literature.⁶¹ ‘Sensitivity’ is defined as:

the acute sense that perceives the human and social problems better and more deeply – leading to alertness and to participation for their treatment. The opposite of sensitivity is insensibility, apathy and indifference. (MNER-PI, 1997b: 192)

Here, the humanistic ideal is promoted whereby pupils are educated to become responsible citizens who are interested in matters of common life, balancing insightful contemplation and active participation.

Literature in school is invested with great significance as it is expected to exert a manifold influence upon pupils. First, by reading literature, pupils become familiar with the Greek literary heritage that is presented as ‘their’ tradition, shared by all of them, building a sense of national identity, uniform and all-embracing. Through this literary tradition, which is put in a historical perspective, they are to become acquainted with Greek culture and history, since texts are the voice of the Greek people themselves. The Greek tradition is usually presented as self-contained, but even when it is compared with texts from other traditions, it is only Western texts that are admitted. Second, the teaching of literature is used to enhance pupils’ linguistic skills and to help them write better essays, an aim that goes way beyond the area of literature study. Third, pupils are expected to comprehend ‘literariness’ and the particular stylistic devices that writers employ to create a text, which means that great stress is put on their learning a specific terminology. Finally, by nature, literature is thought to have a transformative and comprehensive influence on readers, enriching their experiences and making them better people with more acute perception and increased eagerness for participation.

4.B.v. Pupils – a genus of their own

Pupils are at the centre of the curriculum, since everything is aimed at them and their development. Throughout the *Instructions* books, we are told what they should do, what they should achieve or what teachers should ‘offer’ them, but there is not a word about who they are, what they bring into class from home or what they can do. Pupils are present in every sentence, and yet they seem to be absent. Official documents construct an image of pupils as a group that has no voice of its own, a gathering of individuals that have virtually no differences or particularities. They are treated as *tabulae rasae* that come to school free from any other social influences. In the official discourse, the world ends at the door of a classroom and is peopled only by teachers, pupils, texts and authors. Teachers are seen as the bearers of knowledge and the

dimensional change in assessment results in mechanistic and technocratic changes without any substance.” (ibid., p.53) However, it is beyond the scope of this project to look at assessment issues.

mediators between pupils and texts, which are thought to be reflections of reality, depicted by insightful, sensitive authors and expressing Greek culture and ‘good’ quality. Under the guidance of their teachers, pupils will eventually engage with the literary texts and the reflections they offer, and at the end of the process they will have approached wholeness and knowledge.

There are very scant references to pupils’ background and its effect on their reading, and even these are not to be found in all official documents. In the 1997 *Instructions*, which are representative of the pre-1997 discourse, we are told what pupils are expected to do but there is not a word about what they might bring into class. (MNER-PI, 1997a) One would expect that after the 1997 Reform, when there was a turn to literary theory in an effort to ‘modernise’ literature teaching, there would be a change of direction and an increased reflection on pupils’ role in the reading process. However, there was virtually no shift from the previous approach. In fact, in the section entitled ‘Aims’ of the 1998 *Instructions* book, which is reproduced in all subsequent versions, there is only one reference to the differences there might be between pupils, saying that the fulfilment of the aims depends on:

- pupils’ age and perceptiveness,
- the teaching and learning environment,
- the particular nature of a text and the specific objects of study. (MNER-PI, 1998: 60)

Here, for the first time there is a reference to age as a factor that determines one’s contact with literature, while the notion of perceptiveness is brought in, without, though, any discussion of how it affects reading or of the factors it depends on. Thus, in official discourse, all pupils are the same, the only differences being those related to age and perceptiveness. As has been discussed in previous sections, they are all seen as belonging to the same national group, sharing a common cultural heritage, a common history and a common attitude to life. That pupils might have a different cultural background or gender, that they might belong to different social groups or have different experiences, all these ideas are absent from official documents. Identity is understood as a monolithic and homogenising notion that is to be reinforced through literature reading, while notions of diversity, change or conflict are treated as non-existent.

In the post-1997 official discourse, there have been some references to pupils making a ‘personal’ reading of literary texts.⁶² For example, in the section ‘Aims’, reproduced in all *Instructions* books after 1998, we are told that “through methodical and gradual practice [pupils] should be led to a *creative* and *free* reading, interpretation and criticism of texts.” (MNER-PI, 1998: 59; my italics) The question arising, though, is how ‘free’ or ‘creative’ can a response to literature be, especially when it is in the context of a class. It is interesting that both in this and in all the other references made to ‘personal’, ‘free’, ‘creative’ readings, policy makers present them as the result of training, as something that is learned and that conforms to an approved approach to literature. Pupils are

⁶¹ As an example, see MNER-PI, 1997a: 25, 28.

expected to give their own response to a text but this needs to be done within a certain framework that sanctions some responses and rejects others. As for the criteria that a personal response needs to meet to be acceptable, these are rather vague. For example, in the first official document written in the post-1997 reformed spirit, we read:

...it is obvious that pupils' responses are not assessed on the basis of what a certain teacher 'wanted' or 'expected' or 'taught', but on the basis of the more general correctness, the good balance, the rationality, the convincingness, as well as on the basis of the power and quality of pupils' writing. (MNER-PI, 1997b: 197)

Here, a pupil is expected to meet a set of criteria that are left utterly obscure. When is a response to literature 'correct', 'balanced', 'rational' and 'convincing'? What is judged as 'power' and 'quality' in a written response to literature? The writer of this policy document, Kostas Balaskas, makes sure he liberates pupils from their teachers' authority, but at the same time he subjugates them to an authority that is unnamed and thus incontestable.

Moreover, this call for 'free', 'creative' readings appears to be in flat contradiction to the prescriptive tone of the interpretative notes included in the 2000-01 *Instructions* book. These notes build a notion of a 'collective subject' that includes all readers who come into contact with the texts under study. The following extracts come from the three-page long analysis of the poem 'Ballad to the unknown poets of all centuries' by Karyotakis:

Our surprise grows when we realise that the same type of rhyming is also employed in the second stanza and it becomes admiration for the metric achievement... (MNER-PI, 2000a: 241; my italics)

Or,

We can do nothing but acknowledge a poetic generosity in Karyotakis when we realise that he does not content himself with taking the unknown poets but he also includes himself in their class... (ibid., p.243; my italics)⁶²

As can be seen, policy makers speak in the name of all readers, assuming we all share the same feelings of surprise, admiration, honour, pain and so on, when we read this particular text. In the four-page long analysis made of Empirikos' poems and the accompanying lesson plan, we are told five times that pupils should talk about their own experiences and fill in the gaps in the poems, but still the whole analysis consists of fixed statements and has a definite tone. (MNER-PI, 2000a: 232-6) It should be noted that such calls for pupils to bring their experiences to their reading are encountered only in this analysis of Empirikos' poems and in no other interpretative note. In the 2000-01 *Instructions* book, the policy makers argue that texts, authors and pupils should all keep their "creative role", making an effort, as it seems, to reach a compromise between the three agents of the reading process. (MNER-PI: 2000a: 232) The irony is that this reconciliatory view is followed by a series of fixed and close-end analyses of a number of poems. (MNER-PI, 2000a: 232-250) Thus, one wonders what space is left for pupils, that unified and all-embracing genus, to

⁶² The recent insistence on 'personal' readings and polysemy has been partly discussed in the section on 'Textual meaning'.

⁶³ At some other point, in the analysis of the poet Kiki Dimoula, we read: "In general, the poem leaves us with a taste of pain, dignity and familiarity." (MNER-PI, 2000a: 250; see also p.249)

develop and express their own ‘personal’ responses to a text in such a framework, where everything is already settled.

4.B.vi. *Who is in charge here?*

As was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Greek education system has always been under very tight centralised control. The Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (MNER), in association with the Pedagogical Institute (PI), regulate the teaching of literature, deciding upon the National Curriculum, the textbooks to be used, the texts to be studied, the examination system, in short, everything. Teachers and pupils are obliged to follow the guidance and are granted limited independence and autonomy. The prescriptive reality can be traced in the official policy documents, *Instructions*, on which teachers have to model their practice, where dogmatism seems to be systemic rather than an isolated feature. From the way they are written and structured, to the way they present textual meaning, the reading process and the agents involved, one can discern rigidity and fixedness.

The *Instructions* issued by the MNER and the PI play a strongly regulative role in the reality of literature teaching, but still the process through which they are produced is not transparent or open to participation. The committees that write these documents are appointed by the authorities of the MNER and PI and consist of Greek teachers working at the PI. A committee produces a final document for use in all schools without, however, holding any prior consultation with practising teachers, academics or other interested parties. Often, guidance for a number of subjects, such as Ancient Greek, Modern Greek, History, Latin, Philosophy and Psychology, is included in the same book and a list of names appears in the second page, without any indication of who is responsible for the writing of the instructions on each subject.⁶⁴ In other cases, the production of these texts is completely obscured and no names are given at all.⁶⁵ Another surprising feature is that parts of previous books reappear in subsequent ones, without any acknowledgement of their authorship. For example, in the 1999 *Instructions* book there is a piece called ‘About the teaching of literature’, which, as we are told, was written by Kostas Balaskas and published in the journal *The Educators’ Club* in 1994.⁶⁶ This piece reappears in the 2000-01 *Instructions* book, but this time the author’s name and other details have been left out and only the title is given. Thus, a piece that was originally published in a journal becomes part of a faceless, unsigned official

⁶⁴ See MNER-PI, 1999; MNER-PI, 2000a; MNER-PI, 2000b. At this point, it should be noted that ‘Greek’ teachers teach a wide range of subjects, including Ancient Greek, Modern Greek, History, Philosophy, Psychology and Latin, and that is most probably the reason why guidance on all these subjects is included in the same book.

⁶⁵ See, for example, MNER-PI, 1998; MNER-PI, 1997a.

⁶⁶ I.e. Κώστας Μπαλάσκας (1994) ‘Για τη διδασκαλία της λογοτεχνίας’, *Η Λέσχη των Εκπαιδευτικών*, τεύχος 8.

discourse and is being reproduced in a number of *Instructions* books.⁶⁷ Nor is there any explanation about why some sections might be left out for some years, reappearing a few years later.⁶⁸ These *Instructions* books are a distillation of the dominant discourse that determines the reality of literature teaching, setting its rationale, aims, syllabi and methodology. Teachers have to make their practice conform with this philosophy but are not supposed to take part in its making. Instead, it is a remote, and often faceless and anonymous, authority that produces these texts, while the process of their writing remains obscure, completely excluding teachers.

Apart from the production process of these official documents that ensures closure and predetermination, the discourse elaborated in them is also inflexible. The proposed aims, methods, lists of texts to be studied and interpretative notes, all these are given as indisputable statements that ask for teachers' and pupils' total agreement, rather than as propositions for consideration and reflection. In the first official document published after the 1997 Reform, under the title 'The aim' we read:

First of all there needs to be a clear awareness of the aim. For someone to go somewhere, first he needs to know where he wants to go. Why do we teach literature? Where do we aim at by teaching literature? What do we teach, when we teach literature? (MNER-PI, 1997b: 191)

This sounds like an invitation to teachers to ponder on the reality of literature teaching and engage in a dialogue over their practices. However, far from it, it is just a rhetorical device employed by the policy maker to open up the section, as he is quick to give us a list of four aims that literature teaching should serve, leaving no space for debate. In the dictated framework, texts are seen as reflections of an external reality that have been captured by insightful individuals. Most of the time their meaning is treated as fixed, while any allusion to polysemy is undermined by a continuous insistence on set interpretations that need to be taught in all classes. Teachers and pupils are asked, on the one hand, to focus entirely on texts, engaging in an unmediated dialogue with them, and on the other hand, to use 'extra-textual' elements, such as writers' 'literary biographies' in their reading. Thus, teachers and pupils are not only limited in their choice of texts and in their view of what qualifies as literature, but are also deprived of the space they need for the creation of textual meaning. They are constantly referred to some remote and elusive authority, whether it is a text itself or a writer, for an affirmation of their readings.

In this chapter I first gave an account of the relatively short history of literature as an area of the curriculum in the Greek education system. Then, I made a reading of a series of official policy documents of the 1990s that have been issued for teachers' guidance by central authorities. The

⁶⁷ See MNER-PI, 2000a: 228-9. This is not the only example of reproduction to be found. The *Instructions* book for 1999-2000 copies a section from the 1997-98 one (see pp. 142-3), the guidance book for 2000-01 reproduces some sections from the 1999-2000 one (see pp. 182-4, 228-9, etc.) and so on.

⁶⁸ For example, the *Instructions* book for 2001-02 reproduces many sections from the guidance book issued three years earlier for 1998-99 (see pp. 166-176). These sections were not included in the intermediate publications for the school years 1999-2000 or 2000-01.

categories I used for the analysis of these documents were the same ones I employed in chapter 2 for the analysis of the English official policy documents, so that the analyses would be comparable. Many interesting comments can be made from a comparison of the English and the Greek policy documents. However, I will refrain from such juxtaposition as it will be the subject of my last chapter, where all sets of texts from the two paradigms will be compared. In the next chapter I will present my reading of the interviews I did with some Greek teachers on their views of teaching literature and will attempt a comparison between the Greek policy documents and the interview-texts.

Chapter 5

The Greek teachers' perspective

As I explained in the introductory chapter, I interviewed nine Greek teachers in the period from late October 1998 to early January 1999, all teaching literature at secondary schools in Attica.¹ At the beginning of the interviews, respondents were invited to talk about their personal history as readers of literature. In these personal accounts, one can read marked traces of the recent history of Greece and of its education system: the oppression and poverty of the years after the Civil War, the clearly distinguished roles of the two sexes, the desertion and provincialism of the countryside, the suffocating lack of freedom in the years of the Junta (1967-1974), the persecution of left-wing people on account of their beliefs at various periods, teaching practices in past times, the rush to the big cities, education as a means to improve one's position in society etc.² These histories have shaped interviewees as individuals and as teachers of literature, and a good example of this influence is the interdependence they all identify between literature teaching and the system of government. It is interesting how all of them, and in particular the older ones, condemn the censorship and oppression that permeated the education system in past periods of undemocratic government, terrorising both teachers and students. They all agree on one point: that literature teaching cannot be fruitful unless it takes place in a democratic context where freedom of speech is guaranteed. In the same way as I did with the analysis of the English interviews in chapter 3, I will now look at how certain issues emerge in the Greek interviews.

PART 5.A. – TEXTS AND AUTHORS

5.A.i. *Textual meaning*

In most of the Greek interviews the prevalent idea is that meaning is fixed and definite and simply lies there in a text waiting to be discovered by a careful and observant reader. We often come across phrases like “[this teacher] revealed to [us] the value and the secrets of the texts studied” (Kostas/310)³, “[there is guided dialogue] so as to decode certain things from within a text”

¹ See Appendix 1.B. for the timetable of the interviews, Appendix 4.B. for a short presentation of Greek interviewees and Appendix 5.B. for the full text of the Greek interviews.

² See Appendix 3 for a short history of the Greek state since the War of Independence in 1821.

³ All references to the Greek interviews are given as follows: interviewee's changed name/page number. Page numbers refer to Appendix 5.B., where the full text of the Greek interviews can be found. The English translation of the Greek interviews is mine.

(Sofia/304).⁴ The common conception is that texts have 'secrets', 'messages', 'morals', and readers' role and responsibility is to 'reveal', 'decode', 'bring these out'. But, what are these meanings and messages that a text embodies? Most interviewees refer to texts as including images of people or settings that exist outside a text and irrespective of it. Kostas says that "literature is the mirror of an era" (Kostas/313) and Nefeli even reasons that through texts students can see "not only the manners and customs but life itself" (Nefeli/ii.282).^{5/6} Assuming that there is a correspondence between texts and a reality that exists out of and prior to them means that texts become the means to enter a past historical period, someone's psychology, some other people's culture. For example, when Margarita and Stella suggest the inclusion of texts from other countries in the curriculum, they assume that through these texts students will get to know the people of these countries and their cultures. (Margarita/323; Stella/282) Conversely, if one knows the reality that a text refers to, then one can understand the text embodying this reality more easily. In other words, readers need to know about the social, economic and political conditions both of the era in which a text is set and of the era in which its author has lived. They also need to know about the author, her life and personal experiences in order to be able to grasp the meanings of a text.

The idea of a text as a reflection is complemented by the conception of it as a self-contained entity, with specific parts that fit harmoniously together into a whole. A reader can interpret a text and gain "a complete image, a better image" of it (Anna/297), assuming that it is possible to cover *all* parts of a text and not to leave any gaps in the analysis in the pursuit of wholeness. All interviewees use the conventional distinction between content and form as their guide in textual analysis. Even when they deny this distinction, they still employ it, with contradictory results. For example, Sofia makes clear that they look at form and content together. (Sofia/304) And yet, she contradicts herself later on when she says that if a text is too long she "might assign it for homework, for pupils to read the content at home" making the rest of the analysis in class, as if it is possible to read a text only for its content or only for its form. (Sofia/305)⁷ The assumption is that an author

⁴ Similarly, "there are some things which a pupil cannot discern at the first reading and cannot bring out" (Sofia/305), "at the end ... students put together the message, the moral" (Anna/294), or teachers might ask questions such as "What ideas are there in this extract?" (Anna/297)

⁵ Nefeli was present in part of the interview with Stella. References to Nefeli's interview are as follows: Nefeli/page number. References to the contributions she made while I was interviewing Stella are as follows: Nefeli/ii. page number.

⁶ Similarly, Stella argues that "[through literature students] learn life, the daily routine, people's sensitive points, their culture" (Stella/281)

⁷ See also Sofia/305. Similarly, Petros says that he starts with questions on the content, which are then followed by questions on the form. (Petros/285) Interestingly, in some cases (e.g. Anna/297), interviewees use the term 'ideological' to refer to the ideas presented in a text, as opposed to its form. Thus, any question or comment is 'ideological' so long as it refers to the content of a text, a use that is devoid of any systematic or political sense. As Williams (1976) explains, this was the first meaning of the word 'ideology', which was first proposed by the rationalist philosopher Destutt de Tracy in the 18th century: '... ideology, or the science of ideas...', a usage that persisted in epistemology and linguistic theory until the late 19th century. (ibid., p.126)

has some ideas, which she then organises into a well-structured whole and dresses in a form that is stylistically elaborate. The ideas are thought to be worth studying and taking into account, while the form is seen as pleasing and noticeable. Many interviewees stress that, between the two, the analysis of the form proves to be more difficult for students, but cannot be left out, as it is compulsory.⁸ The notion of poetic language is called upon when interviewees talk about the transformation of commonplace material into a remarkable composition. For Kostas, poetic language might use the features of everyday language but is more 'beautiful', 'fascinating', 'sensitive' and 'tasteful', giving satisfaction to readers. (Kostas/311-2) On the other hand, for Maria, poetic language is superior to everyday language as it is the articulation of an idea "in a perfect way and more correctly than in everyday speech", which means that students ought to study it as an example to follow. (Maria/331) Whatever the reasons for which poetic language should be studied, whether for aesthetic cultivation or for use as an example, most interviewees comment on the exceptional form of literature.

The assumption that textual meaning is concrete and definite suggests that there can be only one interpretation of a text and it is a matter of good and in-depth study to find its correct and unambiguous meaning(s), discarding any erroneous ones. In her description of a typical literature lesson, Anna remarks that "at the end, we come up with a general impression of the whole text. Students put together the message, the moral." (Anna/294) When I ask her who is meant by this 'we', she explains:

We ask them, they raise their hand and each of them says his opinion. And, of course, at the end we finish up with the most correct, the most succinct one. Finally, of course, students receive help from the teacher as well. But every student has got something to say. [...] many students talk. Even [when they are left] on their own, they can compare and find the right one. Of course, at some point I intervene as well. (Anna/294-5)

Looking at the syntax of this extract, we see that she uses the first person plural referring to teachers as a group and the third person plural talking about students as a whole. Thus, she attributes the authority of a generalization to the view that there is a 'correct' and 'succinct' reading of a text. Teachers know it and students are expected to find it. She affirms that readers arrive at the 'right' reading of a text, even when left on their own, as if it is a natural process. A similar belief in a singular interpretation of a literary text can be read in other interviews as well, such as those with Maria and Sofia, promoting the concept of texts as monosemous.

It is interesting to note that this is where some interviewees fall into a contradiction, without realising it. For example, when I ask Petros whether he thinks there are specific ideas to be found in every text he answers by referring to the Nobel laureate, George Seferis.

⁸ See, for example, Nefeli/269; Petros/289; Margarita/319; Vasso/339 etc.

Seferis says that 'I will be glad if you understand the text... if each person understands the text in his own way.' So he says that there shouldn't be any guided conclusions. In other words, he says that 'You, tutor, or you, publisher, you shouldn't bring out a manual on this text. Because you will see the text in a certain way and you will make everybody else see it in the same way, whereas there might well be loads of other views on the same text.' (Petros/286)

A reader of his interview could suspect that there is some uncertainty lurking behind Petros' words, especially as he rushes to support his admission of textual polysemy with the weight of a Nobel laureate. He recounts this incident approvingly without any sort of irony or distance from it. So when I ask him how he deals with the different views in class, he answers without any hesitation:

Undoubtedly, I start from my personal view, but I accept [other views as well]. And there are students who come up with ideas, which I hadn't thought of. And I admit it straightaway. I might say to the students 'that's right. This is also valid. Let us discuss it.' It depends. I do not think there is only one idea. But according to my mental ability, this is what I put forward, and if there is another view, then this is acceptable as well. (Petros/286)

The discussion drifts on to other matters and some while later we talk about the recent 1997 Education Reform and the new type of examinations. As he discusses the newly introduced multiple-choice questions, he notices that students might come up with many different answers. However, he points out that he cannot accept all of them because:

the MNER says that only one of these many answers is the correct one. And this one which is 'the correct of the correct', if we can use this phrase, is the only acceptable answer. And students complain because they give an answer and I tell them 'no, that's not the right answer'. And still, seen in a general context, their answer is correct as well. But finally, it is not *the* answer. (Petros/290; emphasis in the original)

At this point I remind him of what he had said earlier on about accepting children's different readings of a text, to which he answers:

It's not that I accept them. No. I say 'well. OK. There is this point of view as well. I don't accept it, or it can't be the main idea of the text.' It could be another idea, a secondary idea, perhaps, but this is not exactly what the poet, or generally, the author wanted to say. (Petros/290)

At one time, he endorses Sefëris' point about texts being interpreted in many different ways. And then he talks as an advocate of the MNER philosophy that is based on a monosemous conception of textual meaning. To an unsympathetic reader of the interview, the impression would be that Petros is not very clear about what the nature of textual meaning is. However, I think that this contradiction shows someone trying to work out a coherent position for himself in an ideologically constructed, and thus, contradictory discourse. On the one hand, he realises that students often come up with interesting and convincing ideas, readings that he cannot reject, an observation that reinforces an established poet's assertion of the polysemy of texts. Thus, he clearly expresses his belief in the openness of a text and his acceptance of different interpretations. On the other hand, he knows that only one answer is acceptable in an examination paper and senses that the dominant discourse allows only a single interpretation of a text. He feels that he, being the teacher, is expected to know and sanction the 'correct' answer. In an attempt to resolve the contradiction, he

recovers his position within the dominant discourse', resorting to a distinction between main and secondary ideas and to a writer's authority for justification.

There are, though, interviewees who do not subscribe to the above conception of textual meaning being fixed to be found *in* a text and insist on students understanding that readers might respond differently. Instead of their voices being vested with the authority of 'correctness', they are to be heard alongside those of students. Margarita remarks that "from the very first day I point out to them that there is no stupid answer. 'I will accept anything you say, so long as it is yours.'" (Margarita/321), a view also shared by Vasso.⁹ According to these two teachers, a text is open to many interpretations and they use the word in the plural rather than in the singular. They do not put their own reading before that of students and talk about reading as an opportunity for readers to 'do' things in relation to literary texts rather than to search for a predetermined meaning in them. And yet they know that the dominant discourse requires them to come out with a single interpretation that the whole class will share, which means that they need to find a balance between what they think and what they are asked to do. The main difference between them and Petros is that any compromise they might make is conscious, whereas Petros does not realise the contradiction he falls into.

5.A.ii. *Authors in class*

In most of the interviews, an author's private world together with the world around her come into her texts, which are seen as evidence of her psychology, experiences and surroundings. Interviewees do not talk about authors as individuals who live in a sphere of their own, detached from the world, but see them as part of society, being determined by it as well as giving voice to it. Maria says that part of her aim is for students "to see that a creator is closely related to his era" and also "to understand that a work of art, in general and not only a work of literature, reflects an era", recognising a close link both between an author and her era, and between a text and the era. (Maria/331) Readers are expected to identify the strong autobiographical signs in all texts, as far as this is possible. As Margarita explains:

[we] work together and try to trace the reasons for which a text has been written. I always put this question to students: 'Let us see. Could we possibly make out why a person like this author wrote such a text at such a time?' So, [we look at] the era together with the author's personal experiences. (Margarita/318)¹⁰

⁹ Vasso explains: "In general, for me, different interpretations are acceptable, even in the exams. Even in the exams. I mean that I mark them positively. [I mark them positively] when they have followed a framework that is close to the text, when they have understood [the text] but have made an extension of their own – of course, so long as they write things that are a bit relevant to the text. This is something positive for me. [...] In any case, they are different persons..." (Vasso/344-345)

¹⁰ Similarly, Vasso argues that "texts come out of human lives" and they should be discussed as such. (Vasso/340)

By looking at a text, a reader can illuminate its creator's personal and social world¹¹, and at the same time an author's personality, life, social context etc. can shed light on her text¹². So the interviewees' framework is structured along the lines of a triangular relationship, where the author, her context and the student-reader occupy the three corners. In this framework a teacher is envisaged as guarantor of a smooth and unobstructed communication between the three.

When the cosmos of a text is close and relevant to that of a reader's, then a reader can communicate directly with the author. For example, Kostas cautions against excessive analysis of a text to avoid destroying the magic because:

if you start looking at all the side elements of a text in a very practical way and mood, then you might spoil what the writer created in a very direct and straight way, just with the mediation of the teacher or of a student who reads well. (Kostas/315)

Here, the assumption is that there can be a link between an author and a reader through which a communion of intimate thoughts and feelings is attained. Both authors and readers are represented as two independent and singular individuals who might have a common psychology and philosophy of life.¹³ However, student-readers' perspectives are often very different from those of the authors under study because:

each one [i.e. every writer] writes about his own matters starting from his own experiences and his own psychology. It is not necessary that a poem written by a poet has the same psychology as that of a child. (Nefeli/268)

In these cases, direct communication between the two is not possible. So approaching a text is seen as equivalent to moving closer to and understanding its creator, as though she is present in her creation. When there is a long distance between a reader's and an author's perspectives, it is the teacher's role to bring these two viewpoints closer and facilitate communication and understanding. In most interviews, a teacher's mediation is seen as indispensable for the identification of the meaning that an author had in mind when writing a text, of 'what she really wanted to say'.

Interviewees think very highly of authors. An author is seen as a gifted individual, "not a common person" but "something special, an eccentric person, a *sui generis* person, whose very weaknesses can be a source of creation." (Maria/330)¹⁴ In general, an author is seen as an individual whose writings are worth studying and whose life is worth knowing about. As for texts, they are discussed as the result of conscious decisions made by authors in their effort to communicate their ideas and

¹¹ See Maria/325; Stella/281.

¹² See Margarita/317.

¹³ In a similar frame of mind, Maria discusses her liking of Papadiamantis' writings, saying that: "He has an admirable way of conveying the manners and customs of a society, which partly reflects the society of the province where I grew up, especially with regard to the position of women. In other words, [through his writings] he talked to me a lot about my surroundings, both the familiar and the neighbouring ones." (Maria/325)

¹⁴ An author can create a rewarding text by using everyday language (Kostas/311; Maria/331) and has "an admirable way of conveying the manners and customs of a society" (Maria/325).

feelings to the rest of the world. Through writing, an author “wants to say” something (Petros/289), “gives” something (Nefeli/266), “wants to bring things out” (Maria/328), “conveys messages” (Maria/328), “makes students understand and creates pictures in their mind” (Vasso/339) etc. There is a sense of intentionality common in all these phrases. Authors make deliberate decisions both on the form of their texts and on the ideas they share with their readers through them. As for student-readers, their role is to read texts closely in order to find these intended meanings, whose correctness is to be confirmed by their teachers. Most of the interviewees do not delve into why people have the urge to write or why they make art; they take for granted people’s need to communicate through texts as well as their satisfaction with artistic creation. What is not made clear in many interviews is how readers can ever be sure about what an author’s intentions might have been in the writing of a text and where such an assurance could emanate from.

Interviewees might sound very confident about finding an author’s intended meaning, but then, sometimes their confidence is undermined by contradictions they fall into. When I ask Anna how one can ever be sure of what is the ‘most correct’ interpretation of a text, she recounts an incident that puts into question the very idea of intentionality.

I will go back a bit to my University years and remember Vrettakos.¹⁵ He came in to listen to the analysis of one of his poems. We were a big group of twenty students and, after we made many different readings [of his poem], in the end, he said ‘Well, did *I* say all these things? All these things that you said, did *I* say all these?’ And he carried on ‘While I was writing the poem, not even one percent of all these things crossed my mind; not even one percent of all these things that you just said and which are all correct.’ (Anna/298; emphasis in the original)

By describing this incident Anna suggests that other readings are possible, readings that might not have crossed an author’s mind during the act of writing. However, what she says right after this contradicts the above view of an author’s intended meanings.

[In my readings] I try not to go beyond what is reasonable. That is, I study the poem, I have taught it so many times, I have grasped the poet’s message, what he wants to give, and I try not to move out of this frame. So this is the reason why I intervene in order to bring them where I must. And this ‘must’ is my own conclusion, the result of all the study that I’ve done. (Anna/298)

First, she raises objections to the quest for ‘the’ authorial, and thus authoritative, meaning, but then she goes on to talk about a fixed intended meaning where all students ‘must’ arrive. The defiance of the authority of authorship that are expressed in the beginning, are followed by a rather forceful imposition of the authorial message, which is made to sound even stronger with the use of verbs like ‘I intervene’, ‘I bring them’.

Most interviewees say that at some point in the course of a lesson, usually at the beginning, they give some biographical information about the author and her era. The fact that this information is

¹⁵ Vrettakos’ work (born 1912) belongs to modern poetry and is characterised by a particular lyricism.

presented alongside the text itself indicates that a text cannot be considered irrespective of its creator and its meanings are dependent upon her. This information on an author and her era is included in school textbooks or is given by teachers, who have found it in other readings of their own. What none of the interviewees discusses is how these biographies, through which we get to know authors, are written or what the sources are and the material used for their writing. Only those details are given from a biography that are thought to illustrate the specific text, assuming that some aspects of an individual's life are more important and relevant than others.¹⁶ The underlying assumption is that it *is* possible to 'know' an author's life and to determine which particular aspects have been pivotal in her life and work. So for a text to be explained in a literature class, an image of its author is built through a selection process, where certain aspects of her life are depicted while others are left out. The constructed picture depends both on school discourse, as this is expressed in the biographical notes included in the anthologies, and on a teacher's philosophy of life.

An interesting example of such an image construction can be found in Maria's interview. Early in the interview, Maria says that she always dictates a few lines on authors that "have to do with his life and era, information that is *directly relevant* to the work under study and had some influence on his writings" (Maria/328; my emphasis), indicating that there is a cause and effect relation between an author's experiences and her writings. Later on in the interview, she describes a lesson on the poem *God Abandons Antony* by Cavafy.¹⁷ As she was talking about the poet, one of the students hinted at his sexual inclinations, which made the rest of the class laugh. Maria observes that "there was this threat that the lesson might fail, just because of this disorderly atmosphere [that had been created] with regard to whether Cavafy was a homosexual or not." (Maria/330) Her reaction is to deny any reference to the poet's sexuality, giving instead a lecture on his ecumenism, his use of Greek civilization, his living in Alexandria etc. She even tells a lie in order to achieve her desired outcome:

[I told them] that he is the most widely read poet in France – sometimes, we use a bit of exaggeration, that he is 'the most' widely read poet, because it makes an impression on them. (Maria/330)

Admitting that "it was up to me to change the climate" and that "it needs a big effort [to achieve this]", she is happy to say that "suddenly, I saw that the climate changed and Cavafy was transformed into a creator in front of their eyes." (Maria/330) After giving a similar example of another lesson, she concludes that:

¹⁶ For example, Sofia points out that she does not "insist a lot on the biographical details, apart from those details that have been decisive for his life." (Sofia/304)

¹⁷ Cavafy (1863-1933), a poet of Greek origin who lived in Alexandria, was not prolific but his work has been very influential in Greek poetry. In many of his poems there are hints of a homosexual Eros but these are always silenced in school discourse.

At the moment, of course, you need to shift the climate towards the creator, towards the artistic aspect. And of course, [it is good] if you manage to convince the students that we do not examine the author's personal life but his creative work. (Maria/330)

There seems to be a certain contradiction in what she says with regard to the relation between an author and her writings. Even though at first she clearly states that an author's personal life influences her writings, she then argues that readers should examine their creative work and not their personal life. Despite her initial admission that an author's life has a direct effect on her work, she goes on to draw a line between an author's 'personal life' and her 'life as a creator', assuming that it is possible to distinguish between the two. We also see the teacher's taboos at work in her construction of the poet's image, excluding his sexuality from it, as if it is something irrelevant. For her, authors are a-sexual beings, and her constructed image of an author is a sanitised one, where a selection of the 'appropriate' features has been made.

So authors are there in a class to be admired by student-readers. The very fact that their texts have been officially selected and are a compulsory study for all students in the country bestows exceptional value on them. However, as Vasso points out, this can be very intimidating and numbing for young readers, who are filled with awe at the inflated authors' achievements; an awe that might prove very unnerving for students as writers.

I think that children are shocked when they are faced with Modern Greek literature. Because you present it to them as something that is very important and great. So, this [treatment] makes a child look and feel small. For example, when you say to him about Kazantzakis 'look what words Kazantzakis has used and in what a successful way!' then that's it; the child has become that small [in front of such a great writer]. [And he might think] 'What word can I write now?' (Vasso/344)

She challenges the status quo presenting the author's 'death' as a necessary condition for the liberation of student-readers. Talking about a 'good' teacher she had at school she remembers that:

She let us go a step further, our own step further. [A step] further than the text and what the poet wants to tell us, and all this common stuff. [...] And I remember it was the first time that we had the opportunity to talk about how we really saw a text in a literature lesson. It was the first time I heard [a teacher saying] that 'Anyway, the poet has died. We can't know exactly what the poet wants to say [through this text], unless he has left a personal account in his writings or I don't know where.' There was such a freedom and opportunities. (Vasso/334)

Thus, there is at least one interviewee who goes against the view of the author as an independent consciousness that is expressed in a text, pointing out the overpowering function that such a view might have.

5.A.iii. Using set anthologies

Interviewees refer to the use of the anthologies given by the MNER as an imposed and often restrictive practice, stressing that they are obliged to use them and that they have no say over the texts included. Phrases such as "we are forced to" use the set texts (Sofia/306), "it is taken for granted" that we will use the set texts (Petros/286), or "[units] are fixed in the textbook. I can't do

any other. The school syllabus is specific.” (Stella/278), emphasise the limitations that are forced upon teachers and their feeling of powerlessness.¹⁸ Kostas' position on the matter is interesting as he exposes the position in which teachers find themselves with regard to the use of the anthologies.

Texts have *supposedly* been selected by the appropriate criteria and all of them have *supposedly* something to offer to a student of a particular age. So *a teacher needs to put himself in the position of the anthology compilers for a while*, to guess the motives of the people who selected the texts, to guess their motives and justify the choice of texts. And, of course, he himself needs to accept it. [He needs] to master it, to taste it and to convey it to students. (Kostas/313; my emphasis)

He talks about the appropriateness of the compilers' criteria and the beneficial effects of the included texts, and yet at the same time, he undermines their validity by his repeated use of the word 'supposedly'. Even though he initially seems to put a big question mark over the whole selection process, he moves on to a stark admission of what his position as a teacher entails: he has to get into the compilers' shoes and to accept their thinking, criteria and taste, to teach a text well. Teachers need to be educated in the school discourse themselves, before they can pass it on to students.

Interviewees realise that this practice is imposed upon them but they do not resist the use of anthologies as such, considering it to be unavoidable for a number of reasons. “The plethora of literary texts renders an overall study impossible” (Kostas/313), whereas by studying an anthology of texts, people “realise that it is possible for the beautiful to be expressed in different ways”, they “follow social changes through literature” (Kostas/313), familiarise themselves with a whole range of authors, and finally, understand the continuity of Greek language, seeing it as “single, unified and constantly in progress.” (Margarita/319) In the few instances when teachers talk about the experience of reading whole texts in place of extracts they do it in appreciative terms.¹⁹ However, they do not seriously consider any other options, such as studying whole texts, making their own decisions on the literary texts to be used, or even being able to choose between different anthologies. Their alienation and distance from the policy-making forums is so great and their disempowerment so striking that they are not used to expressing their opinions and elaborating new theses. They are aware that they *have to* work with the prescribed anthologies, as is the long-established tradition²⁰, and so do their best with what is in their hands.

¹⁸ See also Anna/295; Nefeli/272; Margarita/319.

¹⁹ See, for example, Stella/275; Vasso/341-2.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that since 1923, when Modern Greek was introduced as an independent subject for the study of Modern Greek language and literature, the material used has always been in the form of an anthology of extracts from literary and other texts.

The interviewees' reactions to the present anthologies vary from total agreement to deep scepticism, even though they do not really linger long over them and the criteria used for their compilation.²¹ At one end, Maria thinks the anthologies are perfect and there is no need for change, as there is representation in them of all those authors that students should be acquainted with.

There is no author who is left out. Of course, if we want to have a whole discussion on that, someone might come up and say that women authors are at a disadvantage. OK. Of course, some authors are missing. But, even if they include them, I don't think that we have the time to teach all of them. Only a short familiarisation can be achieved. (Maria/333)

Maria's satisfaction with the textbooks is expressed in the statement 'there is no author who is left out', which is an overstatement as she quickly realises and tries to amend it. However, her belated acknowledgement that there are authors who are excluded from the selection does not lead her to doubt the anthology or to question the criteria applied. Kostas also agrees with the current textbooks but his reasons are different from Maria's. His idea is that "all texts are suitable if we treat them in the right way" and "when a good teacher mediates in a correct and effective way, every text will finally appeal to students." (Kostas/313) According to Kostas, for the accomplishment of his explicit aim, which is students' aesthetic and personal development, the present textbooks can do their work as well as any other.

At the other end, though, there are interviewees who are dissatisfied with the current anthologies and express a wish for something 'different'. It is not that they do not like the existing texts, but they feel they do not meet their targets or serve students' needs. Margarita points out the Hellenocentrism that permeates the anthologies, explaining that, even though they are not promoting nationalism and many of them have an internationalist dimension, still the majority of texts are by Greek authors and relate to issues of Greek history and society, while there are only "a few scattered and piecemeal texts of foreign literature of different eras." (Margarita/323) She attacks the exclusion of texts from other countries, both the distant and the neighbouring ones, both the unfamiliar and the ones where immigrant students come from.²² The stronger voice of criticism comes from Vasso, who hotly contests the criteria that have been used for the compilation of these anthologies. First of all, she describes the texts included in the anthologies as being about "the homeland, religion, family, suffering Greece, the fight for its survival, we receive blows but still we get up and carry on." (Vasso/343) In other words, the selection is nationalistic and moralistic in its approach, trying to shape students' national identity along very conservative lines. She also

²¹ Interviewees, especially the elder ones, are more critical of those anthologies used in past times than of the current ones. Nefeli and Petros point out that, in past periods of repressive regimes, such as the dictatorship between 1967 and 1974, there was censorship and a whole range of texts was excluded from school on the grounds of their anti-totalitarian discourse. (Nefeli/264; Petros/284-285) In those times, two sets of tradition developed with some authors and texts being regarded as acceptable by school discourse, while others formed an alternative resistant corpus. Petros talks about education in the past being based on the ideals of "our country, the family and religion" (Petros/284-285), while Nefeli remembers how, as a student, she would recite whole poems in the school yard "without permission, illegally." (Nefeli/264)

comments on the bleakness and melancholy that characterises most texts, creating the image of a 'literature of mourning'. (Vasso/337) Vasso also reports her students' remark that there is not a single erotic scene or even a hint in the anthologised texts, as if there were strong taboos at work in the making of the selection. And yet, as Vasso observes, these 'chaste' texts are being studied "at an age when [students] are burning with various unfulfilled yearnings and desires; and when love is a central play in their lives, as an idea at least." (Vasso/343) In general, she criticises the images and issues portrayed in these texts as outdated, irrelevant to students' experiences, and consequently, unable to excite and motivate them. It is as if the selected texts relate to a world different from that of the students, presenting issues that are completely strange to them.²³

Margarita and Stella ask for texts from foreign literatures while Vasso and Nefeli point to the use of texts that are more relevant to students' interests. Similarly, Anna suggests "it would be nice if *they* included some new, modern writers as well", complaining about the fact that these textbooks "never change." (Anna/296; my emphasis) It is interesting to note her use of the third person plural, an impersonal 'they', when she refers to the compilers of the anthologies. It is apparent that teachers do not have the opportunity to influence decisions with regard to school textbooks; policies are decided somewhere distant and are just handed down to them. These teachers might not resist the idea of using anthologies as such or the overall shape of the current ones, but they clearly feel that the present anthologies lack something: renewal and other, different kinds of texts are needed for their aims to be achieved.

Following the 1997 Education Reform, teachers are expected not only to use the set anthologies but also to teach the set texts prescribed by the MNER in the whole of Lyceum. It is up to them to select the texts for study only in the three years of Gymnasium, even though the National Curriculum dictates certain criteria for this selection process as well. When asked about the criteria they use to choose the texts for study, most interviewees say that their prime criterion is that of personal taste. They teach texts that they themselves like, arguing that they are more successful in their teaching when they do a text they 'enjoy', 'feel' and 'understand'.²⁴ On the other hand, they find it difficult to teach texts that do not 'speak' to them and so try to avoid these. It is obvious that the subjective element plays a significant role in teachers' choice of texts, inducing a view of

²² Similarly, Stella would welcome the inclusion of "literary works from all over the world." (Stella/282)

²³ As Vasso explains, the images presented in the anthologies have "got nothing to say to them. I'm telling you, the worker who is suffering is a historical feature for these kids. It is not part of their experience. I think it is not part of anybody's experience anymore. Conditions have changed. The texts are on another plane." (Vasso/343) The idea that the texts used are remote from students' interests and worries is also behind Nefeli's demand for "bigger choice in topics that interest students nowadays" as well as for texts with images and characters that will be more familiar and close to students. (Nefeli/273)

reading where deep personal involvement is a condition. However, none of them expands on the factors that have determined and shaped their personal taste in literature, as if they are inherent or natural.

Their foremost criterion of personal preference seems to be complemented by a range of other criteria, which are not totally under their control. First of all, they try to cover all the periods of literary history that are presented in the textbooks, choosing a few representative texts from each one, a practice which is also prescribed by the National Curriculum.²⁵ The notion of 'representativeness' comes up in the interviews again and again, but there is no reflection at all on what it entails or how it is decided. Nor does any of them pause to think about the division of literary history into periods or the need for students to study them. Sofia talks about texts that "should be taught" (Sofia/306) and Nefeli about texts that have been read and discussed by many people, about texts that are recognised. (Nefeli/269) It seems that a literary canon is in full force, without its construction being discussed explicitly or any room being left for debate.

Second, the National Curriculum expects teachers who have classes of the same form to teach the same texts, so that students can sit the same paper at the end-of-year examination as a matter of comparability. So, in schools with a large number of students, two or more Greek teachers might have to agree on the specific texts they will teach in the course of a year. Interviewees have varied reactions to this practice and it seems that these differences relate to age. Older teachers like Petros and Anna assert that they do not really mind having to teach the same texts as their colleagues, as they seem to share some tacit, implicit views about which texts are worth studying.²⁶ On the other hand, the younger interviewees like Margarita and Vasso resent the fact that they have to go along with their colleagues, feeling dominated by them. Margarita complains that older teachers often lack the training, and thus, are unhappy about teaching certain texts.

Very often we see the timidity that some teachers, especially older teachers, have in teaching certain texts. I would say that many of the texts included in the school textbooks nowadays are very avant-garde. And it is precisely these avant-garde texts that some colleagues have difficulty in teaching. And as they have more years of service [than you do] they might, in a way, force you to teach the same texts as them. There are texts that scare teachers off, texts that they are unable to teach. (Margarita/318)

She does not really want to put the blame on the teachers because, as she points out, they have not been taught these texts while at University. Instead, she argues that teachers need to have in-service training to learn the keys that will help them understand and teach such texts. (Margarita/319) Despite her understanding of the cause of their reservations, she prefers it when she does not teach

²⁴ As Petros puts it: "I make clear to [students] that I myself feel the text. That is, I give myself to it, because I love what I do. That's why, first of all, I choose texts that I like. And I try to convey this to children." (Petros/285) See also Anna/296; Nefeli/266; Kostas/313; Margarita/318 etc.

²⁵ See, for example, Anna/295; Margarita/318.

literature with other colleagues, in which case she has the freedom to choose any text she wants from the anthologies. A similar kind of tension is expressed in Vasso's interview as she explains that there seems to be an unspoken understanding among teachers that a specific set of authors and texts should be taught every year, a set that is rather limited. (Vasso/338) As she talks about it, her tone is ironic and bitter, resentful of what she perceives as a narrowing-down of the experience of reading literature. Apart from the explicit regulations there also seems to be a hidden hierarchical discourse that circumscribes their practices. The longer teachers have been in the system, the more they have come to see it as the 'natural' way of things.

Another criterion used for the selection of texts, which is mentioned by some interviewees, has to do with teachers having taught a text in the past and having prepared notes on it. Again the interviewees' reaction to this practice ranges from utter acceptance to total scorn. Petros says that ninety per cent of the texts he does are the same every year, "because I have already worked with these texts and I know how a class will respond to my teaching." (Petros/286) This practice makes him feel more confident and successful, his assumption being that students react in a similar way to texts. On the other hand, Vasso attacks this practice and its underlying assumption, pointing out that it disregards the particular needs of a class and its students and that a teacher cannot walk in with ready-made recipes. (Vasso/338-9) In addition, she expresses boredom at having to do the same texts over and over again, insisting that there needs to be "some kind of experimentation", "of freshness" and "play" in a literature class. (Vasso/342)

Students, their needs and interests, feature in many interviews as a criterion for the choice of texts, though not in all. Some, such as Stella and Nefeli, talk about doing texts that interest students, which tackle issues immediate, direct and close to them.²⁷ Sofia says that sometimes she asks students to indicate which texts they would like to read in class, even though she does not feel obliged to follow their suggestions. "There might be some texts which I deem should be taught and pupils might not have noted them down. In that case, I do those texts [which I consider worth doing.]" (Sofia/306) For Sofia, pupils' preferences come second to their teacher's choices but, surprisingly enough, for the other interviewees students' preferences do not even have a place in their choice of texts, let alone a central one. For example, Maria says in a cynical way: "unfortunately, or fortunately, the pressure of the lessons is such that [students] don't particularly care whether we show preference for or whether we reject a particular author." (Maria/331)

²⁶ See, for example, Petros/288; Anna/295.

²⁷ See Stella/277; Nefeli/266-7.

The role of anthologies is indicative of the power relations at work in a literature class, symbolic of the centralisation of power determining the structure of literature as an area of the curriculum. Anthologies are at the centre of literature teaching and are more than just a teaching aid: they dictate the aims, the material, the approach. The MNER prepares and distributes them, and their use is compulsory. So a first level of control is the imposition of a single textbook and its philosophy by an inaccessible authority, referred to as 'they'. This site of decision-making is remote from classes, and both teachers and students are called to play in a game whose rules are dictated by some distant faceless authority. A second site of control, which functions at a lower level but is not always made explicit, relates to the established school discourse and can be seen in teachers' criteria for the choice of texts from these anthologies. Ranging from the issue of taste and unaccountable personal preference to the issues of representativeness and manipulation by colleagues, there is a whole set of control mechanisms that further circumscribe the teaching of literature. In this process, teachers' degree of autonomy is limited, while students' agency is virtually non-existent. In the interviews, teachers might accept the use of anthologies as inevitable, but some voices can be heard, questioning the adequacy of current textbooks and asking for something 'different'.

PART 5.B. – WHERE THE PRACTICE MEETS THE AIMS...

A substantial part of the interviews refers to the aims that teachers set and what they do to fulfil them, taking into account the restrictions they have due to the centralised nature of the education system. Instead of a single aim, each has a whole range of them which are not always hierarchised in the same way.

5.B.i. *Acquiring a habit*

Despite the divergences, all interviewees agree on one major aim: they all want their students to acquire the habit of reading literature in their spare time throughout their lives. This concerns reading in general and not the reading of a certain kind of literary texts – or at least they do not make a distinction – and is an attitude indicative of their great respect for literature and strong belief in its powers and value. They do not simply want their students to read texts, to understand them, to pass examinations or even simply to like literature. More than that, they seek to forge a special relation between students and reading, making them "love" literature²⁸, "feel" and "experience" texts²⁹, "enter a text"³⁰, "communicate with texts"³¹, "get addicted to the reading of

²⁸ See Kostas/312; Sofia/304.

²⁹ See Kostas/314; Petros/285; Sofia/304.

³⁰ See Stella/279.

³¹ See Sofia/304.

literature³², or keep literature for life³³. Each of them projects an idealised image of a reader who has a number of venerable qualities both as an individual and as a member of society. Being a reader of literature involves features as diverse as knowing about the history of literature, getting pleasure from reading, being a better human being, understanding other people's perspectives etc. Irrespective of where each of them places more emphasis, their common denominator is that they all consider reading literature a highly cherished, life-changing experience.

This approach can also be seen in the metaphors they use to explain this power that literature might have in a person's life. Anna says that literature is "something mythical" and "imaginary", "some kind of escape" or "a refuge from the trivial everyday life", as it "makes life beautiful" and "makes you forget the rather dull things of daily life." (Anna/293, 296) Similarly, Sofia says that literature can be "a companion" and "a way of living." (Sofia/307)

Reading is not only an oasis in your life but also a way out that solves problems for you. [...] It doesn't solve practical, everyday problems, but it solves problems of your own; that is, [problems] in your relationships with other people, with your inner self. (Sofia/303)

Kostas talks about literature as "a place that can revitalise people" and "as a companion through life", something that would not let "their souls dry up." (Kostas/312) Finally, Nefeli and Stella view literature as an "international", a "universal language", like music, that is intelligible to everyone and unites people. (Stella/282; Nefeli/ii.281) The idea of texts as a 'refuge', an 'escape', an 'oasis', a 'way-out', a 'revitalising source', and a 'companion through life' portrays an image of literature as an idealistic, fantasy world which exists parallel to our own world with its harsh realities. Their attitude could be described either as escapism and an attempt to evade reality or as resolution and a search for energy and courage. Whatever the case, these teachers view the reading of literature as something promising and precious, which they want to share with their students.

5.B.ii. Linguistic development

All interviewees lament the poverty of vocabulary that most students have and consider linguistic development as one of their main aims for literature teaching. They constantly witness students' difficulty approaching a literary text, due to their ignorance of Greek vocabulary, which becomes even more pronounced when they study texts from older periods, such as Papadiamantis, Kalvos etc.³⁴ Part of a lesson is to explain any words or phrases that students might not know in an attempt to enrich their vocabulary. Work on language is not thought to end there, as they also want students to learn how to appreciate and discuss the style of literary texts. Studying the style of a text

³² See Maria/331.

³³ See Margarita/321.

³⁴ Papadiamantis (1851-1911), a writer well-known for his short stories, wrote in *katharevoussa*, while Kalvos (1792-1869), a poet known for his odes, developed an idiolect where he mixes archaic types with types from *katharevoussa* and the demotic. Both Papadiamantis' and Kalvos' language is very different from today's spoken language.

involves both the acquisition of the rhetoric that would allow students to analyse it in the 'appropriate' way, and the enjoyment they might get from the play of words.³⁵ Finally, they want students to improve their own expressive skills, an aim that links the teaching of literature to that of essay writing. The methods they follow to achieve this are diverse. On the one hand, there is Maria who dictates whole chunks of criticism for students to memorise (Maria/328)³⁶, and on the other hand, Vasso who reads as many texts as possible with her students and asks them to do their own creative writing, to boost their confidence and make them "love words as the most rich way that a person has to express himself." (Vasso/343)

5.B.iii. Reading with the mind: in pursuit of 'knowledge'

Students are expected to attend lessons and to study in order to acquire knowledge, functioning, thus, at a purely cognitive level. They are expected to learn a whole array of things, ranging from the strictly literary to the broadly cultural. First of all, some interviewees want students to come into contact with as many texts and authors from Greek literature as possible and so they try to cover the greatest possible percentage of the anthologies. The rationale though for reading many texts differs from one interview to the next. For some, literature is a set corpus that students can and should get to know, while the current anthologies are seen as perfect specimens of this corpus. Maria, for example, argues that "it is not right to spend four or five teaching periods on a single author and to ignore another part of poetry or of foreign literature", and so sometimes she makes the analysis on her own while students just listen and take notes. (Maria/329)³⁷ However, other interviewees explain their practice differently. Vasso, for example, sees it as a way to shake up the established literary canon and to help students find their own way of expression.

I aim at breaking the fetish of the single author, who is very good and whom we all choose to teach, while all other authors are being forgotten. Tens of people have dealt with the same theme. So, listen to what each of them has to say on this. [...] And in this way, it is also made easier for them to put their own little stone. So that they can relax and say: 'I [can write something of my own as well].' (Vasso/341)

Both Maria and Vasso read a great number of texts with their students but each of them does it for different reasons. The first seeks to reinforce the authority of the literary canon while the second tries to demystify the writing of literature. Maria considers "familiarization with the authors" vital, because otherwise "students very easily reject anything they don't know." (Maria/331) For her, knowing goes hand in hand with acceptance and she expects students to subscribe to the literary

³⁵ For example, Sofia remarks: "I insist on that: that a pupil comes into contact with what we call a work of 'words', with the art of 'words'; that he enjoys the language; that he enjoys the content. [So that he enjoys] the language, all these elements that [a writer] uses, that he feels the metaphorical language." (Sofia/304)

³⁶ She talks about giving "them some words which are good for essays, which students have not learned how to use and would like to learn." (Maria/328)

³⁷ "I will start making the analysis on my own very quickly, asking [students] questions at the same time, because time is very pressurising. [...] The points [are identified] with guidance from me and with a little bit of searching by the students, so that we can move on quickly." (Maria/329)

canon and her analysis of texts. On the other hand, Vasso's starting point is that "the author is dead" and she sees the reading of a wide variety of texts as a way of understanding the nature of literature, of boosting students' confidence and encouraging them to create their own piece of writing. (Vasso/344)

Interviewees want students to acquire knowledge of authors and of texts. But what does such 'knowledge' involve? 'Knowing an author' is used in the sense of being familiar with her name and recognising it if one meets her in life or pays a visit to a bookshop.³⁸ It also involves knowing some information about her life and era, which is thought to have an explanatory relation to the text under study.³⁹ As has been discussed, such knowledge is treated as rather unproblematic and unambiguous, while authors' lives are seen as a clear-cut series of externally observed events that are lined up between birth and death, with some of these events being more crucial than others. 'Knowing' a text' is used in the sense of having read and analysed it in terms both of content and of form, a distinction employed by all interviewees. So young students are expected to learn about concepts such as the building of characters, the presentation of ideas, as well as the use of stylistic devices, like description and narration, figures of speech, plot and story, meter and rhyme etc. Once again, teachers refer to these analytic categories as part of an indisputable framework that is commonly accepted, as part of a process that students need to learn gradually in order to be initiated in the "art of expression". (Maria/331)⁴⁰ Finally, knowledge about texts and authors is always considered in the context of the history of literature, as this is mapped out in the school anthologies. Thus, 'knowing about literature' is partly synonymous with knowing about its history and each text is conceived as part of a literary movement and genre. Even when teachers claim that their practice is a result of their personal searching, they still resort to the same frame of analysis, which is to a great extent dictated by the school textbooks and the dominant discourse.⁴¹ From all interviews there emerges a formalistic view of textual analysis, that adheres to time-worn and routine formulas, presented as the natural and unquestionable way of thinking about texts.

In the interviews, the boundaries between literature and history as well as between literature and sociology or ethnology become rather hazy. A reader's understanding of literature both enhances

³⁸ See Anna/299; Maria/331.

³⁹ See Margarita/318; Maria/328; Anna/295; Sofia/304; Nefeli/267; Kostas/311.

⁴⁰ According to Anna, when students read their answers to the questions set for homework, "we never stop at one student, because the result isn't always perfect. One, two, or even three students read the same exercise, the answer to each exercise. And we also add a few things, so as to see what the right [approach] is, in order for the students to understand how they should go about it whenever they have a similar question." (Anna/297)

⁴¹ See the interviews with Nefeli and Stella.

and is enhanced by her understanding and background knowledge of history and sociology.⁴² This interdependence is even more pronounced when they study texts that refer to historical or social circumstances unfamiliar to students, such as texts from older times or from other peoples' cultures. For example, Stella explains that, when reading a text about the German occupation of Greece in the World War II with a class of hers, she had to "put it in a historical perspective" for students to get the drift of it. (Stella/277) Teachers' perception of such a close link between literature and history or sociology relates to their view of literature as a reflection of an era and of a person's psychology that was discussed earlier. Knowledge of history is seen as a prerequisite for the understanding of texts, or, at its most extreme form, literature is seen as an aid to the study of history and authors as scribes who just record reality in their writings. A significant target is students' acquisition of some form of 'knowledge about literature', involving their acquaintance with a great number of texts and authors, the history of literature and the 'rhetoric' of analysis, all of which are more or less imposed by the National Curriculum and the organisation of material in school textbooks. It is worth pointing out that this knowledge about literature is treated as an unproblematic and fixed concept, not liable to change through time.

5.B.iv. Reading with the heart: reading as experience

Teachers also expect students to function at a purely affective level in a literature class, putting their heart into their reading and not only their mind. Literary texts provide readers with the opportunity to go through a whole range of feelings and emotions, such as excitement, disappointment, interest, participation, suspense, sympathy, love, comradeship, solidarity, hope, sensitivity, etc.⁴³ Interestingly, the feelings springing from the reading of literature, mentioned in most interviews, are all positive, amiable and politically correct, while all antisocial and negative ones are left out, as if literature encourages some sort of high morality. Reading literature is seen as an enriching experience, a deep and whole-hearted involvement, which concerns the reader's entire personality rather than just her intellect. Readers are expected to 'give something of their own world, of their soul'⁴⁴, to feel a text and its language⁴⁵, to be touched and moved by a text⁴⁶, to enjoy and take satisfaction⁴⁷. Moreover, according to Margarita, the reading of literary texts also provides students with the space to come to terms with feelings they might have experienced in life, disagreeable as well as pleasant ones. "Literature helps us manage our feelings, and in particular,

⁴² As Maria puts it: "Through literature you can convey a lot of historical knowledge to students. So it can be combined with history as well. [...] So they get to know the historical facts through another domain, the domain of literature, without it being a sterile listing of historical facts." (Maria/331)

⁴³ See Kostas/313; Stella/279; Nefeli/ii.282; Sofia/307.

⁴⁴ See Kostas/314.

⁴⁵ See Kostas/314; Sofia/304; Petros/285.

⁴⁶ See Nefeli/266-7; Vasso/335.

⁴⁷ See Anna/296; Sofia/304.

those feelings that we find most difficult to manage and deal with, that is, the heavy feelings.” (Margarita/319)⁴⁸

Teachers consider reading to be a process that is both cognitive and emotive, not merely a mechanical drill. Unless students participate fully in reading, unless they are eager to invest their whole self in it, they cannot meet with success and the lesson fails. “If you do not mobilise in them some elements of their psyche, of their soul and not just knowledge, then, it will be just one more teaching period in their timetable.” (Kostas/315) Even though all interviewees refer to the acquisition of knowledge as being one of their aims, still none of them thinks this is sufficient on its own. A mobilization of the affective side and an insistence on the experiential nature of reading prevails in all interviews. Nefeli stresses that:

the aim is not to finish with the lesson. It is not to go through a poem so that we can say ‘Ah, we know a poem by Varnalis, we know a poem by Cavafy, or we know a poem by Ritsos.’ (Nefeli/269)

In order for a lesson to succeed, students need to pay attention to the text and to engage in an overall dialogue with it without keeping anything back.

5.B.v. A transformative experience

Reading these interviews one gets the feeling that teachers are rather ambitious in expecting their students to be ‘transformed’. The main assumption is that the reading of literary texts has the power to make readers better people; better in the way they see both themselves and other people. The way they define this ‘growth’ is different in each interview, as they do not share the same ideology, but what is common is their belief in the transformative effect of literature upon its readers. First, there are interviewees who describe reading as a way of discovering oneself through texts, inducing people to think about important personal matters. Students are encouraged to start from their personal experiences and to identify with the characters portrayed in a text, seeing the relevance between their own and the characters’ experiences. Through this process they can open themselves up, review their own experiences under a different light, and finally, manage their feelings in a more balanced way. For example, Nefeli talks about students who “search for themselves” in a poem “by reading, by experiencing situations that others might have faced and which are similar to their own.” (Nefeli/269)⁴⁹ ‘Revisiting’ their experiences from a different course makes students gain a different perspective on them. Second, reading literature changes the way

⁴⁸ Margarita goes on to compare the reading of literature by adolescents with the reading of fairy-tales by children. “If only we think of the incredibly beneficial way in which fairy-tales act upon very young children, bringing them into contact with these fearful and scary feelings. I think that literature can work on older children in a similar way, especially on adolescents that we’ve been talking about now.” (Margarita/319) She also gives an example of texts that talk about death and loss and how these might be used in order to reconcile oneself with past traumatic experiences, such as the loss of a parent.

⁴⁹ Talking about his childhood, Kostas remembers: “I tried to discover my self [in literature], to discover the world. To mould my sensitivity, my feelings. To find an expression.” (Kostas/310)

people perceive the world around them and their relations with others, fostering a stance that is distinguished by sensitivity, togetherness and openness. A text is assumed to familiarise its readers with a whole range of characters, ideas, peoples, cultures and eras, which might be different from their own, thus giving rise to a sense of affinity and of sympathy for the 'other'. Students are expected to work out the relation between past and present, between themselves and others, between their own people and other peoples, between their own culture and other peoples' cultures, between their own perspective and those of the others' or between different perspectives. A lesson in literature becomes a forum for the elaboration of one's relationship with the 'other' along the lines of fraternity and understanding.

This influence that literature has on the way one sees oneself and others results in readers being 'humanised'. Sofia attributes her present character to the reading of literature that helped her overcome the effects of her family's pampering, making her a 'better person'.⁵⁰ Later, as she talks about her aims, she emphasises:

that really the aim of the whole subject is for a pupil to come into contact with the works of literature, *and thus*, to become sensitive to them, to become better, to feel more sympathy for his fellow human beings, to find solace for himself through reading, to learn how to appreciate certain things that he has and which other children might not have. [...] And [in general], in accordance with what we say about humanistic subjects, [the aim is] for him to become *a better human being* – as simple as that. (Sofia/307; my emphasis)

When prompted to expand on what she considers a 'better human being' to be, she explains:

What do I mean when I say 'a better human being'? In a few words I would say this. For him to be a person who is not indifferent to life as it is going on around him, who is not indifferent to his other fellow human beings, who is not shut up in himself, who does not believe that life is only about material goods and other needs like that... And for him to believe that his psychological... that his 'ψυχαιγωγία',⁵¹ i.e. the education of his soul, goes through literature. (Sofia/307)

Her assumption is that the works of literature have the power to change people in the way they are as well as in the way they are related to others, an effect that can be read in her use of 'and thus' in the first extract. Literature is thought to encourage communication between people on a sociable, altruistic basis. Together with all the other interviewees, she cannot even conceive of the possibility that the reading of literature might give rise to any sort of destructive, antisocial feelings or behaviour.⁵² The idea is that literature has such an influence upon readers, irrespective of the particular reader, the text, the context or the reading event. A short while later, she explains that this is not achieved through moralistic teachings. Instead, "the text itself presents a pupil with these

⁵⁰ "I could see that through this contact [with literary texts] I was becoming softer, I was being humanised, and some sort of solidarity was being built between my fellow human beings and me." (Sofia/302)

⁵¹ Nowadays, the word 'ψυχαιγωγία' means entertainment. However, she does not use it in this sense. It is a compound word, which includes the word 'ψυχή', i.e. soul, and 'αγωγή', i.e. education. So, the interviewee uses it in the sense of 'education of the soul'.

⁵² Petros also talks about texts making a reader "see things in a different way from the way he would see them until yesterday" (Petros/286) and making them "good citizens and good people", loving their fellow people, being honest and cooperative and so on. (Petros/288)

things and it guides him to arrive at these conclusions on his own.” (Sofia/307) It seems that, for her, this power to motivate people to do good is an inherent feature of literary texts.⁵³ Literature *has* the power and it is a *good* power.

There are other interviewees who argue for literature's role in the education of considerate persons, whose tone, though, is more politicised. Stella and Nefeli observe that there are children who are marginalised in class either because they are foreigners coming from countries that are stricken with socio-economic problems, such as Albania, or because they are from a lower stratum or an excluded family.⁵⁴ Criticising such a discriminatory attitude, they argue that students need to be educated to have a more open and tolerant attitude towards differences, and literature can be the means to bring this about. By presenting different perspectives and characters who might be different in terms of social position or culture, literary texts encourage students to have an open attitude to the 'other', and so to feel sympathy. Stella's and Nefeli's rationale is based on two ideas: first, that once you get to know the 'other' closely, then you accept it and are open to it; and second, that students have a receptive attitude to school and school knowledge. As Stella explains: “students are not conscious of this racism. Alas! I don't believe that children are bad.” (Stella/282) It is rather that an unjust society makes them develop a racist attitude and it is the school's role to make children see that, deep down, people are all the same and should be treated in the same way. (Stella/281-3) And of all school curriculum areas, it is through literature that such an aim can best be achieved: “literature unites children, it brings down the borders” as it is a “universal language” (Nefeli/ii, 281). Margarita is on the same wavelength when she argues that through literature students can get to know “other cultures, other people”, and:

this will help them understand, on the one hand, their particularities as a nation and the very specific characteristics of the Greek course, but also at the same time, their differences from other nations, other civilisations, other cultures, and finally, how to bridge these differences. (Margarita/324)

So, literature can help students work on their national identity as well as get to know other peoples better, a reflective process that is vital in today's world, where the international settings have changed and globalisation puts national identities under pressure. Literature also helps students put binarism in question, teaching them “that everything can be illuminated and can be interpreted from many and different angles. [...] that things are not black and white.” (Margarita/319) Stella, Nefeli and Margarita differ from the other interviewees in that they insist more on the social dimension

⁵³ In the same frame of mind, Kostas stresses that aesthetic education goes hand in hand with good behaviour, as if the two are inextricably linked. “They say that a man of good taste does not do anything bad. Through what is beautiful, through good taste... good behaviour is formed as well.” (Kostas/312) Later in the interview, he comes back to the transformative power of literature, comparing students' response to a literature lesson with that of a spectator at a theatrical performance. “[It is the same with] the way you feel after a good theatre performance. You might walk in feeling neutral and indifferent and then come out feeling transformed.” (Kostas/315)

⁵⁴ See Stella/282-3; Nefeli/ii, 282-3.

that such change can have. They stress that, by reading literature, students can become better not in a vague and general sense of 'goodness', but in the sense of being aware of and receptive to other cultures, other communities, other peoples. Thus, all three of them propose the study of more texts from literatures other than Greek. Of all the aims that interviewees have for literature teaching, this renewed vision of themselves and of others, which students are to achieve, is one of their principal ones and comes up all the time. Apart from everything else and more importantly than anything else, through literature students are expected to learn certain values that will determine their whole outlook on life.

5.B.vi. A linear succession of stages

Interviewees describe their teaching of literature as a self-evident practice, without any discussion of the factors shaping it or of any possible alternatives. It seems that, even though there are no organised departmental meetings, teachers of different generations who work in different schools still follow the same practice. There seems to be a consensus on what the reading process in class should involve, as a result of the explicit National Curriculum demands coupled with the implicit dominant discourse. Occasionally, interviewees attribute aspects of their practice to the National Curriculum requirements or to students' reactions to lessons, but more often than not they are taken for granted.

It emerges that literature lessons follow a more or less standard format with a definite succession of stages. Linearity is a regular feature in most descriptions, which are full of phrases such as "after we exhaust that, we move on to...", "and we carry on in the same way...", "finally, at the end, we come up with..." etc. (Anna/294), or "I always comment on...", "I always start from..." (Sofia/304). First, teachers try to find a way into the text to be studied, linking it to a national day or an event.⁵⁵ In the preparatory stage, they give some biographical information about the author and her era, talk a little about the text, explain a few things about the era it refers to and put it in context. Then, the teacher reads the text aloud, while students listen, following it in their books. Once a text has been read, she asks students to recount the story so as to make sure they have understood what is happening. After explaining any words they might not know, they go on to the analysis, which covers both content and form, and extends over a large part of the lesson. Then there is a recapitulation of the whole discussion, ending with the conclusions or, according to some others, the 'moral' of the text. Finally, the teacher sets some questions to be answered in writing for homework, which students read out at the beginning of the next lesson. This is the format of a

⁵⁵ On national days, symbolic events from Greek history are commemorated. Such days are the 25th March, marking the start of the War for Independence in 1821, the 28th October, marking the start of the Greek resistance against the Italians in World War II, the 17th November, marking the students' uprising against

typical lesson, although there are often divergences in the order of the stages or in the way things are done. For example, a teacher might first read a text before giving any information about its author and her era, or she might start a general discussion on art instead of a detailed analysis of the specific text under study. However, despite these variations, the general shape of literature lessons is to a great extent standardised.

Within this framework, reading a text is based on the assumption that there is such a thing as a 'complete' reading to be attained by someone's course from ignorance to knowledge. A teacher has already been through this course and has grasped the knowledge which renders her an accomplished reader. So it is her responsibility to lead students to the end. This idea of wholeness is complemented by the assumption that there are certain meanings to be found in a text, which it is a reader's task to 'uncover' or 'discover'. Reading a text in class is equated with interpreting it in a certain way, which turns it into a fixed one-off process that leads to some determined knowledge through set stages. The promoted ideas of completeness and fixedness can be seen in the National Curriculum requirement that allocates a very specific and limited number of teaching periods to the reading of each text, ruling out any idea of rereading it or of attempting a different approach to it. Interviewees' reactions to such prescriptiveness vary. On the one hand, there are those who, being in tune with official policy, describe the reading of literature in class as a linear closed process that can be exhausted within a specific time. For example, Sofia argues that it is to students' advantage if the reading of a text is completed in a single teaching period.

Because, otherwise, it leaves. This magic leaves, which [you feel] after you've read it. But [when you come back to it] after a week, then, it is cut into pieces. (Sofia/306)

Her starting point is that the experience of reading a text is concluded at the first contact with it, making any revisit to it superfluous, or even ruinous. On the other hand, there are others who insist that reading a text should be allowed more space to flourish in a range of directions. Going against the National Curriculum directive, Stella insists that often it is not possible to finish with a text in a single teaching period (Stella/277) and argues that:

Teaching is not a fixed, set thing. It is not a square that we can divide into pieces. Teaching is a different thing. It is something which is alive. [...] What is it? A framework? And we start: number one, number two, number three... It's not like this. Especially in our subjects, it's not like this. There is no fixed, stable teaching framework. (Stella/279-280)

While Sofia espouses the discourse that sees reading as a fixed, natural, one-off process which is to be completed in a limited number of teaching periods, Stella resists such formulas and ready-made recipes in favour of a more open, flexible approach.⁵⁶

the Colonels' junta in 1973 and so on. Literary texts referring to these events are included in all school anthologies.

⁵⁶ Stella and Sofia might have a different approach to this matter, but still the outline of a lesson or the textual aspects analysed in the classes of both teachers do not differ much.

Nearly all interviewees lay emphasis on the fact that it is they who read aloud the texts and not the students, insisting that this is a very critical part of a lesson and it could be disastrous if they left it to students to read.⁵⁷ The reading of a text is described as a theatrical performance given in front of a class⁵⁸, where teachers assume the role of an actor, giving a voice to the text without, though, giving a body to it. Thus, they impersonate the characters, shouting, whispering, colouring their voice etc., but do not make use of setting or movement. They want their students' experience of reading to have some sort of physicality, believing that such a rendition enhances their understanding, but do not go so far as to adopt the whole array of dramatic tools. Their rationale for undertaking the reading themselves is that, first, they already know the text, and so can read it in the right way, with the due emphasis, diction, modulation, tone, expression etc. And second, they consider the first contact with a text to be decisive in students' general understanding of it. They point out that a good reading of a text might help students "understand certain things straightaway" (Anna/299), might rivet their attention (Kostas/313-4; Anna/299), "transform students' negative attitude to a warm acceptance of a text" (Kostas/314), "sensitise" (Nefeli/267) or "mobilise" them (Maria/330) etc. Teachers' reading aloud of a text is thought to shape students' understanding and response to it, a remark that lays stress on teachers' critical role in the outcome of a lesson. Emphasising the significance of presentation, Margarita argues that "the way in which you read a text contains half its analysis" (Margarita/318), while Nefeli explains that:

because a teacher knows the text very well, he has marked the points where he will raise his voice, the points where he will lower it, how he will modulate it, how he will make it sound sweet, how he will make it sound harsh. (Nefeli/267)⁵⁹

So a teacher's interpretation of a text is given as 'the' way into a text straight from the beginning. Textual meaning is not open to negotiation; it is a given. In the interviews there is no reference to the possibility of rendering a text in different ways depending on the different interpretations one might make of it, and there are scarce references to the listening of recorded poems that have been

⁵⁷ The results of students reading a text aloud in class are presented in rather bleak colours. Anna says that they "destroy it", because the other pupils "start making remarks about it, criticising, there is some sort of a fuss" and also because "when a pupil reads, then they don't understand a thing. Even with a simple text." (Anna/299) As for Maria, she says that whenever she has asked a student to do the reading, she has failed because, apart from a few students, most of them cannot read well. (Maria/327) Vasso justifies this practice differently, saying that students resist reading a text themselves, especially when it comes to prose. The excuses they give are their shyness or because they do not know the text and feel insecure. (Vasso/336) She goes on to say that, instead of asking a few students who read well to make the presentation, she prefers to read it herself so as not to "create a gap between students." (Vasso/336) So, it seems that, whatever the reason, either out of belief or out of practical need, it is always the teachers who do the reading in class.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Maria/330; Kostas/313-4; Vasso/336.

⁵⁹ Maria holds similar views, arguing that "the first and the last thing [in a literature lesson] is the presentation, or else, the reading of a text by the teacher himself, who needs to have the required skills", or that a teacher illuminates "the points that he will interpret and insist on afterwards." (Maria/327)

set to music.⁶⁰ By their reading, teachers try to help students approach texts, but at the same time they set their personal note to their interpretation, without necessarily realising it.

The rendition of a text is followed by a class discussion of it, which covers a large part of a lesson and forms the main teaching tool. It is by means of dialogue that teachers try to fulfil their aims: to get students to 'know' as well as to 'feel' the text, to develop their language skills as well as to have a renewed perspective of themselves and of the world around them. Interviewees have departed from the traditional model, which had students remaining silent through a lesson, listening carefully to a lecture given by their teacher. Instead, the prevailing belief is that the inherent power of texts in combination with the decisive influence of dialogue will lead to the fulfillment of their aims, thus rendering oracy as significant as literacy in literature teaching. The dialogue described in the interviews is not free as it is the teacher who decides upon its agenda and puts the questions. Even if it is the students who articulate these ideas, this is done under their teacher's direction who already knows from the beginning where they should get to. For example, Stella has something in her mind from the start of a lesson and tries to guide students to it.

After the analysis, if it [i.e. the text] gives a message, I give it. Otherwise, I leave it there. If it gives a message at the end, I give it. I find the aim. Where it aims at. I try, though, for the students to find it themselves. [...] [I achieve this] with various questions, with appropriate questions. [...] I have something in my mind, the aim, and with appropriate questions I guide the students there. (Stella/277)

It is interesting to note the way she wavers as to who gives the message at the end of a lesson. In the beginning, she talks about giving the message herself, but then shifts to say that it is the students who find it under her direction.⁶¹ Reading a text in class might be tantamount to students reaching a unified interpretation, but they are to reach it through discussion and participation in it is so vital that, unless they take part in it, a lesson is thought to be a failure.⁶²

There are though three interviewees who differ from the rest and expect their students to participate in a dialogue that does not necessarily have a predetermined end. Kostas follows the prevalent trend, arguing that a teacher needs to lead students with the 'right' questions to reveal the particular elements that make up the beauty of a text. (Kostas/311) However, there are instances when he thinks textual analysis destroys the magic produced by a text, when it is better to abandon structured discussion and to opt for a more open exchange of ideas on art and artistic creation.

Sometimes, we read a text, it is beautiful and in our effort to analyse and to approach it, we might distort it, we might destroy the text. [...] Especially when students like a text, when their first impressions... the effect of a text on their soul is very positive, [then] it is very

⁶⁰ See Nefeli/270; Sofia/308-9. Another interesting detail is that teachers read each text only once at the beginning of a lesson, with the exception of Nefeli and Vasso who ask students to read a text, especially poems, a second and a third time at the end of a lesson. (Nefeli/270; Vasso/336)

⁶¹ For more examples, see Sofia/305-6; Petros/285, 287.

⁶² See Anna/296-7.

risky to try to pinpoint the elements that make a text attractive, beautiful, well-received. (Kostas/311)⁶³

Margarita accepts the worth of analysis as it “sheds light on a text”, but rejects the idea of a directed dialogue that leads to fixed interpretations. (Margarita/317)⁶⁴ Instead she accepts students’ readings and urges them not to try to go along with her views by saying something just because it might ‘sound pleasing to her ears’. (Margarita/319) She even admits to sidetracking from the original plan, when students offer different interpretations, because:

in a lesson, if you are not open, then you have lost the students. This means that undoubtedly you have something planned in your mind, but it doesn’t matter if something is lost from the plan. There is always the next time as well. (Margarita/320)⁶⁵

As for Vasso, she constantly tries to find alternative ways to involve students in reading, thus diverging from the prevalent knowledge-centred approach and undermining it with her practice. Yet she admits that, due to the examinations, she has to narrow the process down and come out at the end of a lesson with a fixed interpretation.

Among all these things [that we do], through all these general discussions and the freedom they feel to talk on texts, [at the end] there must be five fixed elements that will get across to the whole class, and which the whole class will be able to reproduce in writing. (Vasso/340)⁶⁶

Kostas opts for a general discussion on art only occasionally, Margarita has moved away from her past rejection of detailed class analysis, while Vasso knows that, at the end of the day, all her students should settle on a single unified interpretation. They realise that they should yield to the prevalent attitude that wants a single interpretation as the final outcome of the reading process. Their reaction is a balancing act, trying, on the one hand, to allow space for students’ voices to be heard and, on the other hand, to reach a unified interpretation that will be deemed acceptable within reason.

⁶³ Kostas has control over a literature lesson but puts his views second to students’ particularities for fear of harming them and their inner world. “For me, it [i.e. a pupil] is a precious world. I ought to respect it and cultivate it as much as I can. To push it forward. Most importantly, not to mar the students’ psychic world. And, there are many traps. Not to spoil it, not to violate it. [...] If I am not able to initiate them into the beauty of a literary work, I shouldn’t force them into acceptance.” (Kostas/314) See also Kostas/315.

⁶⁴ As a student, Margarita thought that a text may be destroyed when placed under close scrutiny. However, she has now revised her position and sees analysis as necessary, explaining this shift as a result of her changed vantage point. “Now I am in a totally different position. I am in the position of a teacher.” (Margarita/317)

⁶⁵ See also Sofia/305 for a similar example.

⁶⁶ According to Vasso, students know they are expected to conform to the dominant discourse and try to find ways of getting around it. She relates an incident where students asked her to analyse for them a certain poem because they knew that the teacher from the other class would include this particular poem in the final examination paper, as she always did. Their concern in reading the poem did not emanate from their interest in the poet and the specific work, but from their wish to perform well in the final examination. (Vasso/338) It seems that students infer the way the system works and try to survive it in the best way they can.

An exception to this common use of dialogue can be found in Maria's interview, where she describes lessons in which she assumes the role of an actor, while students are given the role of speechless spectators. She even compares the presentation of a text to a performance...

on the teacher's side. It's only like this that students will be mobilised as well. And even if they are not mobilised, even though this is considered to be antipedagogical, [I still think that] if it is a [good] performance staged by the teacher, then they will follow it like a theatrical performance, participating in it with their mind. This has also happened many times: that students do not talk at all, that there is a monologue by the teacher, and still their interest is focussed, precisely because the performance is given by the teacher. Not all the time, of course. Sometimes. This is not right. They want to have participation, they love it, but they also love to see the work coming to life through a teacher's words. (Maria/330)

Despite her admission that students like participation in class discussions, she is perfectly at home monopolising the floor from the start to the end of a lesson, an attitude that agrees with her general view of textual meaning as reflective and fixed. Apart from their concentration on the exposition of textual meanings carried out by their 'expert' teacher, her students are not asked to do anything else, being treated as passive recipients of their teacher's interpretation rather than as active participants in the creation of meaning. Surprisingly, she seems to consider the ideas given by a text so fascinating and herself such a good actor that she can keep students' attention, no matter what.

So, in a literature class, a teacher is the authority who makes the decisions. However, not all teachers use their power in the same way. Some dictate the whole interpretation in a prohibitive way and it is a class discussion only in name, while others assume the role of a chairperson in a loosely structured dialogue. Some vest their own voice with the utmost authority, while others place it alongside students' voices. Some see knowledge as an end-in-itself and treat the end-product, that is, the resulting interpretation, as the most important part of the lesson, while others try to focus on the process itself, that is, on the dialogue.

5.B.vii. Talking about it

How are students' responses to be expressed: in speaking, writing, acting, singing or what? Spatial arrangements in a literature class are not even mentioned in the interviews, as they form part of the very image we have of a Greek school: students are expected to walk to class at the start of a lesson and to sit behind their desks in rows, eager to take in what is on offer as school knowledge. Moving or acting out, drawing or singing have no place in a literature lesson. With the exception of Vasso and sometimes of Sofia, interviewees do not talk about their students 'doing' things; students are expected to follow, listen, think, feel and answer in speaking and in writing. And even writing is not really part of a lesson as it is done only at home on set questions. So articulation becomes the *sine qua non* of the reading process and without it response to a text is not 'complete'.⁶⁷ It goes without

⁶⁷ See Petros/285; Nefeli/267.

saying that the better one is in the use of language the more effective one is in talking about literature, and so response becomes dependent upon a reader's expressive skills.

It is interesting to look at the interviewees' treatment of the relation between response and its vocalization. Anna explains that speech is closely connected to thought, and response to a text is reinforced and enriched through discussion. (Anna/294) Elsewhere, she says that, despite the weirdness of some of their views, students' responses are fresh, spontaneous and original and "with guidance they will finally get to the right [idea]." (Anna/297) For Anna, students' response to a text is not simply enhanced by class discussion; instead, it is determined and shaped by it. Sofia sees the relation between speech and thought in a slightly different way, arguing that an internal response precedes expression, which remains though the ultimate target. Her comment is that:

if you succeed in making a pupil feel, really feel what it says, then he comes out and is not shy, in the sense that he might sing it as well. It has got into him... these things have got into him." (Sofia/309)

If in their contact with a text students *really* understand and experience it, then they can externalise their thoughts and feelings in an intelligible, coherent way. Finally, Margarita refers to talk in literature classes as being ...

an excellent opportunity for [students] to talk and share things with their classmates, with their teacher, etc. Very often extremely interesting conversations might start. And that's where you can see whether students have thought hard, have pondered on various issues. Usually you see that students have thought hard on issues, but often they haven't learnt to discuss these issues. (Margarita/322-3)

She argues for a social elaboration of meanings through talk. Having thought about an issue is not enough; one needs to bring one's thoughts forward in a public forum, where they can be put under debate.

Class discussion is not limited to analysis at a strictly textual level and students are expected to bring in part of themselves and of their personal values and principles. Especially when it comes to discussing the content of a text, interviewees ask students to express their personal opinion on the issues tackled (Vasso/337-8), and to compare these ideas with contemporary ones in order to see if they are of any value today or whether they are relevant to their own lives.⁶⁸ It should be noted, though, that any such personal response needs to be made with propriety. Maria censors any reference to sexual matters as being irrelevant to a lesson on art and artistic creation (Maria/330) and Vasso remarks that such a censorship is dictated by the themes of texts included in the anthologies. (Vasso/343) As Margarita points out, a teacher needs to have these parts of class discussion under control and keep them "at the level of a school class", because "a literature lesson is still a lesson that takes place in the context of a school class." (Margarita/319-320)

5.B.viii. A feeling of discontent

Interviewees often voice their dissatisfaction and frustration with the current state of literature teaching. Again and again we come across unanswered questions full of puzzlement about what could be done to excite students' interest and to involve them more in the process since they realise that unless students participate in class reading, their efforts are to no avail.

And of course, in literature teaching at some moments you might be unsatisfied. You might walk into a class, you might be in the right vein, might be fully prepared, and still come out and say 'What have I done today?' Because it also depends on the mood of a class. [...] If students don't want to give, then they won't give anything. So you talk on your own all the time, and in the end, you walk out and think 'What am I doing? What have I done?' This has happened many times. [...] In literature it depends on you as well as on the class. (Anna/296-7)

Anna is not quite sure about whether she is on the right path with her teaching, knowing that she cannot follow the same practice in all lessons.⁶⁹ In some interviews, literature is discussed as a subject different from all others, in the sense that its outcome is not entirely predictable⁷⁰, while some respondents confess that they are not always certain about their practice. For example, Petros says he feels uncertain about what is the best option: to teach more texts in a less detailed way or to teach fewer texts in more depth. (Petros/291) Other interviewees are faced with similar dilemmas, which Kostas even describes as "a teacher's small drama: not to be able to approach what he would really like to be and to do." (Kostas/314)⁷¹

As they voice their discontent, many of them also admit that they do not do much to change it, mainly because they cannot do much. School conditions and technical difficulties, such as the lack of sockets or slide projectors, often cancel their plans.⁷² The National Curriculum and examination requirements dictate a certain approach which is difficult to circumvent.⁷³ The limited scope of texts from which they are forced to choose puts a brake on any effort they might make for something different.⁷⁴ Time pressure, as there is a very heavy curriculum for a limited number of teaching periods allocated to literature teaching, is another issue that makes any thought of a different approach difficult for these teachers.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ See Petros/285; Vasso/337-8, 339; Anna/294; Stella/281-3; Nefeli/269 etc.

⁶⁹ "In poetry, if you always follow the same line, the same practice [...] then, at some point, you get tired and you think 'Is this the best way to make pupils understand?' Many times I have thought of it. Even though I like literature, teaching literature, still I have felt puzzled many times." (Anna/299)

⁷⁰ See Anna/296-7; Stella/279-280.

⁷¹ See also Vasso/335, 337, 339-340. From a different perspective, Vasso often gives a picture of students faced with the authority of the literary establishment and a teacher's powerful figure and discusses their feelings of powerlessness and of puzzlement at what their attitude should be. This dissatisfaction comes out in the open once they get to know her better and overcome their reservations. (Vasso/337)

⁷² See Maria/333; Sofia/308-9; Nefeli/270.

⁷³ See Nefeli/271; Petros/290.

⁷⁴ See Nefeli/273; Anna/299.

⁷⁵ See Nefeli/273; Vasso/345; Petros/287.

Despite the widespread discontent, there are very few references to the use of alternative methods that are not part of the established practice. There is Margarita who asks students to present a book they have read in their spare time to their classmates (Margarita/321), and Maria together with Sofia who bring in tapes with poems that have been set to music. (Sofia/308-9; Maria/333) There is only one interviewee whose approach seriously challenges the above framework and goes against the grain of standard practice. Vasso is more interested in students acquiring the habit of reading and responding in their own way to texts than she is in conveying some set knowledge to them, having thus a student-centred rather than a teacher-centred approach. So she tries a whole range of open-ended activities to involve students in reading, asking them to give a different ending to a story (Vasso/339), to make the setting of a scene, to draw and make collages, to put themselves in a character's shoes and make suggestions (Vasso/339), to write stories of their own (Vasso/341) and so on.

Interviewees might not do much to change the current shape of literature teaching, but they all have plenty of suggestions to make for its improvement. Some come up with suggestions that do not really challenge the existing status quo, whereas others put forward a framework that would unsettle its whole discourse. Finally, there are others who voice their discontent with the present state of things without being specific about what they would like to see in its place. These recommendations relate to all aspects of literature teaching. First, they talk about the facilities offered, asking for slides relevant to literary texts and for recorded readings⁷⁶, for more children's books at Gymnasium⁷⁷, and in general, for better facilities⁷⁸. Second, they make suggestions about the literary texts to be studied, asking for a renewal and a greater choice of topics and texts⁷⁹, and for books with parallel texts that could be read in conjunction with those studied⁸⁰. Third, they refer to procedural and examination matters, saying they would welcome an increase in the periods allocated to literature teaching⁸¹, or the opportunity to read texts outside the system of examinations for students to get to love reading⁸². Fourth, they recommend activities that would encourage reading, asking for a national media campaign for the promotion of reading⁸³, or for students to organise events, concerts, visits, exhibitions etc.⁸⁴ And finally, they talk about teacher training on

⁷⁶ See Stella/281; Nefeli/270.

⁷⁷ See Maria/326.

⁷⁸ See Sofia/308.

⁷⁹ See Nefeli/273; Anna/299; Margarita/323.

⁸⁰ See Anna/299.

⁸¹ See Nefeli/273; Stella/281; Vasso/345.

⁸² See Vasso/340.

⁸³ See Sofia/308.

⁸⁴ See Maria/333.

new literary movements and theories⁸⁵, or about special courses where they would learn how to teach literature as art⁸⁶.

PART 5.C. – CASTING THE ROLES

5.C.i. *Students as readers in time and place*

In the interviews there were questions that prompted respondents to talk about any differences they see between students as readers and about the way they treat these differences in class. Before I go on to discuss these issues, I should stay for a while on their paradoxical silence with regard to their students' general reading habits. Even though all interviewees set the acquisition of the habit of reading as their major aim, many admit that students do not read at home, on their own, or that they cannot be sure whether their students keep this habit up or not. Those who argue that nowadays adolescents do not read literature on their own suggest a range of reasons, such as lack of time because of the pressure from school and *frontistirio*⁸⁷ (Petros/286-7)⁸⁸, or the influence of examinations and the media (Vasso/340, 341).⁸⁹ Surprisingly, though, most of the interviewees barely touch upon this issue.⁹⁰ They do talk about what goes on in class or what their expectations are, but they say little about their students as readers in general and about their habits. Probably they feel it is not relevant to an interview on the teaching of literature. Probably they feel that reading and analysing literary texts together with learning about the history of Greek literature in class will inspire students to become regular readers, no matter what. But most probably they cannot say much because, within the context of literature teaching, they do not have the opportunity of getting to know their students and their habits well. The National Curriculum is over-prescriptive, and as a result both the content and the format of the lessons are rather rigid and

⁸⁵ See Margarita/324.

⁸⁶ See Kostas/314-5.

⁸⁷ A *frontistirio* is a private educational institution which pupils attend in their spare time, either to learn a foreign language or to get extra help on those school subjects they are weak in. In older times, students would attend a *frontistirio* only in the last years of secondary education to get extra preparation for the entry examinations to University. Lately, this practice has become so widespread that nearly all students of secondary education attend a *frontistirio* or have private tuition lessons at home instead. One of the expressed aims of the 1997 Education Reform was to put a stop to this practice, as it undermines state education, costs families a lot, and exerts great pressure on students. Unfortunately, the reform was a complete failure in this.

⁸⁸ Submitting to the existing situation, Petros refrains from asking his students to do anything extra-curricular, as he does not know "how willing they will be." (Petros/287)

⁸⁹ Vasso is particularly caustic about the fruitless, or even disastrous, effects that the school system has upon young readers. "Once I read an article by some French teacher, who was saying that 'it is incredible how, when we are children, every evening we ask people around us to read us a story or a fairy tale. And then, ten years later, we see a book and we burn it. We don't even want to see it in our eyes.' And this is through the mechanism of school and of examinations. How does it happen and children end up hating the subject?" (Vasso/341) Instead of giving up, Vasso tries many different things in order to interest students in literature, such as presenting novels from various genres that are not included in the school textbooks or organising discussions on whole texts.

⁹⁰ For examples, see the interviews with Margarita, Kostas, Maria, Anna, Sofia and Nefeli.

inflexible, leaving little room for teachers' own initiatives or more general discussions of reading habits.

As there are only a few things said about students' general habits, the interviews give evidence of students' responses to literature mainly within the context of a lesson. All the interviewees seem aware that a whole array of factors affects the nature and outcome of students' responses.⁹¹ First of all, it is pointed out that the outcome of a lesson depends on teachers' and students' psychological mood at a specific moment.

Students are not always well and properly predisposed for a lesson. They might have a test in the following period and this might be worrying them. They might be tired. Many other distractions might be involved and these prevent their substantial participation and, most importantly, their will to be transferred to the world of a text. (Kostas/315)

So there is an element of unpredictability as children's responses depend on their worries and preoccupations of the moment, which might prevent them from being relaxed, open and enthusiastic.⁹² Second, students' personal experiences also affect their contact with school literature, and interviewees give various examples of readers understanding some literary texts better because they are more relevant and close to them.⁹³ Another factor is gender, as girls seem to have a stronger inclination towards literature than boys.

Girls are closer to literature [than boys]. They love literature more. They take part more and are more effective than boys. [...] Girls are richer, in their contribution, their speech, their thinking, in the answers they give, both orally and in writing. Boys are more dry. They want to be brief. (Anna/297)

Girls are described as being more sensitive, tender and sentimental than boys.⁹⁴ The difference could be a matter of nature (Vasso/345), or of nurture, being traced to their upbringing and society's expectations (Margarita/324).⁹⁵ Still, there are some interviewees who disagree with this shared view. So Petros says that there are no noticeable differences between boys and girls in their reading of literature (Petros/291), while Maria argues that gender differences do not exist at primary school and appear only at secondary school.

⁹¹ It should be noted that Kostas resists putting forward any schematic groups and suggests the need for research in these matters. (Kostas/314)

⁹² See also Anna/296.

⁹³ For example, Sofia remarks that Albanian children have a different attitude towards some texts, such as Tchekov's *Vanka*, implying that there is community of experience. (Sofia/308) And, as a child, Nefeli enjoyed reading novels about unfortunate children, because she shared certain feelings with them. "They would talk to me. They fitted my psychology. I felt for them, I experienced their situations." (Nefeli/264; see also Nefeli/266-7)

⁹⁴ See Vasso/345; Sofia/308; Maria/332; Margarita/324.

⁹⁵ As Margarita puts it: "It might be that girls have a greater ease at analysing and talking about these deeper matters, because it is also our society that teaches them [to be] that way. In general, I think that women [...] are trained to have a greater ease at expressing their feelings. And so, in a question of that type, which is about a character's personality, psychology, or about conflicts, it might be that girls would talk more." (Margarita/324)

In addition to mood, personal experiences and gender, students' performance is directly related to their 'cultural capital'.⁹⁶ Interviewees realise that when children come to school, they are not *tabulae rasae* and that school has limited power over their development as readers, compared with the influence of other social structures, the most important of which is their family and social background. Children from educated families, who live in cities, belong to society's higher strata and have Greek as their mother tongue are found to be better equipped for the reading of literature than children from uneducated families who live in villages, belong to society's lower strata or have Greek as a second language. So, what is it that children from educated middle-class families bring to their reading that makes them good at it? First, interviewees repeatedly argue that children from such families have greater linguistic competence and this enables them to understand and discuss texts more easily and successfully, in a way cherished by school.

If their parents have a certain level, then, they teach them more... better... to speak the language *more correctly*, first of all. [And this is] something very important. They discuss with them and teach their children how to think. (Stella/280; my emphasis)

Kostas, Anna, Margarita, Vasso, Nefeli, they all talk about the difficulties students encounter due to gaps in their vocabulary, described as one of the greatest impediments they have.⁹⁷ Nefeli paints a rather bleak picture of those children whose families are not in a position to help them.

[In these cases] the child cannot express himself, cannot read fluently [...] He is not used to reading. So, he does not read fluently and does not understand what it [i.e. the text] says. (Nefeli/272)⁹⁸

For these teachers, knowing all the words of a text and being able to talk and write about it in an elaborate way is the ideal and performance in literature is seen as inextricably linked with performance in language. Interestingly, when they talk about linguistic competence they stick to the issue of vocabulary breadth and very rarely is there a reference to other issues such as register, dialect etc. In general, their view of language is one-dimensional and there is no consideration of language as a social code in use.

Second, children from higher strata living in cities have more cultural stimuli. Anna says that a teacher can tell which children come from villages after a few lessons with a class. The difference is pronounced because:

They don't have many opportunities to come into contact with texts. Everything they do is what they do in school. It seems that at home they don't open a book, at least not a literary book. They limit themselves to schoolbooks. Whereas in a city, someone might give them a gift, parents might be reading at home, there are public libraries, teachers exhort them. It is easy for them to find [books]. In a village, however, things are difficult on that matter. (Anna/298)

⁹⁶ The interviewees might not use the term 'cultural capital' but still they use the same concept with Bourdieu (1976b) to describe their pupils' participation in 'culture' and the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes.

⁹⁷ See Kostas/314; Anna/294; Vasso/341, 343.

⁹⁸ These children have "a very big linguistic deficiency" (Margarita/322) and "a very big weakness at expressing themselves" (Vasso/343).

Many other interviewees agree with Anna and point to the lack of stimuli as one of the reasons why some children, especially those from rural areas, are not keen on reading.⁹⁹ Similarly to language, culture is also conceived as being unified and unproblematic. Interviewees do not explicitly refer to 'culture' but talk rather vaguely about it. They refer to children "who have more experiences of civilisation and who are more cerebral" (Vasso, 340), who "have got knowledge ready" (Maria/332), "come from an environment where people read" and have already read literature at home (Sofia/308), while their parents have a certain level, discuss with them and teach them how to think (Stella/280), and their "family environment is intellectually elevated." (Nefeli/272)¹⁰⁰ These are counterposed to children who have "minimal or even non-existent incentives" (Maria/332), who "come from an environment that is culturally downgraded" and don't have many opportunities to come into contact with texts" (Anna/298), they are scared to talk about likes and dislikes and personal preferences (Margarita/319), are excluded and marginalised in class (Stella/282-3), and "have no cultivation." (Nefeli/272).

So on the one hand, there are the children who are good readers because they have the knowledge and the appropriate experiences, and on the other hand, there are those children who are no good in reading as they lack experiences of culture. The former can decode a text and reveal its messages, whereas the latter are inexperienced in reading and do not have a clue about it. The former speak the language 'correctly' and can talk about a text effectively, whereas the latter have gaps and a serious difficulty at expressing themselves, fated to remain silent. A number of things emerge from the interviewees' perception of students' differences. First, it seems that school discourse on literature teaching fits in well with that of students from certain social groups, which means that they are better prepared for it. Second, interviewees treat culture as an unproblematic, homogeneous set of attitudes and processes, which people either know or not. Finally, any differences between students in terms of their reading are seen along the lines of a deficiency framework and are perceived in a clearly hierarchical way. Students are ranked according to their performance in a rigid way and their relative position in this ranking seems to be determined, to a great extent, by their home culture.

In the course of our discussion, I asked interviewees how they treat these differences and whether they review their teaching practice in their light, a question that gave rise to a range of reactions. First, there are those who do not look at their students' backgrounds at all, giving various reasons in support of their attitude. Maria argues that what she 'gives' in a lesson is the same, irrespective

⁹⁹ See, for example, Maria/332; Sofia/301; Margarita/323-4; Vasso/342, 345.

¹⁰⁰ These children also "know things and this knowledge comes into the text" (Vasso/345), "are more aware" (Sofia/301), while their parents are "thinking people" (Nefeli/272), have a higher level and can understand more (Nefeli/272).

of the level of a class or of students' background, all of which have no effect on her decisions and practice. Her rationale is that:

the student who wants to be good in terms of the requirements of the subject – I don't know to what extent he will be essentially good – this student makes sure that he meets these requirements, gaining, of course, the relative profits. I believe that sometimes knowledge has to be compulsory too. You need to make someone learn it. Because once he gets to know it, he will love it. He has [many] chances to love it. (Maria/332)

Her philosophy of the subject is rather didactic and formal, with students being expected to learn the prescribed knowledge under the direction of their teacher. In her framework, there is no room for students' particularities; they are not supposed to bring anything to class or to articulate a different voice. Petros and Kostas show a similar disregard for students' differences but they do this out of fear that this might give rise to prejudices. (Kostas/314; Petros/291) Even though these three teachers seem to treat all their students similarly and do not vary their approach, a close reading of their interviews shows that their position is not exactly the same. Maria is strict with students following the prescribed course, whereas the other two have a more subtle and open approach, letting students have their personal voice. Kostas might avoid addressing the issue of differences, but he repeatedly talks about letting children give something of their own world or discussing very generally around the edges of the text and so on. (Kostas/314, 315) So, what is it that makes Petros and Kostas refrain from looking at their students as individuals living in a community and having an identity of their own? I think it has to do with the past of the literature as part of an education system that reflected a repressive governance, typical of Greek history until fairly recently. This is an idea that emerges in all the interviews with the older teachers, where they talk about their personal memories of reading literature as children.¹⁰¹ They all describe their teachers as people who had to watch every word they said and who avoided any discussions touching upon sensitive matters, such as personal values or ideology, for fear of persecution. For many decades people would be victims of discrimination on account of their beliefs, and Kostas was one of them, as he was forced to stay out of work for three years, from 1967 until 1970, due to his political beliefs. (Kostas/310-1)¹⁰² As a result, for these older generations of teachers, looking at a student's background has turned into some kind of taboo, in their effort not to be seen as taking part in any sort of discriminatory and oppressive practice.

Second, there are the teachers who try to adjust their teaching to the average student's level. Working within a deficiency frame, they consider it is possible to find the average level of a class, assuming that differences between students are solely quantitative and relate to the degree of their participation in 'the' culture of educated people. So Stella adjusts her teaching to the level of the

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Stella/275; Sofia/302; Maria/325-6 etc.

¹⁰² This was during the seven-year long dictatorship (1967-1974). See Appendix 3 for a short history of Modern Greece.

average student, “so that a lesson is comprehensible by most students” (Stella/280).¹⁰³ They explain that they cannot do anything more because they have mixed-ability classes, the National Curriculum is rigid and overloaded, and time pressure is great; all these make it impossible to sit down with each child individually. These teachers adapt their teaching practice so that as many students as possible can have access to the delivery of a lesson while they also try to make the greatest possible number of students take part in class discussions. Students are encouraged to express their personal opinion, but this has to take place within the dominant school discourse, which requires them to agree with their teacher on the messages an author ‘gives’ through his text and to prove this in some standardised examinations. Thus, this adjustment of the level of lesson delivery does not derive from their recognition of differences as a structural principle, but from their effort to be more effective and fair in their teaching.

Finally, there is a teacher who differs from the rest, having a more student-centred approach. Vasso tries to find a compromise between the precepts of the National Curriculum and what students bring to class. She repeatedly criticises those Greek teachers who teach the same texts every year in exactly the same way, without paying attention to the particularities of each class, and talks about her constant search for new ways of motivating and exciting students’ interest. And yet, she knows that at the end of a lesson they all have to reach an understanding of a text that will meet the requirements of an over-prescriptive National Curriculum. (Vasso/340) Even though she realises that students respond differently to texts and have different needs and tries to vary her practice accordingly, the official requirements, where any regard for differences and differentiation is ruled out, call her to order. Thus, it seems that most interviewees, consciously or not, treat students as a group, addressing them as a class and measuring them against the yardstick of a dominant notion of culture. They do not start from what students know and bring to class, but from what they have to deliver and what the National Curriculum dictates. There are signs that, deep down, they sense that such an approach is reductive and that it fails some students, but they do not really question it, probably because there is no room left for them to reflect.

5.C.ii. Teachers as authority

It has been shown that despite any differences interviewees share a working framework. So the question arises as to who is the authority responsible for the shape of literature as an area of the curriculum, or else, who determines its discourse. At a first glance, one gets a picture of teachers being all-powerful and fully responsible for everything going on in a lesson. As has been discussed

¹⁰³ Similarly, Nefeli describes how: “In class, I would look at the ways in which they learn. And I would adjust my teaching accordingly. That is, if I saw that the level [of a class] was very very low, then I would try to take even a single word out of them. I would try to use the simplest possible text. I would try to do

in previous sections, they are the ones who set the targets and choose which texts will be studied from the school anthologies; who introduce and read texts aloud; who can turn a lesson into a monologue with students in the role of passive listeners or an open discussion; who lead the discussion, guiding students to a certain interpretation; who point out textual features that they think noteworthy and significant; who give information about an author and her era, constructing a narrative about her life; who help students approach distant texts by annotating and explaining them; who transmit certain values, principles and ideals that they think are beneficial and useful; who set the homework questions and decide which answers are correct; and finally, they are the ones who set the examination papers and mark them. It seems they are the authority, as they know about literature and its history, about texts and authors, about textual analysis and reading, and try to give this knowledge to students.

A number of formative factors are listed, giving us some indication as to what it is that makes a teacher. Interviewees admit they have been influenced by some good “enlightened” teachers they had at University or at school, who are their ideal and model.¹⁰⁴ Some acknowledge that their discussions with colleagues have supported them in their teaching, but they stress that these exchanges take place informally, and are not organised, focused meetings.¹⁰⁵ They indicate that they have come across helpful ideas at various seminars, which were held either by school advisers or by independent institutions, even though they all hasten to complain that the organised seminars are insufficient, as there are very few of them, and that some of them are not even good.¹⁰⁶ Finally, some interviewees point out that their readings of literary criticism have also helped them settle on their current teaching.¹⁰⁷ As Anna remarks it is not that one factor has been more decisive than the others, but that “each of these things, each of these people would add a small stone.” (Anna/296)

The above determinant factors are neither surprising nor unforeseen. What is most interesting, though, is that almost all interviewees insist that their practice is basically the outcome of their personal thoughts and searches. Stella talks about her teaching as the result of her “own course” (Stella/280) and her “personal decisions” (Stella/279), Sofia discusses her “own efforts” and “personal ‘fight’ with the texts” (Sofia/307), while Kostas points to his “sense of responsibility towards [his] students, [his] wish to convey to them [his] personal love for literature” as the most influential factor in his practice. (Kostas/315) Anna acknowledges the influence of various factors, such as seminars and critiques, but concludes saying that “at some point, in the end, it ends up

something in the simplest possible way. I was not aiming at taking out high meanings and high ideals and high theses.” (Nefeli/271)

¹⁰⁴ See Anna/296; Kostas/310; Vasso/334.

¹⁰⁵ See Stella/280; Sofia/307; Vasso/345-6.

¹⁰⁶ See Stella/280; Sofia/307-8; Anna/296; Vasso/345-6; Kostas/314-315.

¹⁰⁷ See Anna/298; Sofia/307.

being personal", (Anna/298) a matter of experience and personal experimentation. (Anna/296) Petros denies even the idea of anything or anybody else determining his practice, as if it is entirely of his own making.

There has been no discussion [with the other Greek teachers] on that [i.e. on the teaching practice]. Each of us has his own practice. There is no specific direction from some... there haven't been any seminars. We haven't seen anybody teaching a text in Modern Greek literature. [...] Well, there is no official directive, and so each of us follows his own course depending on his personal knowledge, his intuition and his own world of emotions. (Petros/288)

As for Maria, she puts teaching down to a natural talent. Ideally, in a lesson, a teacher brings a text into life through her words, but "most of the time, this is a natural talent. It cannot be attained easily." (Maria/330) If a teacher does not have the talent, then, "the lesson will range from being a typical lesson to being a dead lesson" and students will resent it. (Maria/330) So, Maria goes further than the other interviewees and suggests that one's teaching practice is not simply a personal matter but comes from an inborn charisma.

When interviewees invoke this notion of the 'personal', their discussion becomes very vague and ambiguous as it implies that each one's practice is different from all the others, being the result of personal searching and reflection. And yet there are a number of related questions that are not tackled. What governs the shape of this 'personally determined' practice? How is it possible for nearly all of them to foreground the personal factor while their practice, aims and working framework are so similar? Instead of their practices diverging as a result of their following an independent course, they often seem to converge. Some interviewees even fall into contradictions when it comes to discussing the influences they have been under. For example, at one point Nefeli explains that:

Up to now the texts have been from the textbook which is provided by the Ministry of National Education. The way in which I work on these texts has been mine. (Nefeli/271) But straight after that she says: "of course, I should say that I have always tried to draw near to the questions that are found in their textbooks underneath the texts, which have also helped me." (Nefeli/271) Since these questions included in the textbooks dictate a certain approach to the texts and a certain way of analysing them, it seems that her declaration of an entirely independent teaching methodology cannot stand up. Another contradiction can be read in Anna's interview. She explains that "there are teachers who are charismatic in teaching literature and others who are not." (Anna/299) And yet, when I ask her to describe a charismatic teacher of literature, she says he should be:

rich in terms of substance, to have read too many things, to be able to draw a parallel between different texts, to compare; when he teaches a specific text to be able to find... to bring to class other poets' viewpoints or other authors' opinions on the same topic. He needs to have rich speech and good speech. Moreover, he needs to present texts well. (Anna/299)

The features she expects a teacher of literature to have are all the result of educational background, of study and hard work and do not really support her initial idea of a teacher having charisma, which is a conferred unaccountable quality.

I think this insistence on the personal factor marks a defence, a complaint and an act of defiance at the same time. On the one hand, it is a defensive act as it precludes any discussion of their own making as teachers or their positioning within discourse. Putting up the notion of the 'personal' as a shield, they evade accounting for it. On the other hand, it marks a complaint against the central authority for not being next to them and for not helping and supporting them in their work. Teachers feel abandoned by the MNER and the policy makers and that their voices are not really heard. They are being treated as servants who are there only to apply some policies that are being designed in distant centres out of their reach. When interviewees talk about their practice being purely personal, they seem to suggest that policy-makers have never been close to them or with them in this affair. There is disappointment and uncertainty lurking behind this notion of the 'personal', a disappointment that is also behind their request for more seminars and better guidance. There are points in the interviews full of bitter complaint for having been deserted by the state and the officials.

The state does not help [us] in this, at all. It hasn't helped us. It hasn't come to our schools often. They haven't given seminars to us in the various school subjects. (Stella/280)

This complaint becomes so strong as to make them defy the official policy, a policy that has been imposed upon them without necessarily being in accordance with their own views. Thus, Petros does not even acknowledge the MNER directives (Petros/288), Stella admits "I have not taken note of the Ministry for Education at all. Honestly." (Stella/279), while Kostas does not take examinations seriously into account, not even those organised by the MNER at a pan-Hellenic level in the last two years of Lyceum.

Personally, I am not much preoccupied with them. Exams do not subdue me. I do not conform to the expediency of exams. I mean that my teaching practice does not have as an aim, at least not a primary one, to prepare students for the exams. (Kostas/314)

Even though at a first reading interviewees come out as *the* authority in a literature class, it seems they are not completely independent, as they would like to think, and there are other centres of power operating as well.

5.C.iii. *The community of Greek teachers*

While discussing aspects of their practice, interviewees often make use of the first person plural, a 'we' that refers to Greek teachers as a group. For example, Nefeli has Greek teachers as a whole in mind when she says "we've started adapting our lessons to the requirements for the June examinations", or talks about "our aim" (Nefeli/271), which is also what Petros does when he says "what we try to do in class." (Petros/288) What one wonders about is how this 'we' has developed.

Through what procedures has this community of Greek teachers with their shared discourse been constructed? What does this community adhere to? Has their discourse been made explicit or is it an unspoken implicit framework? Do they have a role in the policy-making processes or are they pushed to the margins of educational logos? What emerges from the interviews is that this community of Greek teachers is a rather abstract and general conception, without a public voice of their own. Greek teachers feel they share a discourse but they are not organised in a body with a distinct presence. In the interviews, they define themselves as a group faced with the students, on the one hand, and with the policy-makers of central government, on the other. Stella notes that “we need to prompt them” (Stella/278) and Anna says “we ask them, they raise their hand...” (Anna/294), both of them referring to teachers as a group opposed to that of students. At the same time, Nefeli says “they forced on us the way in which we will teach” (Nefeli/271), and Petros says that “the MNER asked us to do it” (Petros/288), both of them setting the group of teachers against the central authority.

There are no departments or departmental meetings in Greek schools and the agenda of the meetings that do take place includes matters that concern the whole school.¹⁰⁸ Interviewees call attention to the fact that there are no departmental meetings and that the exchanges they have with other Greek teachers are short and informal.¹⁰⁹ It is only after the 1997 Education Reform that some meetings at Lyceum have acquired a more systematic character, either because the MNER made it a requirement to have a yearly plan and to keep a formal record of it, or because they felt they ought to cooperate in order to meet the new demands.¹¹⁰ However, these meetings have been organised to work out a way of satisfying the MNER requirements and not in order to discuss and devise policies. The other occasion, on which they have to discuss their practice, is before the end-of-year examinations and concerns only those Greek teachers who teach classes of the same year. In those cases they have to agree upon the texts to be examined as well as upon the interpretation students will be expected to make in the paper.¹¹¹ With formal meetings being of such limited

¹⁰⁸ Staff meetings at Greek Gymnasiums and Lyceums are rare. The standard meetings are one before the start of the academic year, one in every term and one after the end of the examinations, which make up a total of five meetings for Gymnasiums and four for Lyceums. There might also be extra meetings when an urgent need arises. All teachers of a school take part in these meetings and the topics for discussion concern affairs of the whole school.

¹⁰⁹ See Stella/280; Sofia/307.

¹¹⁰ See Nefeli/271; Petros/288. As Nefeli puts it: “now we are starting to think hard on the issue, because we cannot work out the new questions easily. And because they [i.e. the new questions] are far too many, we have agreed on what we will insist on.” (Nefeli/271)

¹¹¹ As has been discussed in ‘Using set anthologies’, interviewees have mixed feelings with regard to this. Some, especially the older ones, do not really mind and find themselves in agreement with their colleagues. (Petros/288; Anna/295) However, other interviewees, in particular the younger ones, feel oppressed by this practice, as they are obliged, first, to teach the same texts as their colleagues and, second, to go along with the others’ interpretations. (Margarita/318; Vasso/338)

scope, it seems that the informal discussions taking place on a friendly basis between Greek teachers have a more decisive significance.¹¹²

Apart from those few references to the forced formal meetings and the incidental discussions with a few colleagues, there are no other references to a locus where this shared discourse could possibly have been shaped. There is no body of Greek teachers acting as an organised unit and interviewees do not mention any seminars they have all attended, or any books and journals they have all read. Moreover, their allusion to a common discourse is somewhat at odds with their insistence on the independent course they claim to have followed in their practice, while the distinction between what is shared and what is purely personal is blurred and left unaddressed. In general, the Greek teachers' voice is not clearly and distinctly expressed and this weakens and undermines it in the public domain, especially when it is juxtaposed with the central authority's voice.

5.C.iv. The looming presence of the MNER

It is amazing how the MNER, its policy-makers and the compulsory National Curriculum come up in nearly all interviews, mostly as an oppressive force circumscribing teachers' intentions and dictating a certain approach to the reading process. It is the central authority that determines the number of teaching periods allocated to literature teaching¹¹³; sets the targets¹¹⁴; decides upon the anthologies and the number of texts to be studied in every year¹¹⁵; determines the periods allocated to each text¹¹⁶; dictates the criteria to be applied for text selection¹¹⁷; lays down the general framework of a lesson and the way of analysing a text¹¹⁸; decrees a list of texts, which is rather limited, to be studied in the last two years of Lyceum¹¹⁹ etc.

Interviewees seem not to consider themselves fully responsible for their practice, being obliged to follow all these externally imposed directives, and often present aspects of it as a given without thinking it necessary to justify or problematise them. They have realised that instead of a joint enterprise, it is the central authority that produces the definition of literature as a curriculum area and they have no say in its theoretical framework or the ramifications of its practice. It is interesting to note that the central authority is presented as a faceless distant organisation to which teachers have no access and which does not take their views into account. Interviewees refer to it as

¹¹² See Vasso/345-6; Stella/280; Sofia/307.

¹¹³ See Nefeli/273; Vasso/345.

¹¹⁴ See Petros/288; Nefeli/271; Margarita/323.

¹¹⁵ See Sofia/306; Kostas/313; Stella/278; Vasso/343-4, 345; Margarita/321, 323; Petros/286, 288.

¹¹⁶ See Margarita/320-1.

¹¹⁷ See Margarita/318-9.

¹¹⁸ See Nefeli/269, 271, 272; Margarita/319; Sofia/305; Anna/299-300; Vasso/340, 341, 342; Petros/289-290.

¹¹⁹ See Nefeli/269; Anna/295; Vasso/342; Petros/288.

'the Ministry of Education', 'the state', or by using the third person plural, a rather vague 'they'. Very often they make use of passive-verb constructions where the agent is omitted, while the verbs used to describe the central authority's actions are strong and forceful. For example, Nefeli says "they imposed on us...", "they forced on us", "they prescribed a certain way...", without giving a face to this impersonal 'they'. Many other similar examples can be found denoting teachers' alienation from the centres where decisions are made. Interviewees do not feel part of the decision-making procedures: they are simply asked to put the orders into practice.

Whenever interviewees refer to the MNER and the National Curriculum, they do it by way of explanation for some aspect of their practice of which they do not necessarily approve. The MNER guidelines are often discussed as an unwanted intervention and not as an appreciated aid. One often detects a sense of desperation, as they are pressed between what they would like to do and what they have to do. Their discontent with the current situation is sometimes expressed as a refusal to remember and consciously integrate the guidelines into their theoretical framework, which is the case when Petros says "for every subject the MNER has set some targets, which, of course, I once read, but now I don't remember them." (Petros/288) This resentment is expressed as a bitter complaint against the state that forsakes teachers¹²⁰, or as mute anger for teachers' "small drama"¹²¹. And at other times, it takes the form of open disagreement and defiance, as is the case when Nefeli denounces the MNER policy:

Our aim at the moment is not children's learning any more, in a wide sense, whatever students learn and if they learn. [...] Now, our teaching aims at what students will be examined in, in this particular subject, in these particular questions, which come ready-made from the Ministry for Education. [...] The moment when only a single aim is acknowledged, and this is how to secure entry into University, [...] at that moment, the free way of teaching and the free way of learning stops. It stops. It is limited. (Nefeli/271)

Nefeli might dispute the targets set by the MNER after the 1997 Education Reform, but still she endorses and puts them into practice because she has to.¹²² It should be stressed that references to the central authority and its policies are not a common feature of all interviews. Some interviewees, such as Nefeli and Vasso, are clearer and more outspoken in their criticisms of the imposed curriculum, whereas others, such as Petros and Maria, do not have an explicit position on it. For example, nowhere in her interview does Maria mention the MNER or the National Curriculum at all and she talks about her practice without considering how it has been shaped or what its relation is to the official policy. I think that these silences and omissions are as telling as the complaints and the open challenges.

¹²⁰ See Stella/280.

¹²¹ See Kostas/314.

¹²² See also Margarita/320-1.

PART 5.D. – INTERVIEW-TEXTS AND OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

First as students and then as teachers, Greek interviewees have been nurtured in a centralised education system, with a strict national curriculum produced through an opaque and dogmatic mechanism. They are fully aware that they have to follow the directives prescribed by the policy bodies, the MNER and the Pedagogical Institute, and that they have no role whatsoever in the process of writing these policies – at best, they attend seminars to get help with their implementation. Central authorities determine not only the national curriculum but also the anthologies to be used in all classes throughout the country. So it comes as no surprise that the picture of literature depicted in interview-texts is not very different from that of official documents. In both sets, the same assumptions underlie literature teaching: texts are treated as reflections of an external, knowable reality while authors are seen as insightful individuals, whose psychology, thoughts etc. are discernible in their writings. A text is to be analysed in order to discover its fixed meanings, and an author's 'literary biography', including details from her life thought to be relevant to her texts, is to be employed in this analysis.¹²³ With texts seen as monosemous and reading as a closed process, teaching also becomes a rather inflexible affair, described as a set of fixed steps. The interviewed teachers and policy makers also agree on the effects that literature reading has upon readers, ranging from their acquisition of knowledge about texts, authors, the history of literature, the past and the present etc. to their transformation into 'better', more 'humanised' beings.

In both the official documents and the interviews, this 'knowledge about literature' is not discussed as debatable or constructed but as commonly accepted and incontestable. Meanings are to be found in texts and images are to be built of author's lives, but it is nowhere discussed who has the authority to sanctify the 'correct' interpretation or to sign a 'literary biography'. Sometimes, it is the author's intention that is invoked as a confirmation of the author-ised textual meaning, but it is not really made clear how these intentions can be established. Most of the time, though, these 'right' interpretations are discussed as self-evident 'truths', the outcome of 'rigorous' analysis. There are other issues as well that are silenced in both sets of documents. So it is nowhere considered what qualifies as literature, what the relation is between literary and other texts or between 'Modern Greek literature' and 'other literatures'. Especially the official documents promote a formalistic model for reading as an individual enterprise that takes place in a vacuum, completely disregarding the social context.

¹²³ Interviewees might not use the term 'literary biography' but still they make use of the concept. See above the section on 'Text and author' in this chapter.

Despite the apparent agreement between the two sets of texts, teachers do not go along with official policies without protest. There is widespread dissatisfaction among them with the shape of literature teaching and most of them talk about their uneasiness with current practices, as they realise that these do not necessarily meet students' needs and do not involve them in reading. Interviewees realise that students' response cannot be taken for granted, and without it, their efforts are to no avail and lessons are a failure. Official discourse treats students as a homogeneous and compliant group but teachers can see that their students have differences affecting their response to class reading, and thus they realise that the officially promoted model is a fabrication that has little to do with reality. At the same time, they sense that these differences, which are perceived mainly along the lines of social class, culture and gender, are not easily accommodated within an over-prescriptive framework that treats students as passive recipients and knowledge as definite. Another issue that makes their relation with official policy a little awkward relates to textual meaning. On the one hand, they sense that texts are polysemous and would like this principle to inform their practice, but on the other hand, both their own education and the prevalent discourse promote a view of texts as monosemous, the result being that they are torn between the two. Some of them are aware of this tension and try to work out a compromise in their practice, but others fall into contradictions unaware of the conflicting pulls. In addition, many interviewees are critical of the school anthologies that impose a 'literary canon' based on some rather hazy selection criteria like representativeness or quality. With one exception, interviewees do not question the idea of a 'literary canon' as such and there seems to be an implicit subscription to such a concept. However, they realise that students are often unhappy with and react to the anthologised texts, and so they wonder whether something should be done about it.

However, all these questionings are either silenced or expressed in informal discussions with friends, since there is no forum operating at school or national level where they would have the opportunity to exchange views on their theories and practices. This lack of open debate, together with the restriction of their autonomy, are the two main reasons why they are so reluctant to think of and propose any alternatives. Being part of a centralised and restrictive system with such a long tradition means that they are not used to reflecting on their practice.¹²⁴ So their resistance to the imposed official policies is silent and does not lead to the elaboration of radically different frameworks. It is interesting that many of them refuse to conform to official policies and argue that their practice is the result of 'personal' searching, a rather dubious notion that could be interpreted as an act of defence, of complaint but also of defiance. So even though they do not depart from what they have to do, still their voices of discontent can be distinctly heard. By this, I do not mean

¹²⁴ To this it should be added that until fairly recently, that is until the 1976 Education Reform, the Great Debate in Greece focused on the 'Language Question' and which language should be used in schools, the spoken demotic language or the elitist artificial *katharevousa*.

that they do not make efforts to appeal to students and to encourage their active participation in reading, with some being more committed to this than others. On the contrary, nearly all of them come out as sensitive people who are attentive to their students and do their best to facilitate their approach to literature. What I mean is that the existing framework is so overbearing, constantly keeping them in check, that they do not have the space in which to problematise the current approach and to contemplate other directions.

Chapter 6

Comparison and Conclusions

At the beginning of this project, I was faced with a whole range of questions on the whys, what, how or who of literature reading in school, which I have tried to answer with reference to two paradigms, the Greek and the English education systems. Instead of talking about literature teaching in the abstract or seeking to come up with the 'best' approach to it, I focused on the discourse produced in two sets of texts, official documents of the 1990s and interviews with teachers, trying to historicise and problematise them. As I expected, the importance of context is highlighted through these comparative readings, which means that when one moves away from a particular setting and regards the habitual from another perspective, then the naturalness of any definitive and all-inclusive answer cracks, revealing the workings of ideology. What might be considered 'obvious' in one setting is unthinkable in another, and issues that draw all the attention in one paradigm are not even under debate in another. So the operation of knowledge and power develops in localised formations, and consequently the procedures also need to be contextualised.

It is interesting that in the texts studied many voices can be heard, which are often conflicting, and thus the idea of the 'present' as a single, homogeneous and unified discourse becomes illusory. Any sense of consistency and uniformity is undermined by the divergences and internal contradictions that can be traced in all texts, as 'subversive' views can be found alongside the 'dominant' ones. Notwithstanding the conflicts and the silences, in each paradigm some kind of consensus has developed on certain values and procedures. Neither all teachers nor all official documents are the same – far from it – but still they share a rhetoric on issues like the criteria for text selection, the format of a lesson or the way of expressing one's response. So Greek texts can be discussed as a group because they operate within the same discourse, the discourse of literature teaching in Greek education, and so can the English texts. Each group moves in "a domain of language-use, a particular way of talking (and writing and thinking)" that "involves certain shared assumptions which appear in the formulations that characterize it." (Belsey, 1980: 5)¹ Keeping in mind the discordance within each discourse and the significant differences between the official documents and the interviews, I will try to compare the two paradigms, referring to 'Greek' and 'English' discourse.

¹ Bourdieu's concept of 'topoi' also describes this common ground that teachers share. As he explains, "educated people of a given period may disagree on the questions they discuss but are at any rate in agreement about discussing certain questions." (1976a: 193) So in each era, people share certain 'topoi' which furnish them with the general disposition that generates both the commonplace patterns and the "patterns for invention and supports for improvisation." (ibid., p.194)

Contrary to my initial expectations of full differentiation, I have come to realise that the two paradigms might have many differences but they also have many similarities, which could not be explained as a result of communication or of direct influence, since the two systems have followed different paths.² The relative position of the two countries in world dynamics is also very different: one comes out of a once powerful world empire that still has a pivotal role in the happenings of a globalised community and whose language has become the lingua franca of the world, while the other is less than two centuries old, constantly struggling to uphold its territorial integrity and national sovereignty as well as to become part of the ‘developed’ world. And yet it seems that in both countries similar mechanisms have been operating in the construction of literature teaching that bear traces of the shared Western liberal humanist tradition and mark a defensive self-containment in the face of a future in a globalised multicultural world.

PART 6.A. – TEXTS, AUTHORS AND READERS

Speaking in general terms, textual meaning and the image of the ‘author’ are set up differently in the two paradigms. Influenced by reader-response theories that have held sway over literature teaching, the English discourse considers texts to be open to a range of interpretations depending on the viewpoint from which they are read. This move towards polysemy is associated with the emphasis on a reader’s role in the process of meaning making. In this context authors are not placed in a very prominent position, and so Barthes’ suggestion is confirmed that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (1977: 148) Views arguing that authors are “the true apostles of equality” who spread culture to the whole of society and so can do away with classes and all ensuing problems (Arnold, 1948: 70), or that they are ‘great’ because they have ‘moral intensity’, ‘openness before life’ or ‘capacity for experience’ (Leavis, 1948), such views have gradually lost their currency. This does not mean that the notion of ‘author’ is deconstructed in the English discourse; it is rather that its significance is toned down while more emphasis is put on the reader.

On the other hand, in the Greek paradigm, textual meaning is seen as concrete and definite, something to be found *in* a text after close study. More often than not, interviewees talk about finding the ‘correct’ meaning while official documents indicate that texts guide readers to ‘what must not be missed’. As for any references made to personal responses in the post-1997 documents, these are only part of a face-lift and are not followed by any structural change of direction. In line with the prevalent view of texts as monosemous, both the Greek official documents and most of the Greek interviewees are intent on establishing the presumed authorial meaning and repeatedly refer to it as evidence of ‘authoritative’ interpretations. So the conjectured

author's intention functions both as a *raison d'être* for the 'explication du texte' and as a means to explain a text. Authors are seen as gifted individuals who 'talk' to readers through their writings, offering views of themselves and of the world. It is teachers and policy makers who have the power to produce an author's image, stressing some aspects and silencing others in accordance with their beliefs and taboos; but in all the texts studied, the constructed nature of these images or the operation of ideology in this process are completely overlooked. The view of textual meaning prevalent in the Greek discourse corresponds to the theory of literature called 'expressive realism'. (Belsey, 1980) This theory, which was current in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, assumes that:

Literature reflects the *reality* of experience as it is perceived by one (especially gifted) individual, who *expresses* it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true. (ibid., p.7; italics in the original)

And:

The text is seen as a way of arriving at something anterior to it: the convictions of the author, or his or her experience as part of that society at that particular time. To understand the text is to explain it in terms of the author's ideas, psychological state or social background. (ibid., p.13)

Belsey sees this theory as the outcome of the fusion of the Aristotelian concept of art as mimesis, that is, a representation of the real world, and the Romantic movement's conviction of an artist as a sensitive and inspired individual who is gifted with an exceptional power to perceive the world and represent it in a spontaneous, emotional way.

In accordance with the conceptualisation of textual meaning, there seem to be two trends regarding students' role and the reading process. Whenever textual meaning is described as fixed and literature as accumulation of knowledge, then students are put in a role where they have to identify the acceptable interpretation, guided by their teachers. In these cases reading in class is characterised by linearity and closure as it is a product-oriented approach. On the other hand, when polysemy is the starting point, then students are represented as 'active' readers and class reading is based on activities that allow the space for personal responses to flourish. This approach is process-oriented and encourages children to take their own journey into literature, instead of asking them to respect texts and to preserve their sanctity. The former description is more apt for the Greek discourse while the latter fits the English discourse on literature teaching better. The difference between the two approaches is also manifested in the mode of expression preferred in each of them. In an English literature class emphasis is put on writing about texts and reading, whereas in a Greek class the stress is on talking. Through writing, drafting and redrafting, students are encouraged to reflect on the process of reading itself as they re-create the texts studied. Moreover, the employment of creative forms alongside formal writing also gives the impression of readers' whole-person engagement in their reading. In a Greek class, though, both

² It was in the former colonies that British influence was decisive in the shaping of their education systems. However, in the 19th and the early 20th century the Greek education system was more attentive to movements in Germany, as most Greek educators studied there, usually at the University of Jena.

students and the teacher are involved in a whole-class discussion, each of them making her contribution until the lesson concludes and interpretation is completed. Writing is done only at home and only after reading in class has been brought to an end.

From the above, the English and the Greek discourse emerge as two poles in an opposition, a view that is a simplification, especially if one takes into account the close reading of the interview-texts that was presented in chapters 3 and 5. To put things right, two points need to be stressed. First, these are only general trends and are not without exceptions. For example, contrary to the dominant discourse in their setting, there are Greek teachers, like Margarita and Vasso, who see texts as polysemous and encourage pupils to make their own readings of a text, while there are English teachers, like Cathy and Claire, who insist on pupils bringing out 'the' meanings that are to be found in a text. Second, in both paradigms, the official discourse is rather text-centred and favours a view of texts as monosemous, an approach that is imposed upon teachers through the national curriculum and the examinations system. So, readers do not feature in a prominent position in official documents and at the same time teachers often admit that class readings are led to closure and fixedness because of the requirements they have to meet.

Despite this apparent contrast regarding the nature of textual meaning or the reading process, what is never doubted in either discourse is that a text is an independent 'voice' that expresses the era it comes out of and the individual that has created it. Texts are seen as self-contained entities that have a presence and a structural integrity of their own, while pupils are expected to listen to their distinct voices and to engage in a dialogue with them. Texts are sometimes discussed as distinct worlds, through which pupils wend their way, while at other times they are presented as reflections of a world that exists outside and prior to them, which pupils gaze at. Whatever the metaphor used, they are considered to be a way to find access to experience itself. Even though experience is discussed as dependent upon perspective and thus as particular, still the assumption prevails that there is community of experience between all people. For example, in both contexts, it is assumed that pupils can always work out the relevance between a text and their own life or that the contact with texts offering 'other' perspectives helps them gain insights into their own. There seems to be a double-sidedness, with texts seen as particular and yet at the same time as expressing a universalised sense of experience. However, this double-sidedness and its implications remain unacknowledged as the relation between a 'text' and 'reality', 'life' or 'experience' is blurred and left untackled.

The assumption fundamental to both discourses is that of the 'metaphysics of presence', whereby there *is* something there at the moment of talking or writing that alludes to a unified entity with a developed sensitivity of feelings and intellect, the 'Romantic subject'. In the Greek discourse, pupils are to hearken to the authors that 'talk' through texts, while in the English discourse, pupils

are to use creative writing to express their ‘personal’ responses. In both cases there is the assumption of authenticity, of a rational presence that can represent itself in writing and of a correspondence between the signifier and the signified, creating a view of the sign as transparent. And yet, as Derrida (1981) has argued, the concept of a unified subject is an illusion and so is the idea of an autonomous consciousness speaking through a text and producing a stable, self-authenticating knowledge. Instead, subjectivity should be treated as an effect of *différance*, where ‘*différance*’ is defined as “the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other.” (ibid., p.27; italics in the original)³ No piece of writing is a true and accurate depiction of someone’s ‘self’ or of ‘experience’, as both readers and writers – and the difference between the two is indistinct – operate within discourse and its network of differences, always bearing traces of non-present meaning.⁴

PART 6.B. – SHAPING A NATIONAL IDENTITY: ‘WE’ AND THE ‘OTHER’

Art, music or mathematics are designated as separate areas of the curriculum that are not limited to national understandings, transcending national boundaries. However, in both the Greek and the English education system, literature is taught only in the context of a subject called ‘Modern Greek’ and ‘English’ respectively, combined with the study of the national language.⁵ Despite the multicultural nature of both societies, literature teaching is synonymous with the teaching of ‘national’ literature, as there is insistence on the study of a single corpus of texts written in the official language of the ‘nation’ and shaping images of its culture. So English literature occupies a central position in the curriculum for the subject, giving meaning to the notion of Englishness, while the teaching of Modern Greek literature contributes to the construction of a national ‘self’ – though it shares this task with the subjects of Ancient Greek and of History.⁶ It seems that literature is conceptualised as the national voice and the culmination of national creativity, in an

³ The term ‘*différance*’ comes from the French word ‘*differer*’, which means both ‘*differ*’ and ‘*defer*’, encapsulating both their meanings and creating the concept of a chain of becoming, differential and deferring traces. Besides, it is a term that connotes activity by having the ending *-ance*, an ending used in French for the production of noun forms from verbs.

⁴ Derrida also criticises the ‘phonocentrism’ of Western thought that treats speaking as a more accurate and close realisation of meaning than writing, which is seen as a depersonalised medium where meaning is often obscured. “*Voice* becomes a metaphor of truth and authenticity, a source of self-present ‘living’ speech as opposed to the secondary lifeless emanations of writing.” (Norris, 1991: 28) It is interesting that whenever interviewees, especially in the Greek context, want to emphasise the immediacy of authorial meaning they use phrases like ‘the author says...’, assuming there is a *voice* directly addressing the readers.

⁵ In Greece, literature does not form part of foreign language teaching at all. In England, the curriculum for foreign languages up to GCSE level does not include literary texts, and as for A-level courses, they give the option to students to avoid the study of literature, focusing instead on topics from history, geography, art etc.

⁶ As was discussed in chapter 2, one of the reasons why English was initially introduced as the main subject of mass education was for the construction of a national identity. However, in the Greek education system, for a long time it was mainly the subjects of Ancient Greek and History that had this function. And even now, for most years in secondary education, the same number of teaching periods are allocated to Ancient Greek and to Modern Greek. (See Appendix 2.C. for information on the timetable of Greek secondary schools.) Moreover, the subject of History is very Hellenocentric as it consists mainly of the teaching of Greek history since the ancient times. The aim of the curriculum is obviously to present the Greek people as having a continuous presence in history, with their roots being traced back to the Ancient Greeks.

effort to assimilate individuals to a unified identity. In the pre-1997 Greek official documents, the Greek-centred bias of literature teaching was very pronounced, projecting a romanticised and idealised image of Greek people and their culture, free of anything disagreeable or contradictory. Similarly, in the English context, the 'great' national texts were seen as capable of humanising and saving the nation in such texts as Arnold's, *The Newbolt Report*, Leavis' etc. However, things have changed and so in both the post-1997 Greek official discourse and in the recent English one, references to a shared national identity have been toned down and even the adjective 'national' has been wiped out – perhaps for fear of being thought nationalistic, a viewpoint that does not sit well with our Western rhetoric of equality and justice. The attitude, though, is not radically different, as is shown by the references to a common 'heritage' and the centrality of Englishness and Greekness in the curriculum.

Official documents in both paradigms insist that literature is presented as having deep roots in the past and so dictate the study of older texts alongside the modern ones. This may be more pronounced in the Greek curriculum, where pupils are to be taught the history of Modern Greek literature and its periods in an explicit way, but is also a conspicuous feature of the English curriculum, where, for example, the study of Shakespeare and pre-20th century literature is considered essential. By becoming familiar with the history of their national literature, pupils are expected to gain confidence in the long-established value of their culture, seeing themselves as members of a creative unfailing 'we' that has a constant presence through the centuries. So the idea of a nation is constructed that has a past, a present and a future, disregarding any notion of fragmentation or multiplicity. This historicist approach is also particularly evident in the Greek interviews, where the reading of literature is seen as a means to enhance pupils' understanding of their nation's trajectory through time. On the other hand, English interviewees do not deal with the relation between literature and history, with the exception of Mark, who questions the artificial division of subjects and argues for an integrated curriculum.

Interestingly, in both settings, 'Our' literature and identity are defined with reference to the 'Other', a notion that is constructed in the curriculum by the inclusion of some 'foreign/other/different' texts but remains marginalised, occupying only a small part of it. In England, only texts written in English are included, creating thus the impression that it is the only language fit for literary expression. In the official documents, references are made to texts from 'other/different' cultures and traditions, but these cultures are left unnamed, being instead classed in an undifferentiated group of texts that are 'other/different', or else, 'non-English'. In some documents, though not in all of them, these texts are linked with notions of distinctiveness and peculiarity, as opposed to texts from the English heritage that are associated with quality and excellence. On the other hand, in Greece the percentage of foreign texts studied in translation is tiny, giving the impression that Greek literature is a sufficient means for approaching the

‘universal’ cultural heritage. The minimal number of foreign texts included in the school anthologies are mainly by dead white men of Western origin and are organised on the basis of their country of origin, as if each country has a distinct literary tradition that can be distilled into a couple of texts. So the English national culture acquires its particularity with reference to the rest of the English-speaking world, which includes all the former colonies of the British Empire, while the Greek one is defined with respect to the ‘developed’ world of Western Europe and North America.

The literary curriculum is structured on a binary opposition between ‘our’ heritage and ‘other’ traditions, between ‘Us’ and the ‘Others’. Pupils are regarded as being part of ‘Us’ rather than belonging to the ‘Others’. Nowhere in either setting is there a suggestion that these ‘other/different’ cultures might be the home cultures of some pupils, completely disregarding the multiculturalism of pupil population and assuming that all pupils share a single culture and that texts from the ‘national heritage’ are more important to them. It is interesting that this distinction between ‘Our’ texts and ‘Others’ is treated as a given and its construction is not discussed. The writers of official documents avoid elaborating on the relation between literature and culture, as if it is a self-evident and straightforward one. Likewise, there is utter silence on the relation between different cultures and literatures as well as between readers/writers and cultural texts. Despite the significance of ‘national’ texts for the subject, there is no discussion of the process by which these corpuses of texts are put together or of the principles of inclusion or exclusion. Why do pupils need to come into contact mainly with ‘national’ literature? Why are all texts that are not originally written in English left out of English classes and why are so few foreign texts admitted in the Greek ones? Do all texts written in Greek or in English form part of the ‘Greek’ or ‘English’ national heritage? Is it only those authors who are born within the spatial boundaries of the two countries who have the right of entry or is it also granted to those who give voice to the ‘national spirit’? What is ‘English/Greek/national’ and what is ‘other/different’? They are treated as distinct wholes, but there is no discussion about the way the boundaries between the two notions are set, as if they are fixed.

Unlike the undifferentiated national focus of official documents, two trends can be identified among interviewees of both settings. On the one hand, there are those like Maria and Claire who accept the official discourse uncritically, making no comment at all on the emphasis placed on national literature. On the other hand, there are many like Nefeli, Stella and Mark who criticise the bias of ‘Hellenocentrism’ or the construction of a corpus on the principle of an overarching imperialistic Englishness. Some of these teachers ask for more texts in translation, others for texts from hitherto un-represented cultures, and others for less rigidity in the representation of Otherness. These voices do not necessarily have the same starting point, since some arise from an internationalist approach to literature as the aesthetic expression of a universal human experience,

while others spring from a regard for particularity and diversity. Whatever their starting point, these are teachers who problematise the construction of the school canon and question the idea of an unproblematic national identity. As was discussed in chapter 2.A., this critical review of the literary canon was advanced with enthusiasm by many English teachers in the 1970s and 1980s, who also introduced a wide range of texts to their classes.⁷ However, despite their strong criticisms, Greek teachers have not done much in that direction, due to their lack of freedom on curricular issues. Notwithstanding this movement among teachers who argue for openness, the nation-centred bias of the curriculum remains stable in both countries and any changes are not drastic.⁸

PART 6.C. – WHY STUDY LITERATURE?

For a long time, literature has been thought to have a deep and lasting influence upon readers, and this has provided a strong enough reason for its teaching at all levels of education.⁹ There seems to be agreement between the official documents and teachers of both paradigms on the great significance of literature reading on pupils' development, designating a prominent place for it in the curriculum. However, in neither setting does literature form a separate area of the curriculum, being closely related to the study of the official language and of textual studies in general. Despite being allocated a rather distinct position, with its own periods on the timetable, separate textbooks and examinations, still it cannot be considered independent. For example, in Greece its grade is often calculated together with that of language, while in England it forms part of a subject under the general title 'English', and the framework for its teaching is included mainly in the sections on 'Reading' and partly on 'Writing' and 'Speaking' in the NC for 'English'. Being placed under the same umbrella as language, literature serves, to some extent, similar ends and is seen as a means to enhance pupils' linguistic skills, an approach that brings to mind the tradition of rhetoric and belles lettres. Especially in Greece, official documents put a lot of emphasis on literature as a way

⁷ This call for a more inclusive curriculum is not new in English education. For example, at the end of 19th century, Moulton, a radical lecturer working in the University Extension courses, aimed at the teaching of a wider panorama of world literature and suggested a study of the evolution of different genres. He thought that such an approach would enrich national cultures as opposed to a narrow focus on Englishness. (Dixon, 1991: 59) However, it seems that the movement for the 'English-isation' of the curriculum has prevailed up to now, even though it has shifted its position.

⁸ For example, in the English context, the inclusion of a list of suggested authors from 'different' cultures and traditions in the 1999 NC can be seen as a result of the trend that argues for the opening up of the curriculum as opposed to its 'English-isation'. However, the binary opposition between the 'English' and the 'Other' is not really unsettled.

⁹ Still there are some studies, usually from the area of psychology, that treat literature reading as a neutral and mechanical skill to be considered out of context and pay no attention at all to a reader's experiences and background, as if they are completely irrelevant to the whole process. The social function of literature reading or the effects it might have on readers are not considered to be an issue and instead efforts are made to put students' responses on a scale – only that these responses are understood in a functionalistic and quantifiable way. (E.g. Mudd, 1987; Rowell et al, 1990; Marton et al, 1992; Duckett, 1998) This view of literature reading is similar to the conception of literacy as a measurable decontextualised skill that is used by organisations such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). For example, in the IEA comparative study on literacy achievement in 32 countries, reading is seen

to improve pupils' ability for 'correct' communication, without, though, for a moment expanding on how the reading of literature could contribute to improved language use or what might be meant by 'correct' communication.

In her comparative study of literature teaching in Greece and in England, Hodolidou (1989) pointed out that the aims are prioritised differently in each system.¹⁰ Through her analysis of official documents and examination papers, she identified three major aims set for literature teaching in each setting. In England she found that literature teaching aims first at the study of literature as an autonomous form of art, second at pupils' language development, and finally at promoting pupils' psychological growth. In Greece, on the other hand, the first aim set for literature teaching is to inculcate pupils with certain cultural values, the second is to study literature for its own sake, and finally the third is to use it for pupils' language development. As can be seen, the two out of the three aims are common in both paradigms, even though they are not ranked similarly. A difference between the two settings is that the prime aim set for literature teaching in Greece, that is, pupils' inculcation with the national cultural values, does not feature at all among the aims set in the English official documents and examination papers. However, this does not mean that it does not form part of English education. As Hodolidou explained, in the English system pupils' inculcation with the national cultural values is accomplished through the use of the literary canon and this is why it comes so low among the aims of the Examination Boards. (ibid., p.126-127) In my analysis of official documents of the 1990s and of teachers' interviews, I identified the aims set for literature teaching in the two countries, without, though, hierarchising them, as I felt that any prioritisation would be forced and untenable with this kind of material.

The reasons invoked to support the reading of literature are not very different in the two settings. A principal aim is pupils' familiarisation with a range of texts and genres, with the past periods of their national literature, and lastly – and less importantly – with texts from 'other/different/foreign' cultures and traditions. It is always the central authorities that decide on what is to be studied, through a process in which teachers may become more or less involved. The literary texts studied at school are seen as worth reading but there is no explicit discussion of the selection criteria in either paradigm. In the Greek official discourse, there are some references to texts being chosen for enhancing pupils' knowledge about Greek history, culture and ethos, but these are toned down in the post-1997 documents. At other points, Greek policy makers explain that texts are selected on the basis of their aesthetic value and not of their ideology¹¹, but they are reticent about how they judge aesthetic value or how they can put ideology entirely to one side

as limited to decoding some printed signs on a page and does not necessarily involve a critical understanding of a text, of its function or of its relation to the world. (Elley, 1992)

¹⁰ See chapter 1.B. for a presentation of Hodolidou's study.

¹¹ See Milionis [Μηλιώνης], 1989; Plakas [Πλάκας], 1984.

when thinking about a text. English official discourse of the 1990s is equally evasive about the criteria used, with only a few documents appealing to 'quality' and 'excellence' in a rather vague and undefined way. So in both official discourses, there is silence about the criteria applied for the inclusion or exclusion of texts and only small hints are made, the assumption being that teachers and pupils will trust and accept the choices made for them unquestioningly. Similar silence surrounds the question of what counts as 'literature' while the more 'serious' genres receive preferential treatment. Especially in Greece, the inclusion of popular genres or fiction for adolescents is completely out of the question. By ruling out any reflection or open discussion of the rationale employed for their production, the set lists are ascribed the status of a 'canon', even though the term itself is never used. Still there is a difference between the two paradigms, in that English NCs include only a list of 'suggested authors', while Greek policy makers set down the anthologies with specific authors and extracts, and lately, they even prescribe specific lists of texts for study at all years of Lyceum. Official documents might present text selection as self-evident but there are teachers in both settings who problematise it. Some accept what they are given without complaint, but there are many others like Vasso and Mark who question the criteria and the prescriptiveness of the whole process. In England, reflection on text selection runs deep through the history and advocacy of teachers, who have at times introduced a wide range of genres in literature classes and have exerted strong pressure upon official discourse. Greek teachers, on the other hand, do not unsettle the traditional definition of literature but realise that the set texts do not excite pupils' interest, making their work rather difficult.

An interesting difference between the two settings is that in Greece only extracts of texts are studied as opposed to England where whole texts are used. In the Greek setting, the use of extracts has a very long history and the official documents do not even deem it necessary to justify their use, despite the widespread criticisms that are recently being voiced in various journals. Conforming to the official discourse, most interviewees also see this practice as inevitable. Even when criticisms are made of the current selections, the use of extracts is still regarded as the best way for pupils to come into contact with a wide range of texts, authors and genres, and to get a good grasp of the history of Greek literature. On the other hand, the use of whole texts is similarly treated as a given in the English official documents and the interviews studied, without any discussion of the advantages or disadvantages of this practice. The assumption seems to be that it is preferable to get to know a few texts better, instead of dabbling through a representative sample. It seems that in both settings a sacrifice has been made but in almost none of the texts studied is there a reflection on the prevalent orthodoxy and its rationale.

Familiarisation with a corpus of texts is not deemed enough, unless pupils also learn 'how' to read. With reference to the English paradigm, pupils are expected to develop a 'personal' response to literary texts, a notion that is rather controversial as has already been discussed. In addition,

though, their knowledge about literature is to be enhanced and in both countries the focus has lately shifted in that direction. So in the 1999 English NC ‘personal involvement’ has given way to a more ‘critical’ approach, while in the post-1997 Greek official discourse elements from literary theory are seen as the *sine qua non* of literature teaching. In both countries, it is seen as necessary for pupils to get a grasp of the knowledge about literature that will allow them to analyse, explain and evaluate texts. A framework has been elaborated that makes use of such analytical concepts as author and her times, text and context, content and style etc., all of which are extensively used in most official documents as well as in the interviews. Even when this ‘knowledge’ is not discussed as such, it still features in a very prominent position, being embedded in the very structure and practice of literature teaching. Applying Stibbs’ (1997) distinction between the different types of knowledge about literature¹², the Greek discourse promotes the development of the intratextual and intertextual, while the English discourse often encourages circumtextual in addition to the above. Regarding English and Greek teachers, they might use different methodologies but they all see it as their responsibility to help pupils make their knowledge about literature explicit.

Notwithstanding the significance of cognitive aims, literature is also assumed to have a major influence upon reader-pupils, transforming them as individuals and as social beings, changing them emotionally, spiritually, aesthetically, morally and socially. In both the Greek and the English discourse, literature is considered to have a deep and lasting effect upon readers, contributing to their whole-person development. This aim might be common in both paradigms, but official documents present it very differently from interviews. In policy documents this rhetoric of literary education as a way to maturation and betterment is kept alive, but in England it does not form part of the attainment levels on ‘Reading’, while in Greece it is not taken into account in the assessment framework promoted after the 1997 Reform. These promote a more utilitarian and technical approach and include only a few hazy references to the notion of ‘personal’ responses and preferences. Moreover, in the official discourse of both settings, all references to literature’s profound and wide-ranging influence are left vague while controversial concepts like ‘emotional’ or ‘moral’ growth are nowhere discussed. They are being used as incontestable and universal ideas and there is no consideration of their particular and context-specific definition. Such reticence may be part of an effort to make these documents as widely acceptable as possible or may be a way of playing down their significance.

¹² Stibbs’ definitions of the different types of knowledge about literature are as follows: ‘extratextual’ is “knowing if what you read is true, false, or spoof”; ‘metatextual’ is knowing that “even the most inspiring literature is artifice”; ‘intratextual’ is “knowing what aesthetic qualities to look for”; ‘intertextual’ is “knowing about other texts, traditions, contexts and genres”; and finally, ‘circumtextual’ is “understanding how texts are presented, written, published, taught and read within naturalised networks of expectations.” (1997: 7)

Teachers, on the other hand, are clearer than official documents on the issue of transformation through reading. English interviewees explain that the reading of literature teaches pupils how to think and how to feel, broadens their minds, helps them understand their life and relationships, expands their imagination and so on. Greek teachers are even more specific in their descriptions, talking about pupils who discover themselves or who see the world in a new light. They consider that literature teaching can make pupils 'good' persons and members of society, instilling in them qualities like sensitivity, openness, altruism, honesty, as well as solidarity and sympathy for others. Greek teachers seem to have great confidence in the power of literature, which is always described as 'good', fostering only 'positive' and politically correct feelings, to the exclusion of anything anti-social. Teachers from both paradigms argue that literary texts offer perspectives that are different from those of the pupils' and thus encourage them to address various issues and to develop empathy. By coming into contact with other perspectives and considering how themes emerge in different contexts, they have their fixed ideas and prejudices challenged and become more open. Unlike the official documents that pay lip-service to issues of personal formation while promoting a utilitarian view of reading, the interviewees create a picture of literature teaching that is more politicised, being about beliefs, principles and ideals. And yet, it should be noted that interviewees are not always conscious of the ideological aspect of their discourse, and more often than not disregard its constructed nature and present it as the 'obvious' and 'incontestable' way.

Finally, an aim to be found in the margins of some official documents is the love of reading and of getting pleasure from it. Pleasure is a rather slippery notion, having an elusive meaning and being unquantifiable. It does not come in the description of all curricular subjects and so, for example, pupils are not expected to get pleasure from the study of history or mathematics. It is only in the Cox Report and the 1995 NC that a small reference to it can be found, whereas there is none in the Greek official documents or the 1990 and 1999 English NCs. Regarding the Greek documents, this omission could be part of an effort to give an air of objectivity and neutrality to the subject, while the 1999 English NC lays emphasis on a 'critical' approach, instead of a highly ambiguous notion such as pleasure. Unlike official policy, both the Greek and the English teachers insist on the importance of pupils forging a special relation with literary texts, getting into the habit of reading for life and finding enjoyment in it. Verb phrases like 'loving', 'feeling', 'experiencing', 'enjoying' literature can be found in most interviews, placing pleasure in a rather prominent position, even though it is also an idea that is left hazy. English teachers are especially emphatic on this, repeating the principal tenet of the Progressive Movement and of educators like Caldwell Cook and Marjorie Hourd that have been so influential in England in the past.

Texts, authors and readers may be represented differently in the two paradigms, but the aims set for literature teaching are more or less the same. Coming into contact with a wide range of texts

and authors, acquiring knowledge about literature, getting pleasure out of reading, or being changed into a different person, all these feature in the discourses of both settings. What is different, though, is the discourse permeating official documents from that of teachers. The former promotes a more technical and utilitarian view of reading, while it silences its assumptions and avoids anything that would bring controversy. Among teachers, though, the old humanistic ideal seems to be alive; the very ideal that saw education as the way to shape children's identity as responsible citizens, who are interested in common life and can balance insightful contemplation and active participation. The idea that literature reading has great powers goes back to educators like Knox, Buchanan, Arnold and Leavis, but the content of this assumption has shifted. As Michael remarks, teachers have always hoped that 'literary' reading would change their pupils; and yet,

what these changes are will vary from one historical period to another, and from one section of society to another, but they have always included (in the language of our own times) the development of sensibility: awareness of and responsiveness of human, aesthetic and verbal experience. (1987: 137)

Like true romantics, most interviewees talk about pupils as persons who live in a multicultural world, fraught with conflicts and tension, and pin their hopes on literature teaching for making them see things in a more open and receptive way and – who knows! – the world might thus become better as well!

PART 6.D. – PUPILS ... WHO ARE THEY?

In both countries, official documents depict pupils as a uniform group that follows the same 'natural' path of development, the only difference being the individual pace of progress. All references are made to 'pupils' as a whole, working on the assumption that they belong to the same nation and have a common cultural heritage, history and attitude to life. In the official accounts of the proffered – or to put it more accurately – of the 'prescribed' model for reading, there is not the slightest suggestion that pupils' readings may also be determined by factors like gender, or cultural and social background.¹³ With the excessive use of 'shoulds', 'musts' and of affirmative sentences, schools are portrayed as regulatory institutions that have a formative and unifying effect on acquiescent pupils, who have no identity of their own, neither as a group nor as individuals. Even though pupils are 'present' in every sentence of these texts, they are virtually 'absent', as they lack a voice of their own and accept what is on offer without any form of challenge on their part, without resistance or defiance.

In the Greek paradigm, the 1997 Education Reform did not bring any substantial change of direction with it, despite the efforts to 'modernise' literature teaching by introducing 'modern

¹³ Even in the English paradigm, where there has been a debate on the role of the home in children's education, official documents refer to pupils' home cultures only in the first stages of schooling, as if its role is less important when children are in secondary education. The exception of the 1999 English NC will be discussed further on.

literary theory' and appealing to the authority it derives from being 'modern' and 'new'. In official documents an all-embracing 'we' is still used to describe the common response of all readers to a text, building the notion of a 'collective subject' that includes everyone. The sole acknowledgement of differences is a reference to pupils' age and perceptiveness but even this is too short and its implications are not followed up. (MNER-PI, 1998: 60) Apart from this minor reference, the world described in these texts seems to end at the door of a classroom and children are regarded only as 'pupils', untouched by any other influence. In this general espousal of homogeneity, one could point to the 1999 English NC as an exception. Indeed, in that document, there is acknowledgement of differences between pupils in terms of gender, social and cultural background, special needs, ethnicity and linguistic background. However, even there, at the end of the day, all pupils are to be ranked on the scale of the attainment levels, thus keeping intact the idea of a linear development of skills. So diversity remains only a side element that does not permeate the whole curriculum, which is once more dictated to – rather than co-authored by – teachers, pupils and their communities. Instead of dialogism becoming a structural feature of the literature curriculum, 'English' culture is again treated as the essential and unique experience for the whole pupil population. Teachers may be encouraged to take into account differences but these are discussed as difficulties to be overcome rather than as sources of meanings.

As with the aims set for literature teaching, so the interviewees' approach differs from that of official discourse on this issue as well. Teachers in both paradigms do not see pupils as a uniform group but as individuals and as members of communities, and they emphasise that pupils' response to a text depends on their personal experiences and background. They identify differences between boys and girls, between children with a different culture or mother tongue, who come from different classes and so on, using mainly the descriptors of gender, social class, ethnicity, linguistic and cultural background. It is worth noting that English teachers speak more confidently about their pupils in comparison with the Greeks, who feel they do not know enough about them as a result of having little contact time with them in literature lessons and of having to work with an over-prescriptive curriculum. Notwithstanding their acknowledgement of differences, most teachers treat identity as a stable and clear-cut set of features that are visible and can be attributed to specific experiences in life. It is the pupils whose family is middle-class, educated and speaks the official language that are thought to meet the demands of a literature lesson with more success. Especially in the Greek interviews, the approach is deterministic and the influence of pupils' homes is described as being so strong that teachers can do little to counteract it. So the interviews from both settings offer testimony to the argument developed by the New Literacy Studies that schooled literacy is equivalent to the dominant group's literacy practices and thus children from that group do better.¹⁴ However, interviewees do not

¹⁴ See chapter 2.A. for a discussion of the New Literacy Studies.

problematise the school model of reading at all and treat differences as an obstacle that needs to be overcome for all pupils to gain equal access to the benefits of education.

Within the context of post-modernity, identity is discussed as complex and dynamic rather than monolithic and fixed, fragmented rather than integrated into a coherent whole. It is seen as the locus of tension and conflict between fluid notions of gender, class etc., resulting in continuous shifts. Such a reconsideration of the notion of the subject means that, apart from outer differences between pupils, inner diversity also needs to be recognised and the space should be given to deal with the inherent contradictions of identity. Once it is accepted that “diversity is itself historically contingent, fluid and produced through discourses and practices” (Hird, 1998: 519), then the agenda of the education project needs to be reviewed as well. Education is no more about teaching certain skills or the spread of knowledge, but about allowing pupils the space in which to confront and negotiate the diverse and often painfully conflicting notions of culture and identity. Mark and Jennifer are two interviewees who operate within this framework, describing a literature class as a place where pupils play with various subject positions, exploring and reshaping their identities in new formulations. For these two teachers, diversity is not a problem, an obstacle that needs to be overcome, but something that can always surprise us with its creative force.

PART 6.E. – POWER AND CONTROL

Teachers and pupils in Greece and in England have to follow a curriculum that is compulsory for all and is produced by central authorities, that is, by the Department for Education and its consulting bodies. The implementation of a ‘national’ curriculum is upheld as a way to ensure equality of access to education that is seen as everybody’s entitlement, and yet such a centralisation of control results in a denial of teachers’ and pupils’ power and responsibility to determine the content of the educational act. In Greece, the national curriculum has very deep roots and is thus seen as an essential part of education, whereas the ripples from its recent introduction in England have not died out yet.¹⁵ It is the officially produced documents that determine the framework of literature teaching, setting the aims, the descriptions of what counts as achievement, the texts to be studied and so on. In both countries, there is a gradual increase in centralisation and so, in England, control has become even tighter through a system of examinations and reporting, while in Greece the MNER not only provides the set anthologies but has also recently started to prescribe a fixed list of texts and their analysis to be studied in upper secondary education. Even though in both countries official documents are authored by central authorities and then sent to schools for implementation, the process differs. In England, the NC might be produced by an appointed committee, but a consultation takes place first where teachers, academics and other interested parties are involved. Amendments are usually made to the original

¹⁵ It is worth pointing out that in Greece the national curriculum is compulsory both for state and for private schools, whereas in England only the state sector is obliged to follow it.

proposals in order to appease pressure groups and achieve a compromise. In Greece, on the other hand, practising teachers are entirely excluded from the writing of these documents, which is done by appointed committees, whose names are not always disclosed. In England, teachers have some sense of limited participation in the making of official discourse, whereas in Greece, teachers are confronted with a faceless official discourse produced by a remote and anonymous authority.

As texts, the official documents of both settings are very different from the interviews.¹⁶ The former emerge as unambiguous and 'transparent' texts that express a set of indisputable truths. Even the English official documents, for which a relatively open consultation process has been followed for their writing, are 'closed' texts, where a series of statements are set forth, rather than suggestions open for discussion or subject to change. The voice heard in them is one of a neutral and objective authority that transcends history and context¹⁷, while many difficult questions are evaded. There is utter silence about the rationale underlying the described model of development or of reading, which are not related to any theory of literary criticism, education or psychology, and many statements are left vague. Instead of a terrain where different and often contrasting views are developed, official documents present literature as a fixed corpus of worthwhile texts and reading as an uncontroversial way of approaching and analysing texts, irrespective of time or place. In all policy documents, even in the 1999 English NC, which could be described as the one promoting a more critical stance to reading, this rhetoric of comprehensiveness and indisputability is employed to silence all ideas of change, conflict or disagreement. The interviews, on the other hand, are more ambiguous and unassertive texts, where one can discern teachers' efforts to strike a balance between forces that pull them in different directions, or between what they might believe to be better and what they have to do. Official documents are rigid and forceful, whereas the interviews echo with uncertainty and doubt but also with creativity and sensitivity. In the interviews, there is a sense of time and place, of conflict and change, as teachers recount the reality of literature classes, often falling into contradictions or posing questions instead of giving definite answers.

Another emerging difference is that between English and Greek teachers. Both of them often use a 'we' that refers to the group of literature teachers in their country but then again these two communities are depicted very differently. English teachers sound assertive in their interviews and seem to share a collective identity with their colleagues, feeling part of a team. They might not agree on all issues of education and pedagogy, but still they are 'socialised' in the world of

¹⁶ Here, I have in mind Homi Bhabha's distinction between 'ambiguous' and 'unambiguous' texts as this is presented by Viswanathan. (1989: 96-97) Homi K. Bhabha developed this distinction in his article 'Signs taken for wonders: questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817', in *Critical Inquiry* (1985), 12 (1): 144-165.

¹⁷ In older times, reports on the teaching of English, like the Newbolt Report (1921) or the Hadow Report (1926), included a discussion of its history as a curriculum subject. Nowadays, though, authors of policy

English teaching.¹⁸ They are organised in departments, belong to bodies of teachers with wide participation, have access to publications, attend courses and so on. As a result, they have more space to talk about curricular matters, to articulate their concerns and develop a common language. This is a practice with a long history, going back to the times when teachers had more autonomy and the government's intervention was rather limited, the period of the 'social democratic consensus' that followed the 1944 Education Act. (Whitty, 1992: 273) In the 1950s and 1960s, English teachers were to a great extent responsible for the curriculum, took part in research organised by the Schools Council, NATE was being organised and so on. Later on, in the 1970s and the 1980s, the widespread use of coursework further reinforced their sense of control, even though they never stopped being under the pressure of examinations and other practical restrictions, such as the availability of texts etc. Since then, they might have been under attack as professionals but the mechanisms still operate that support them in their practice and make them feel confident. On the other hand, most Greek teachers appear relatively uneasy and give the impression that they feel alone, having no forum, such as a department or a body, a place where they can exchange ideas. However, despite their treading a 'personal' path, they do not seem to differ so much in their practice, a similarity that is not surprising if one thinks that they have been conditioned into the official discourse for so long, without ever having the opportunity to experiment with alternatives. At the same time, they are alienated from all decision-making procedures and often consider the centrally dictated practices to be out of touch with the reality of a literature class or pupils' needs. Contrary to the English teachers who seem satisfied with the current shape of literature teaching, most Greek interviewees sound unhappy, having a strong feeling that something is missing or should be done differently. Taking the above difference into account, one wonders whether the implementation of a national curriculum, no matter how well written it might be, can do much for education unless teachers appropriate it. Already in the English context there are many voices indicating the danger of overbearing prescriptiveness as it makes teachers feel deprofessionalised and puts teaching in plaster.¹⁹ As Kirtley argues, writing about English teachers in the mid 1990s:

Many young teachers are well versed in skills of curriculum interpretation but not curriculum invention, coming as they do from a culture where ideas are implemented, not created. (Kirtley, 1996: 2)

So, a comparison between the two paradigms shows how essential it is that teachers get the power and the responsibility to shape the curriculum.

documents feel it is unnecessary to give a historical dimension to the subject, describing an ahistorical framework for reading.

¹⁸ Talking about teachers' 'socialisation' into the world of teaching, I have in mind the article by Marshall, Turvey and Brindley (2001) where they talk about young teachers' shifts of perspective as they move from their year as trainees into their first years as newly qualified teachers and how they are influenced by the departmental policy of the schools they work in.

¹⁹ Carol Adams (2001), for example, explains that "an increasing overload of instructions of what to teach and how to teach it is making many feel deprofessionalised." Similarly, Brian Cox (1995) points out that "professional disagreements cannot be sorted out by a parliamentary Order. Children need different

Considering the official documents and their status, one is led to think of the operation of schools as an 'Ideological State Apparatus' (ISA) where pupils' "subjection to the ruling ideology" is ensured, by teaching them not only a 'know-how' but also a submissive stance to the established order. (Althusser, 1971: 127-8) Instead of functioning mainly 'by violence', like the repressive State Apparatus, school functions mainly 'by ideology' and secondarily by repression – albeit this may be symbolic. The idea is that:

no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses. (ibid., p.139)

Thus, the ruling class tries to control the school, which is the dominant ISA in the capitalist social formation, in order to safeguard its hold on power and the reproduction of the relations of production. However, the hegemonic function of the School is covered up and it is represented "as a neutral environment purged of ideology", indispensable and beneficial to all. (ibid., p.148) Despite the pretence to neutrality, still the ideology is inscribed in the practices of the apparatus. In the official documents studied, this 'naturalisation' of ideology can be seen in the promoted model of reading which is depicted as a technology available and useful to all, with any question of authorship or intentionality presented as irrelevant. Contrary to the projected image, schooled literacy depends on the group that organises the curriculum.

The 'literate bias' of schooling [...] is the bias of the middle and upper classes and the dominant social groups and their conceptions of culture, order, norms, behavior, and values.

Literacy, thus, is attached to structures of control and authority, and is itself, in the process of its transmission, neutralized. (Graff, 1987: 390)

As the dominant class generalises and decrees "their group characteristics as representative of the national culture", the subordinate groups' cultural ways are excluded from it. (Freire & Macedo, 1987: 52) In this way, all other literacy practices are seen as inferior to the dominant model or even as non-existent, resulting in the exclusion and silencing of many social groups' particular and creative forces. Suppressing their ideological function, policy documents present curricular subjects as self-evident entities, in an effort to drive the participants in educational praxis into acceptance of the prescribed framework. As has been discussed, though, the seeming coherence and consistency of official documents, which try to project an unproblematic picture for literature reading in schools, is achieved mainly through silence and vagueness.

And yet, the idea of downright control and acquiescence does not really encompass educational discourse, even if it gives a good description of the function of official documents in a centralised system. Althusser himself pointed out that the ISAs are occasionally disturbed by contradictions, the result of pressure from the ideological forces of other classes. Educational discourse is never homogeneous and unified, as a number of different trends may coexist in the same framework, interacting with each other. Raymond Williams points out that:

strategies to help them to read. New research may change the emphasis; teaching methods should not be prescribed by parliament." (1995: 146)

An educational curriculum, as we have seen again and again in past periods, expresses a compromise between an inherited selection of interests and the emphasis of new interests. (1992 [1961]: 150-151)

In any case, educational discourse is something more complex than official policies, as government policies are read and actualised in schools and in real classes. An interesting thing that emerged from the interviews with the English and the Greek teachers was the lively, even if contradictory and uncertain, style of their responses, that calls into question the official discourse and its dogmatic positiveness that tries to impose a sense of consensus. An 'easy' reading of these interviews would be to doubt these teachers' worth, as we tend to feel edgy and suspicious of a writer's abilities for coherent thinking when we are faced with a contradictory text like these are. It is our coming to consciousness within modernity that makes us regard textual nature as free of contradictions, gaps and fissures, and we like to think that at any time we can create a narrative characterised by wholeness and integrity. On the contrary, I think that this ambivalence prevalent in most interviews proves these teachers' sensitivity to the contradictory pulls they have to deal with. A narrative like the official documents that silences its emphases, inclusions and exclusions negates its constructed nature in an attempt to gain control over any alternative voices that might be articulated. In my discussions with those English and Greek teachers, I asked them the questions that had been in my mind since I first started this project, which I am not sure whether I would be able to answer myself in a definite way. I guess that, had I answered them myself, I would most probably sound as ambivalent and contradictory as they did. The assumption that there can be a general consensus on such matters as the teaching of literature silences the ongoing dialogue between different, and often conflicting, positions that are current at any moment. Instead of trying to create totalities, blurring the practices of selection and composition, it is better to keep in mind the contingent and particular nature of our stories; it is better to move beyond a naturalistic and nationalistic view of literature in schools, problematising discourse and raising awareness of it.

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APPENDIX 1

Research details

Part 1.A. *List of English schools visited*

In the academic years 1993-94 and 1994-95, I visited six English secondary schools in the Greater London area, where I discussed with English teachers and made classroom observations. The schools I visited were the following:

- Camden School for Girls
- Epping Forest College
- Holland Park School
- Kingsland School, Hackney
- Parliament Hill School
- Pimlico School

Part 1.B. *Timetable of interviews with English and Greek teachers*

Changed names have been used for all teachers in order to ensure anonymity. All interviewees worked in the state sector, in secondary education.

Dates of interviews with English teachers:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------|
| 1. 7 / 6 / 1995 | Liz |
| 2. 8 & 29 / 6 / 1995 | David |
| 3. 14 / 6 / 1995 | Susan |
| 4. 23 / 6 / 1995 | Cathy |
| 5. 14 / 5 / 1998 | Claire |
| 6. 5 / 6 / 1998 | Jennifer |
| 7. 18 / 6 / 1998 | Mark |

Dates of interviews with Greek teachers:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| 1. 27 / 10 / 1998 | Nefeli |
| 2. 28 / 10 / 1998 | Stella |
| 3. 22 / 12 / 1998 | Petros |
| 4. 23 / 12 / 1998 | Anna |
| 5. 23 / 12 / 1998 | Sofia |
| 6. 24 / 12 / 1998 | Kostas |
| 7. 2 / 1 / 1999 | Margarita |
| 8. 2 / 1 / 1999 | Maria |
| 9. 7 / 1 / 1999 | Vasso |

Part 1.C. Guiding questions used in the interviews**Personal history...**

- ⇒ What memories of reading literature do you have from your childhood?
- ⇒ Would you read literature as a child outside school? How would you compare your reading of literature in school to your private reading of literature?
- ⇒ Was there anything or anyone who influenced you in your decision to become an English/Greek teacher?
- ⇒ Which would you consider to be the most decisive period in your formation as an English/Greek teacher: primary – secondary education, first-degree, postgraduate training, your life outside educational institutions, other?
- ⇒ What would you describe as ‘literature’? Have you always held this view?

Positioning as a literature teacher...

- ⇒ What are your aims as a literature teacher? In what ways would you like literature lessons to affect your pupils? What do you expect your pupils to ‘gain’ from the reading of literature?
- ⇒ What criteria do you use when you choose texts for study with a class?
- ⇒ How do you read a text with a class? What strategies do you employ? What particular activities do you pursue? How did you come up with these activities?
- ⇒ Do you talk with other English/Greek teachers? What do you talk about?
- ⇒ Would you consider yourself a typical English/Greek teacher?
- ⇒ Do you read literature in your personal life? How do you read a text on your own? How would you compare your personal reading to your reading in school?
- ⇒ Which part of your lessons do you enjoy most? Which part of your lessons do you consider most successful? Why?
- ⇒ How do examinations and examination criteria affect your teaching?

A teacher’s view of pupils as readers...

- ⇒ How do your pupils react to literature lessons? Do they usually come up to your expectations? Did you – as a pupil – react similarly?
- ⇒ What do you consider to be ‘success’ in literature lessons?
- ⇒ Pupils have different gender, different cultural and social backgrounds. How does this influence your teaching of literature and their reading of literature in school?
- ⇒ What texts do you expect your pupils to find ‘interesting’? Do you share their taste?
- ⇒ What do you think pupils mean when they say that a book is ‘boring’?

APPENDIX 2

Information on the Greek Education System

Part 2.A. Structure of the Greek education system

The Greek education system has the following stages:

Nursery	Ages 4-5
Primary Education (compulsory) Years 1-6	Ages 6-11
Gymnasium (compulsory) (Lower secondary education) Years 1-3	Ages 12-14
Lyceum (Upper secondary education) Years 1-3	Ages 15-17
Higher Education Duration: 4-5 years	

Primary Education and Gymnasium are compulsory, which means that children have a total of nine years of compulsory education. Nursery education might not be compulsory but the majority of children attend a nursery, either a private or state one.

Part 2.B. The 1997 Education Reform

In 1997, the Education Minister Mr. Gerasimos Arsenis promoted a reform of the education system, the main aspects of which were regulated by the 2525/97 statutory law. The main changes of the 1997 Education Reform could be summed up as follows:

The Lyceum and its programmes of study

Before the 1997 Education Reform there was a range of upper secondary institutions, such as the General, Music, Classic, Technical-Vocational Lyceums etc. The 1997 Reform replaced all existing types with two, the *Integrated Lyceum* (IL; in Greek: *Ενιαίο Λύκειο* – E.A.) and the *Technical Vocational Educational Institutes* (TVEIs; in Greek: *Τεχνικά και Επαγγελματικά Εκπαιδευτήρια* – T.E.E.).

Before the 1997 Reform, pupils in years 1 and 2 of Lyceum followed the same programmes of study and had to sit end-of-year internal examinations at their own school. In year 3 of Lyceum, they attended a number of general education subjects that were examined internally at the end of the year. In addition, they had to choose one pathway out of the four that were offered: Sciences and Technology, Medicine, Arts and Law, and finally, Finance. In each direction they did four subjects that were examined in pan-Hellenic examinations at the end of the year. In the Sciences and Technology direction, the subjects studied were Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Essay-writing; in the Medicine direction, they were Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Essay-writing; in the Arts and Law direction, they were Ancient Greek, Latin, History and Essay-writing; and finally, in the Finance direction, they were Mathematics, Sociology, History and Essay-writing. Their entry into Tertiary Education depended mainly on the grades they got in those subjects examined at a pan-Hellenic level and to a small extent on the grade of their Leaving Certificate.

After the 1997 Reform, Integrated Lyceum pupils are channelled into different pathways at an earlier age. So in Year 1 all pupils are to follow the same programme of study but in Year 2 they have to choose between three *directions*: Arts, Sciences and Technological. All year 2 pupils are to attend a series of general education subjects that make up 60%-65% of the total number of hours and a series of subjects particular to their direction that make up 35%-40% of the total number of hours. In Year 3, each of the three directions includes *cycles of studies* with optional subjects. In this year, general education subjects are to cover 50%-55% of the total number and optional subjects 45%-50%. Year 1 pupils sit final examinations in all subjects at their own school but year 2 and 3 pupils have to take pan-Hellenic end-of-year examinations in nearly all the studied subjects. So, before the 1997 Reform, pupils had to take pan-Hellenic examinations in only four subjects at the end of year 3. However, after the 1997 Reform, they have to take pan-Hellenic examinations in a number of subjects – between nine and fourteen – at the end of both year 2 and year 3.

At the end of year 3 of Lyceum, successful pupils are awarded with a *Leaving Certificate*, which can be used to register in Tertiary Education institutions or in post-secondary vocational institutes.

Before the 1997 Reform, pupils who would fail in the June examinations were given a second chance to take the same examinations in the September period. If they passed, then they could move on to the next year, but if not, then they had to repeat the same year. According to the 1997 Reform, this second chance was to be abolished and Lyceum pupils who failed in the June examinations would have to repeat the same year. Reactions to this change were so strong that the Ministry had to go back on it and allow the September re-sits.

Those pupils who could not cope with the Integrated Lyceum requirements could attend the *Technical and Vocational Educational Institutes* (TVEIs; in Greek: Τεχνικά και Επαγγελματικά Εκπαιδευτήρια – Τ.Ε.Ε.). In theory, these institutions are of equal standing as the Integrated Lyceums but in practice they are far from being so. Even though a large percentage of pupil population attend these institutions, they are neither well-staffed nor well-equipped and every year there are many protests about the conditions they have to work under.

Whole-day Nursery and Primary Schools

According to the 1997 Reform, whole-day nurseries and primary schools are to be organised that would operate for at least eight hours a day. In whole-day primary schools, apart from the compulsory programme of studies, pupils should be able to attend programmes of creative activities, programmes offering assistance with homework and programmes of support teaching for those with learning difficulties. Teachers are to point out which pupils need to attend the programmes of support teaching. Indeed, until 2001 a great number of whole-day nurseries and primary schools were organised. The rest of nurseries and primary schools work for about five to six hours per day.

Schools of a Second Chance

At the recommendation of the Institute of Continuous Adult Education and in association with the Local Authorities, 'schools of a second chance' can be established for those young people who are over 18 years old and have not completed the nine-year compulsory education. At these institutions, fast track programmes of primary and lower secondary education are offered. Graduates are awarded with a leaving certificate that is equivalent to the primary school or Gymnasium leaving certificate.

Programme of support teaching

Following the 1997 Reform, programmes of *support teaching* (in Greek: πρόγραμμα ενισχυτικής διδασκαλίας) are organised outside the normal timetable hours for those pupils with learning difficulties, both in primary and in secondary education. These programmes came as an answer to those charges made against the state education system for not meeting pupils' needs. For years, successive generations of pupils have been driven to attend frontistiria, private institutions that offer group tuition on school subjects as well as foreign languages. Pupils go to a frontistirio in their spare time and it is their families that pay the bills. In older times, students would go to a frontistirio only in the last years of secondary education to get extra preparation for the entry exams to University. Lately, this practice has become so widespread that nearly all students of secondary education attend a frontistirio, while many, especially the more wealthy ones, have extra tuition lessons at home.

Appointment of teachers in Primary and Secondary education

Before the 1997 Education Reform, University graduates could put their name in the list for prospective teachers of their specialisation field, getting a priority number according to the date of registration in the list. There were separate lists for teachers of primary education, of Greek, of mathematics, of physics, of RE etc. and these were run by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (MNER). Every year MNER would appoint a number of teachers from those lists to cover the needs of state schools. The appointed teachers were civil servants, employed by the Ministry of Education, and they had to apply to the MNER for a change of schools.

The 1997 Education Reform abolished these lists. Now University graduates who want to work in state education need to take part in a series of centrally organised examinations that are held every two years. The Ministry of Education uses the lists of successful candidates to appoint new teachers. Succeeding in the examinations does not guarantee appointment. Both before the 1997 Reform and after it, newly appointed teachers have to go to village or small town schools for some years, before they can get a placement at a bigger town or city school.

The years between 1998 and 2002 would be a transition period and appointments would be both from the old and the new lists in a graded percentage. For example, in 1998, 90% of the newly appointed teachers were from the list of registered teachers and 10% from those who took the examinations, while in 2002, 10% of the newly appointed teachers will be from the list of registered teachers and 90% from those who took the examinations.

As the number of permanently appointed teachers does not cover the needs of schools, every year the MNER employs a big number of *supply teachers* whose contract is temporary, lasting only for a few months. Supply teachers are usually sent to schools two months after the start of the year. Every year there

are many complaints, as schools have to operate without being properly staffed for the first months of the school year. Despite the disruption caused, the Ministry of Education prefers the option of employing supply teachers instead of permanent staff, because the cost is lower.

Evaluation of teacher performance

Before 1981, the Ministry of Education would appoint the school *inspectors*, one for each education region, who were responsible for assessing teachers' performance, writing a report and putting a grade on each of them. A teacher's career would depend entirely on her inspector's report and grade. This system was abused as a teacher's career hung on a single individual's judgement. In 1981, when a socialist government came to power after a succession of conservative governments, the institution of school inspectors was abolished in an effort to stop its discriminatory function. Instead, for the period between 1981 and the 1997 Reform, there were a number of *advisers* whose role was to offer support to teachers of their speciality rather than to assess them.

In 1997, again with a socialist government in office, inspectors as well as a rather rigorous evaluation system were reintroduced, as part of the Education Reform. In an effort to evaluate both school and teacher performance in a more systematic and strict way, it was arranged to establish a *Body of Permanent Evaluators* with a 400-strong staff, whose role would be to overlook the whole evaluation process. So teachers were to be assessed by four persons: the head of their school, the senior officer of their Education Authority, their adviser and finally by one of the Permanent Evaluators. As would be expected, teachers' reaction to such a suffocating control mechanism was so strong that in 2001 the whole plan is still on paper, even though the government has not withdrawn it and keeps trying to find a way to push it through.

Reactions to the 1997 Education Reform

The 1997 Education Reform met with strong reactions from teachers, pupils, parents and prospective teachers. It is worth pointing out that the Ministry of Education imposed the Reform without having put it under consultation before, and so teachers and other interested groups were never given a chance to make any suggestions.

Pupils were exasperated at having to take examinations in twelve to fourteen subjects in both year 2 and year 3 of Lyceum, seeing a tenfold increase at their workload. They reacted by occupying school buildings and no lessons would be held for nearly two months, from November 1998 up to January 1999. In addition, almost every single pupil of secondary education ended up attending a frontistirio outside school hours, which meant that family budgets were put under considerable strain.

Teachers shared their pupils' concerns and were worried about the examination-centred change of the curriculum, as everything seemed to revolve around examinations and preparation for them. They also resented the idea of having all these people – heads, advisers, senior officers and permanent evaluators – grading and reporting their performance in such a centralised system. Moreover, prospective teachers, who had been for years registered in the lists waiting to be appointed, were told that their wait had been in vain and they had to take even more examinations if they wanted to find a job in state education.

In the April 2000 elections, the same party, PASOK, was brought once more to power but a new Minister was assigned to the MNER. Mr. Petros Efthimiou, the successor of Mr. Arsenis to the MNER, tried to appease the strong reactions to the 1997 Reform by modifying various of its aspects. For example, the number of subjects examined at a pan-Hellenic level in years 2 and 3 of Lyceum dropped to nine per year, with the rest being examined internally; the evaluation system of teacher performance has not been implemented yet; Lyceum pupils who fail in the June period are given a second chance in September and so on. Despite the changes and the time that has gone by, the 1997 Reform is still strongly resented and a feeling of discontent is prevalent.

Part 2.C. National Curriculum (subjects, timetable)

In Greece, there is a National Curriculum (NC) that regulates the subjects taught, the programmes of study and the examination system. The Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (MNER; in Greek: Υπουργείο Εθνικής Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων – ΥΠ.Ε.Π.Θ.) decrees the NC, after consultation with the Pedagogical Institute (PI; in Greek: Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο – Π.Ι.), which is a governmental organisation staffed by civil servants. The role of the PI is similar to that of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in Britain. All schools, both in the state and in the public sector, are obliged by law to follow the National Curriculum and make use of the same textbooks prepared by the Pedagogical Institute and published by the Organisation for Publishing School Textbooks (OPST; in Greek: Οργανισμός Εκδόσεως Διδακτικών Βιβλίων – ΟΕΔΒ).

The subjects taught at each stage of secondary education are the following:

GYMNASIUM

(compulsory Lower secondary education)

	SUBJECTS	No. of periods per week		
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
1.	Religious Education	2	2	2
2.	Ancient Greek language and literature	4	4	4
3.	Modern Greek language and literature	5	4	4
4.	History	2	2	3
5.	Education in Social Issues and Citizenship	-	-	2
6.	1 st Foreign language (English)	3	2	2
7.	2 nd Foreign language (French or German)	3	3	3
8.	Mathematics	4	4	4
9.	Physics – Chemistry	-	3	3
10.	Information Technology – Technology	2	2	-
11.	Geography	2	2	-
12.	Biology (I)	2	-	-
13.	Biology (II)	-	-	2
14.	Careers Education	-	-	1
15.	Physical Education	3	3	2
16.	Art	2	2	2
17.	Home Economics	1	2	-
18.	Information Technology	-	-	1
	Total no. of periods	35	35	35

LYCEUM

(non-compulsory Upper secondary education)

Lyceum Year 1

Compulsory subjects (29 periods per week)

Religious Education (2 hrs)	Ancient Greek (4 hrs)	Modern Greek language & literature (4 hrs)
History (2 hrs)	Mathematics (5/4 hrs)	Physics/Chemistry (3/4 hrs)
1 st Foreign language (3 hrs)	Economics (2 hrs)	Technology (2 hrs)
Physical Education (2/1 hrs)	Careers Education (-/1 hrs)	

Optional subjects: 2/4 periods per week

2nd Foreign language (2 hrs);
European Civilisation and its Roots (2 hrs);
Information Technology and Computer Applications (2 hrs);
Arts (Theatre Studies, Music and Art) (2 hrs);
Psychology (2 hrs).

Years 2 & 3: PATHWAYS

In Years 2 and 3 of Lyceum, there are three pathways that pupils can follow, depending on what they want to study at Higher Education, i.e. Arts, Sciences or Technology. Thus, in Year 2 of Lyceum, pupils have to attend a total of 13 to 14 subjects:

9 compulsory general education subjects (common to all students),
3 subjects for each direction (compulsory to pupils of that pathway), and
1 or 2 subjects for each direction (optional, to be chosen out of 8 subjects)

Lyceum Year 2

Compulsory subjects (common to all three directions): 24 periods p.w.

Religious Education (2 hrs)	Foreign language (2 hrs)	Physical Education (2 hrs)
Ancient Greek (2 hrs)	Modern Greek language and literature (4 hrs)	History (2 hrs)
Mathematics (Algebra/Geometry) (4 hrs)	Physics/Chemistry/Biology (4 hrs)	Introduction to Politics and Justice (2 hrs)

A. ARTS DIRECTION

Compulsory subjects: 6 periods p.w.

Ancient Greek (3 hrs);
Social and Political Organisation in Ancient Greece (2/1 hrs);
Latin (1/2 hrs).

Optional subjects: 2/4 periods p.w.

Environmental Studies (2 hrs)	Modern European literature: history and texts (2 hrs)	History of Social Sciences (2 hrs)
Astronomy (2 hrs)	Design (2 hrs)	2 nd Foreign language (2 hrs)
History (2 hrs)	Computer Applications (2 hrs)	

B. SCIENCES DIRECTION

Compulsory subjects: 6 periods p.w.

Mathematics (3 hrs);
Physics (2 hrs);
Chemistry (1 hr).

Optional subjects: 2/4 periods p.w.

Environmental Studies (2 hrs)	Modern European literature: history and texts (2 hrs)	2 nd Foreign language (2 hrs)
Astronomy (2 hrs)	Design (2 hrs)	History (2 hrs)
Computer Applications (2 hrs)	Biology (2 hrs)	

C. TECHNOLOGICAL DIRECTION

Compulsory subjects: 6 periods p.w.

Mathematics (2 hrs);
Physics (2 hrs);
Communications Technology (2 hrs).

Optional subjects: 2/4 periods p.w.

Natural Resources Management (2 hrs)	Modern European literature: history and texts (2 hrs)	Computer Applications (2 hrs)
Astronomy (2 hrs)	Environmental Studies (2 hrs)	2 nd Foreign language (2 hrs)
Chemistry (2 hrs)	Design (2 hrs)	

Lyceum Year 3

Compulsory subjects (common to all three directions): 16 periods p.w.

Religious Education (1 hr)	Foreign language (2 hrs)	Physical Education (1 hrs)
Modern Greek language and literature (4 hrs)	History of Sciences and Technology (2 hrs)	Mathematics and Statistics (2 hrs)
Physics/Biology (2 hrs)	Modern Greek History (2 hrs)	

A. ARTS DIRECTION

Compulsory subjects: 12 periods p.w.

Ancient Greek (4 hrs);
Modern Greek literature (2 hrs);
Latin (2 hrs);
History (2 hrs);
Philosophy (2 hrs).

Optional subjects: 2/4 periods p.w.

2 nd Foreign language (2 hrs)	Economics (2 hrs)	Sociology (2 hrs)
Statistics (2 hrs)	History of Art (2 hrs)	Computer Applications (2 hrs)
Logic: Theory & Practice (2 hrs)		

B. SCIENCES DIRECTION

Compulsory subjects: 12 periods p.w.

Mathematics (5 hrs);
Physics (3 hrs);
Chemistry (2 hr);
Biology (2 hrs).

Optional subjects: 2/4 periods p.w.

Philosophy (2 hrs)	2 nd Foreign language (2 hrs)	Economics (2 hrs)
Modern Greek literature (2 hrs)	Statistics (2 hrs)	History of Art (2 hrs)
Computer Applications (2 hrs)	Logic: Theory and Practice (2 hrs)	

C. TECHNOLOGICAL DIRECTION – CYCLE 1 (Technology and Production)

Compulsory subjects: 13 periods p.w.

Mathematics (4 hrs);
Chemistry – Biochemistry (2 hrs);
Physics – Mechanics (3 hrs);
Technology and Development (2 hrs);
Electrology (2 hrs).

Optional subjects: 2/4 periods p.w.

2 nd Foreign language (2 hrs)	Agronomics & Agricultural Development (2 hrs)	Industrial Production & Energy (2 hrs)
Economics (2 hrs)	Statistics (2 hrs)	Accountancy (2 hrs)
Design (technical/architectural) (2 hrs)	Computer Applications (2 hrs)	History of Art (2 hrs)

C. TECHNOLOGICAL DIRECTION – CYCLE 2 (Information Technology and Services)

Compulsory subjects: 13 periods p.w.

Mathematics (4 hrs);
Physics – Mechanics (3 hrs);
Programming Applications (2 hrs);
Computing Systems Technology and Operating Systems (2 hrs);
Business Management and Services (2 hrs).

Optional subjects: 2/4 periods

2 nd Foreign language (2 hrs)	Multimedia/Networks (2 hrs)	Software Applications (2 hrs)
Economics (2 hrs)	Statistics (2 hrs)	Accountancy (2 hrs)
Design (technical/architectural) (2 hrs)	Computer Applications (2 hrs)	History of Art (2 hrs)

Part 2.D. Modern Greek literature textbooks

In all years of secondary education, the use of specific textbooks for the teaching of Modern Greek literature is compulsory. For each year, an anthology of extracts has been compiled by a group of teachers and authors appointed by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs and the Pedagogical Institute. These anthologies were compiled in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as part of the 1976 Education Reform that sought to democratise the education system after the seven-year-long dictatorship (1967-1974). They all bear the same title, *Modern Greek Literature Texts* (in Greek: *Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας*), even though foreign texts are also included. The general structure of these anthologies are the following:

Gymnasium – Year 1

Compilers: Grigoriadis, N., Karvelis, D., Milionis, Ch., Balaskas, K., & Paganos, G.

Thematic Parts

- I. Man and nature
- II. Religious faith
- III. 1940 – Occupation – Resistance
- IV. Love for our fellow beings
- V. Ties of friendship
- VI. Labour
- VII. The individual's fighting spirit
- VIII. From our national palingenesis
- IX. Older forms of life
- X. Emigration
- XI. Family relationships
- XII. Acquaintance with our place and with other places
- XIII. The plight of Cyprus
- XIV. Athleticism
- XV. Folklore themes
- XVI. Folk theatre

Gymnasium – Year 2

Compilers: Grigoriadis, N., Karvelis, D., Milionis, Ch., Balaskas, K., & Paganos, G.

Thematic Parts

- I. The sea
- II. School and life
- III. City – Countryside
- IV. 1940 – Occupation
- V. Young people in the fight for freedom
- VI. Love
- VII. From religious life
- VIII. Asia Minor themes
- IX. The yearning of emigration
- X. The Greek people outside the borders
- XI. Problems of modern life
- XII. Travelling
- XIII. On the eve of the Great Cause
- XIV. Old life
- XV. The fights of the Akrites and the Kleftes
- XVI. Folk art

Gymnasium – Year 3

Compilers: Grigoriadis, N., Karvelis, D., Balaskas, K., & Paganos, G.

- I. From our folk songs
- II. Scholar tradition – First period (1000 – 1600)
- III. Seventeenth century – Cretan literature
- IV. Modern Greek Enlightenment (1669 – 1820)
- V. The Nineteenth century up to 1880
 - a. Memoirs
 - b. The Eptanisian School
 - c. The Fanariotes and the Romantic School of Athens
- VI. The New Athenian School (1880 – 1922)

- VII. Modern literature
 - a. The period from 1922 to 1945
 - b. Post-war period
- VIII. Appendix – Foreign literature

Lyceum – Year 1

Compilers: Grigoriadis, N., Karvelis, D., Milionis, Ch., Balaskas, K., & Paganos, G.

Introduction: ‘The beginnings and main features of Modern Greek literature’

Part A

- I. First period (10th cent. – 1453)
- II. Second period (1453 – 1669)
- III. Third period (1669 – 1830)

Part B: Contemporary literature

- I. Poetry
- II. Prose
- III. Critical essay
- IV. Theatre

Part C: Foreign literature

- I. Latin literature
- II. European literature of the Renaissance
[Italy, Spain, France, England]

Lyceum – Year 2

Compilers: Grigoriadis, N., Karvelis, D., Milionis, Ch., Balaskas, K., Paganos, G. & Papakostas, G.

Part A: The Eptanisian School

Part B: The Fanariotes and the Romantic School of Athens (1830 – 1880)

Part C: The New Athenian School

Poetry

Prose

Part D: Modern literature: The first decade of the interwar period (1922 – 1930)

Part E: Post-war literature

Poetry

Prose

Part F: Foreign literature

[England, France, Germany, Russia]

Lyceum – Year 3

Compilers: Grigoriadis, N., Karvelis, D., Milionis, Ch., Balaskas, K., Paganos, G. & Papakostas, G.

Part A: Poetry

Part B: Narrative prose

Part C: Critical essay

Part D: Foreign literature

[England, France, Germany, USA, Spain, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Chile]

APPENDIX 3

Landmarks in Modern Greek history

- 1821 Greek War of Independence begins. After some four hundred years of Turkish rule Greece becomes, in 1827, an independent state.
- 1831 First president, Capodistrias, is assassinated, one year after coming to power.
- 1832 Greece gains formal recognition in the treaty between Bavaria and the 'Great' or 'Protecting' Powers, who determine that Greece should be a monarchy. The sovereignty of the small Greek state is not absolute as the Protecting Powers intervene in its affairs.
- 1833 The Great Powers choose Otto of Wittelsbach, the son of King Louis I (Ludwig) of Bavaria, as king of Greece. His rule is not a happy one for the Greeks. Thessaly, Epiros, Macedonia, Crete still remain under Turkish rule. The 'Great Idea' to unite the Greek Empire is born.
- 1844 King Otto is forced to grant a constitution.
- 1863 As a successor to King Otto, driven into exile in 1862, the Great Powers choose George I, a prince of the Danish Glücksburg family. The Glücksburg dynasty reigns intermittently until the 1974 referendum rejects the institution of monarchy.
- 1864 The Ionian Islands are ceded by Britain to mark the beginning of the new reign.
- 1881 Thessaly and part of Epiros are united to Greece.
- 1890s Military endeavours compound serious economic problems, culminating in national bankruptcy in 1893. The great wave of emigration to the United States characterizes the last decade of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century. About one-sixth of the entire population participated in this great exodus.
- 1910 Eleftherios Venizelos becomes Prime Minister. For many years the hopes of the middle-class and of all those who opposed the monarchy were focused on him and people were divided in two blocs, the Venizelists and the royalists. Venizelos dominated Greek politics during the first third of the 20th century.
- 1912-13 Balkan Wars: Thessaloniki, Macedonia, Epiros, Crete and East Aegean islands are liberated from the Turks. The land area of Greece is increased by some 70% and so is its population from 2.8 to 4.8 million.
- 1914-1918 Greece is riven by the 'National Schism', a division of the country into two camps, supporting either King Constantine I or the prime minister Venizelos. The king advocates neutrality, while Venizelos is an enthusiastic supporter of the Triple Entente (i.e. Britain, France and Russia). In an effort to lure Greece into the war, the Entente holds out the attractive prospect of territorial gains for Greece at the expense of Turkey, which has aligned itself with the Central Powers. In June 1917 the Entente allies oust King Constantine and install Venizelos as prime minister of a formally united but bitterly divided Greece. Venizelos duly brings Greece, hitherto neutral, into the war on the side of the Entente. In May 1919 Greece was permitted to land troops in Smyrna (Izmir), the major port city in Asia Minor.
- 1922 The Greeks are defeated by the Turks in Asia Minor. Much of Smyrna is burned and many Greeks and Armenians are killed. Tens of thousands of Greek refugees flee Turkey. The Treaty of Lausanne orders an 'exchange of populations': 500,000 Turks living in Greece return to Asia Minor; 1.3 million Greeks living in Turkey are evacuated to Greece – the population of which was then only 5½ million. The Asia Minor Disaster, as it is known, shapes the main frontiers, politics, population and history of contemporary Greece. The 'Great Idea' is no more.
- 1924 In a referendum, the majority vote against the monarchy. Parliamentary democracy lasts until 1935 when King George II is reinstated after a fraudulent plebiscite.

- 1925-1926** Short-lived military dictatorship headed by General Theodoros Pangalos.
- 1936-1940** General Ioannis Metaxas imposes dictatorship, with the connivance of the king. Metaxas strives to maintain the country's traditional alignment toward Britain. He endeavours to recast the Greek character in a more disciplined mode, invoking the values of ancient Greece. He furthermore seeks to fuse them with the values of the medieval Christian Empire of Byzantium, thus fashioning what he pompously describes as the 'Third Hellenic Civilization.'
- 1940** At the outbreak of World War II Metaxas tries to maintain neutrality but is increasingly subject to pressure from Italy. A series of provocations culminates in the delivery of a humiliating ultimatum on Oct. 28, 1940, but Metaxas, reflecting the mood of the entire nation, rejects this without discussion. 28th October is still celebrated as the 'No' day. The Italian forces attack Greece and the campaign at the Albanian borders follows, where Greeks are victorious.
- 1941** The Germans invade Greece and a harsh tripartite German, Italian and Bulgarian occupation starts. King George II and his government flee to the Middle East. The Occupation lasts from April 1941 until October 1944 and costs the lives of hundreds of thousands of Greeks from hunger, executions and in the resistance. Almost from the outset of the occupation, acts of resistance are recorded. These take a more systematic form in September 1941 when the National Liberation Front (EAM) is founded, with its army ELAS, in both of which the Communists have a very active participation. Other resistance groups, like EDES, are also organised. British forces join in the fight against Hitler.
- 1944** The Germans retreat from Greece and the British intervene to support the Greek Government who returned from exile. In negotiations with Stalin, Winston Churchill trades Russian predominance in post-war Romania for British predominance in Greece. A bloody Civil War ensues, lasting until 1949, when the Communists are finally defeated.
- 1947** Following the Truman Doctrine, the United States assume Britain's former mantle as Greece's chief external patron, providing military equipment and advice. The Dodecanese islands are ceded from Italy to Greece.
- 1950s** The Civil War has ended but a period of persecution starts that lasts for a decade. Political dissidents are imprisoned, executed, exiled and put in concentration camps.
- From the mid-1950s Greece underwent a rapid, if unevenly distributed, process of economic and social development. The population of greater Athens more than doubled in size between 1951 and 1981, and by the early 1990s about one-third of the entire population was concentrated in the area of the capital.
- 1960** Cyprus becomes independent from British rule.
- 1967** The Colonels impose a brutal dictatorship, which lasts for seven years until 1974.
- 1973-74** Student uprisings are brutally repressed. 17th November is the day celebrating the students' uprising and commemorating those who lost their lives in it.
- 1974** The attempt by the Greek junta to overthrow President Makarios in Cyprus fails. Turkey invades Cyprus. In Greece, the junta collapses and democracy is restored. In a plebiscite, 72% vote for the abolition of monarchy and the constitution of parliamentary democracy. Konstantinos Karamanlis returns from self-imposed exile and founds the conservative party New Democracy (ND). He promotes Greece's entry into the EEC. The Greek Communist Party (KKE), which had been outlawed since 1947, is officially recognised.
- 1981** Greece finally enters Common Market. A socialist Government is elected, under Andreas Papandreou, leader of the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK).

APPENDIX 4

Introducing the characters

Changed names have been used for all teachers in order to ensure anonymity. All interviewees worked in the state sector, in secondary education.

Part 4.A. *Presentation of English interviewees*

CATHY is in her fifties and works as an English teacher at a girls' school. Her mother was a teacher and, despite her financial straits, used to get many books for her, both children's and classics. Cathy was an avid reader and would read anything that fell into her hands. She particularly remembers the library at the boarding school she attended in her teens. Even though she resented the idea of studying at a boarding school, she still found its library excellent "with fairly eccentric choices of books, which suited me, quite unusual books." (Cathy/1) She often sought ways to avoid games so as to read instead. The teaching of literature she experienced as a student was very traditional and was based on frequent testing, which, in retrospect, was "probably very arid, very un-adventurous and probably killed for many children their interest in literature." (Cathy/2) However, she was perfectly happy with it, because she was very successful. Initially, she wanted to become an actress but thought her chances of succeeding were poor, and so she opted for a job as an English teacher instead. She has always worked in the same school, either part-time or full-time, and has also taken some time off to raise her children.

SUSAN is in her fifties and is head of English at a girls' school in London. As a young child, she had to move constantly because of her father's job. The change of schools meant that she would often find herself in a new environment, books becoming a substitute for friends. Both her teachers and her family encouraged her to read, and books became her main free-time occupation since she did not watch television or pursue any other form of entertainment. As a child, she would read a mixture of books, ranging from classic novels to *The Classics Illustrated* magazine. Moreover, some family friends gave her comics from the States, which she found particularly exciting as they were outside her experience. When she came to think about her future career, she was rather indecisive, shifting from medicine to a clerical job. Finally, she ended up teaching but not because she was keen on it. Susan did not want the interview to be recorded because then it would sound like a definite statement, and so I took detailed notes as she was talking to me. In the interview, she seemed very confident and was eager and careful to address all the questions. In fact, she used the list of guiding questions as an indicator of what would come next.

LIZ is in her thirties and works as an English teacher at a girls' school in London. As a child she enjoyed reading at home a lot, whereas she found reading at school a slow and boring procedure. She owes her decision to become an English teacher to some of her teachers, whom she thought brilliant and now uses as examples. Her studies, a PhD on women writers of the 19th century and a PGCE, have contributed to her way of thinking about literature, the canon and reading. She has worked in a number of schools, including a RC school and a comprehensive in a working-class area. Like Susan, Liz did not want the interview to be recorded and became more talkative once I closed my notebook and stopped writing. It seems she would rather talk 'off the record'.

DAVID is in his fifties and is head of English at a comprehensive school in central London. He remembers that as a child he was not very much into reading until the age of thirteen. At the time when he changed from primary to secondary education, his parents moved house and, as a consequence, he lost all his old friends. Reading became an occupation that filled most of his spare time, being a solitary activity. Even when he formed new friendships, he remained hooked on reading, as his new friends had similar interests. It was at that age that he got out of reading children's literature, which for boys meant mainly war and school adventure stories, and into reading 'adult literature'. He preferred to read modern texts rather than the classics they did at school. Unlike his private reading, he did not particularly enjoy literature lessons at the grammar school he attended, criticising them as boring, teacher-led and directed. Even though he did

English at A' level and was interested in reading, he read Law at University, as a result of parental pressure among other things. However, when he graduated, he decided to go into teaching, with English as his main subject. Around 1970, while studying for his PGCE, he worked with other people on devising new ways of teaching literature and new materials to be used in lessons, as part of a renewed conception of school curriculum that came together with the move towards comprehensive education.

JENNIFER is in her thirties and is head of English at a girls' school. As a child, she remembers reading at home a lot but did not much enjoy literature lessons at school. Her father was an academic, and would encourage her and her siblings to read. However, it could not have been his influence that turned her into a reader, because, even though her sisters also read, her brother would have nothing to do with it. At school, she found literature lessons 'boring' and 'very dry', thinking they 'just didn't come alive', and bore no relation to their own lives. Outside school, though, she would read all sorts of books, classics as well as modern texts. Being a naughty student who would not concentrate hard on her lessons, she made use of books to present herself as a 'naughty but not stupid' person. She would go around with a book in the pocket of her green parka coat, next to a packet of cigarettes, because it was 'an image thing'. She also picked up and used bits that she found funny from the books she read. After reading English and Philosophy at University and teaching English as a foreign language in Greece for a few years, she went into teaching as an English teacher, a job that she loves.

CLAIRE is in her thirties and works as an English teacher at a London comprehensive. As a child, she loved literature and remembers her father reading to her and making up stories. She has memories of seeing her parents read and of her father trying to be a writer, although this was not his job. She came from a working-class background, but was educated in an academic environment, from which she feels she benefited a lot. At school she was very good at English, always being the first in class. Nevertheless, she thought her teachers at the grammar school she attended were boring, unable to inspire their students with enthusiasm for literature or to make it accessible or relevant to them. She later did a degree in Philosophy and trained as a social science teacher. After some time spent in teaching Media studies, she managed to fulfil her dream of becoming an English teacher, combining her love for literature with her urge to teach.

MARK is in his forties and is head of English at a comprehensive school in a working-class area. As a child, he attended a very traditional boys' grammar school, where most teachers were men, being very strict and wearing gowns. He does not remember much about literature lessons, as they consisted mainly of reading texts aloud and did not mean much to him. At home, though, he would escape into Biggles' world, in the boys' adventure stories that he had from his three older brothers. From his present vantage point, he is critical of those books, but at the time he read them with passion, identifying with their fictional characters. For a while, in the years before he embarked on the A' level course, he would not read literature at all, opting for books on history and politics instead. He felt that English, though pleasurable and easy, was not a serious enough subject. Still, he ended up studying English at University, and then, stayed on to do a research degree in seventeenth century drama. However, it was not until he did his PGCE course and had to think about issues of literacy that he became clear about what the reading process might involve. He has worked for a number of years in various London schools with a multicultural student population.

Part 4.B. Presentation of Greek interviewees

STELLA is in her early sixties and works at a Gymnasium in a neighbourhood of Athens. As a child she enjoyed reading at home but found literature lessons at school very academic and pedantic. Even though she had very good teachers in Classics, she did not think highly of her literature teachers, who had “narrow ideas”. However, she does not condemn them...

... because this was in the years after the Civil war and they were all basically scared people and the subject was wide and [the situation in that era] did not allow them to have enough freedom of expression and of thinking. (Stella/1)

She did not have any books of her own, and used to borrow books or to read the *Illustrated Classics*, an illustrated magazine where ‘classic’ literary works, such as Victor Hugo’s novels, would be published. She became a Greek teacher not out of deep love for the subject but, first, because it was a Faculty that seemed more appropriate for girls, second, it would make it easier for her to find a job afterwards, and finally, because she had a lot of sensitivity, a quality thought to be fit for such a subject.

NEFELI is in her early sixties and works at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. She was born and grew up in Athens. Coming from a working-class family, she says that she was “an unfortunate child”. (Nefeli/1) She loved reading and would borrow books in order to satisfy her craving for it, as she did not own any books herself. She remembers memorising long poems at primary school and reciting them, a practice that she continued at secondary school, this time, though, outside school lessons. Together with her friends, she would read and learn texts that were not permitted, “texts which I would read of my own accord, because I had a certain ideology. And some poems met my desires, my hopes, my aspirations.” (Nefeli/2) Thus, she brings up the repression of the regime and the alternative emancipatory tradition that developed outside its institutions. She would rather have become a civil engineer, a lawyer or an archaeologist, but her mother made her go into philology, which she considered to be a more secure profession.

However, my mum said that ‘If you become a Greek teacher, my child, you will be appointed straightaway. You will make your living, marry a teacher and satisfy your hunger.’ (Nefeli/3)

Despite her initial reservations, she has enjoyed it ever since and has followed it with passion and willingness, “because its subject matter is the child.” (Nefeli/3) She was forced out of state education for seven years during the Junta period and got a job as a teacher in 1975. Since then she has taught in various schools in the provinces as well as in Athens.

KOSTAS is in his early sixties and works at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. He was born in a poor family, his father being a primary school teacher, and grew up in the provinces. He loved literature from childhood, seeing it as a kind of refuge that fitted his character as a sensitive, romantic and shy person. He did not really like literature lessons at school, where the subject was not taught in a systematic way. However, he does not blame his teachers for that because “times were difficult and they did their best.” (Kostas/1) It was in the last year of secondary education that he had a knowledgeable and thorough teacher who opened up the world of literature for him and was his idol and role model. He became a Greek teacher because it was only through studying that he would be able to obtain a secure job, since his family was not wealthy enough to set him up in any other profession. And yet he was forced out of work for three years due to his political beliefs during the repressive regime of the Junta. Since 1970 he has been working in various schools in the provinces as well as in Athens.

SOFIA is in her early fifties and works at a Gymnasium in a neighbourhood of Athens. She was born in Arta, a town of the mainland, and grew up there until the age of sixteen when she moved to Thessaloniki. As a child she loved reading literature, even though they had no books at home. Being the eighth child in her family, she would read her siblings’ magazines, of which she preferred the *Illustrated Classics*. As well as reading magazines and borrowing books, she would read novels during her holidays at her uncle’s, who was a Greek teacher at Yiannena. She felt that her horizons at the provincial town where she grew up were very limited and was much impressed when they moved to Thessaloniki. Initially, she would rather have become a lawyer than a Greek

teacher, because she thought her teachers were “ugly, old and old-fashioned”, “without any flame, very commonplace things” and did not want to become like them. (Sofia/2) However, she had no choice as her family decided she should study at Yiannena, which was near their hometown, and become a Greek teacher. She experienced the oppression of the Junta regime while at University, because all the “good teachers” of her Faculty were dismissed. Her reaction was to take refuge in the Library of the Department for Modern Greek, where she would read Greek literature for hours on end. She has taught in various urban schools for twenty-seven years.

PETROS is in his early fifties and teaches at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. He grew up on an island and his parents were poor farmers, who were right wing and religious. He had a bent for reading but there were no books around, and as a result, he did not have anything to read, apart from magazines and some novels by Jules Verne. He started reading literature late in life, when he was appointed as a teacher. His teachers in Classics were very good, unlike those he had for literature, whose lessons were boring, indifferent and uninspiring. He remembers that, in those days, textbooks included texts on history, science, geography etc., alongside the literary texts. He also points out the heavy use of katharevousa in school textbooks as well as their ideology, which was the nationalist philosophy of the Right, based on the ideals of love for the country, the family and religion. He did not like rural life and dreamt of leaving his village. However, being from a very poor family of islanders, his only options were to become a sailor or a teacher. Finally, he succeeded in the entry examinations to the School of Philosophy, and became a teacher. He has been teaching for the past twenty-four years. He admits that he likes teaching Ancient Greek and history but not so much literature.

ANNA is in her early fifties and works at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. She grew up in a small village and had three older sisters, who used to read a lot. She loved reading and would read loads of novels, mostly foreign ones. She got into the reading of Greek literature only later while she was at University. In the close community where she grew up they would exchange books, as there were not many available. Despite the fact that she enjoyed reading at home, she disliked literature as a school subject, which she found boring and monotonous, having a “very poor approach to a text.” (Anna/1) Her teachers are described as being without substance. “They themselves hadn’t read enough to be able to give something more [to us].” (Anna/1) She decided to become a Greek teacher because in the village the only role models they had were those of a doctor and a teacher. She has been teaching for the past twenty-five years in provincial and urban schools.

MARIA is in her early forties and teaches at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. She grew up in Messologi, a small town in Western Greece. At primary school, she did not get to know much about literature, since school textbooks were very poor, including only simple texts. However, when she was at the end of primary school, a public library was founded that became a point of attraction and a meeting place for her and her friends. It was in that library that she turned into an avid reader, borrowing all kinds of books and leafing through numerous magazines, in her effort to satisfy her curiosity “on what can be found outside school.” (Maria/2) At school, however, things were not so rosy, as literature lessons were standardised and dull, while communication with the teachers was not easy at all.

Their way of teaching would not leave a lot of room for us to have a warm relationship with them and to be eager to communicate with them, without constantly being afraid we might make a mistake. In other words, what you said had to be correct, usually. (Maria/3)

Her good memories from school are of a teacher who would put on plays with them. She strongly criticises the censorship of the Junta period, which resulted in the exclusion of a whole range of authors from the school curriculum, authors whom she got to know only later at University. She became a Greek teacher because she has “an inborn bent for the theoretical subjects”, and in particular, for Ancient Greek. (Maria/4) She has been teaching Greek for the past twenty-two years at various provincial and urban schools.

MARGARITA is in her mid thirties and teaches at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. She grew up in Athens and her mother is also a Greek teacher. As a child, she would read many books, either from those they had at home or others that her mother borrowed from her school

library. She remembers her mother pressing this on her, a pressure that was not particularly traumatic, as there was a wide range of books from which she could choose. Not only did she like reading on her own but she also enjoyed it at school. She liked her teachers and thought their lessons were inspiring and interesting, opening up new ways for her. In fact, she admits that literature was her favourite subject. The reason she became a Greek teacher was not because she saw it as a career, but because she liked the areas of study of a Greek teacher. She has been teaching for the past four years at various schools in the provinces and in Athens.

VASSO is in her mid thirties and teaches at a Gymnasium on a little island close to Pireus. She grew up in Athens. As a child, she enjoyed reading and had a circle of friends with whom she would discuss books, music, ideas etc. She did not have books at home or much money to buy any, and so she would borrow from friends. In particular, she talks of a friend whose mother was a Greek teacher and who would introduce them to different kinds of texts. She has a strong memory of her resentment at a Greek teacher, teaching them Ancient Greek, whom she describes as a fascist. Apart from him, she remembers enjoying literature lessons at school, thanks to a teacher who was open-minded and would let them express their preoccupations and questionings, without sticking to the typical identification of a 'poet's meaning'. Apart from that she cannot remember much more about the lessons or what they would do exactly. Her becoming a Greek teacher was a matter of chance: she felt insecure because she had not attended a *frontistirio* in the summer before the final year of Lyceum, unlike the other science students, and so decided to go into the arts. She had not really thought of herself as a teacher in a class, even though she has not regretted it since. She has been teaching for ten years at various schools on islands, on the mainland and in Athens.

APPENDIX 5

Interviews

Changed names have been used for all teachers in order to ensure anonymity. All interviewees worked in the state sector, in secondary education.

Part 5.A. *English interviews*

1. Liz (7 / 6 / 1995)
2. David (8 & 29 / 6 / 1995)
3. Susan (14 / 6 / 1995)
4. Cathy (23 / 6 / 1995)
5. Claire (14 / 5 / 1998)
6. Jennifer (5 / 6 / 1998)
7. Mark (18 / 6 / 1998)

Part 5.B. *Greek interviews*

1. Nefeli (27 / 10 / 1998)
2. Stella (28 / 10 / 1998)
3. Petros (22 / 12 / 1998)
4. Anna (23 / 12 / 1998)
5. Sofia (23 / 12 / 1998)
6. Kostas (24 / 12 / 1998)
7. Margarita (2 / 1 / 1999)
8. Maria (2 / 1 / 1999)
9. Vasso (7 / 1 / 1999)

SYMBOLS USED IN THE TRANSCRIPTION:

<i>E:</i>	Elena, that is me, the interviewer
...	long pause
/.../	inaudible phrase
/text/	unclear phrase, presumed phrase
[laugh]	description of other reactions
text in bold	phrase said with emphasis
[...]	omitted phrase so as to preserve interviewees' anonymity
{...}	(used only in Greek interviews) implied phrase, added so as to achieve clarity

English Interview No 1:

Liz

(7 / 6 / 1995)

Liz is a white woman in her thirties and works as an English teacher at a girls' school in London. She was very attentive and eager to help me both with my classroom observations and with the interview. Liz did not want the interview to be recorded, because 'her voice doesn't sound good'. Moreover, she became more talkative once I closed my notebook and stopped writing. It seems she would rather talk 'off the record'. She would look at what I was writing all the time and even waited for me to finish writing before she resumed talking, especially in the beginning. Before we started talking I gave her the list of guiding questions I had prepared, making clear though that she need not address every single question and that the order of the questions was not forbidding. The reason I did this was because I wanted her to know what my general aim and interests were. However, I found that the list of questions was quite restricting since she felt as if she had to talk about all of them and was taken aback. This was the one of the two interviewees to whom I had given the list of guiding questions at the start, the other one being Susan.

Reading texts as a child at school and at home.

She thought that reading literary texts at school was very boring, unlike reading at home. When she read texts at home she would read them quickly, and thus, found them more interesting. On the contrary, at school they would read texts as a class which was a very slow and boring procedure. She remembers one teacher who spent the whole year reading novels in class "it was very slow and we felt sick of it". Another teacher would ask them to do the reading at home and then they would discuss the chapters they had read in class.

Was there anything or anyone who influenced your decision to become an English teacher?

She owes her decision to become an English teacher to some of her English teachers who were brilliant. In particular, she found that the oral work and the creative work they had to do at school were very enjoyable. Her English teachers were definitely the persons who made her want to become an English teacher, whereas her home did not influence her decision in any particular way.

What would you consider as the most decisive period in your formation as an English teacher?

She thinks that her formation as an English teacher has been an on-going process which started when she was a pupil at school. She uses the teachers she had at school as examples or models. She remembers what she used to enjoy and what not and develops her own practice accordingly. Another factor that has been decisive in her development as a teacher are her colleagues and the discussions they have together where they exchange ideas.

What would you consider as 'literature'? Have you always held this view?

When she was at school and while she was doing her first degree on English Literature she thought that literature is every text defined as 'classic'. Later on, her conception of literature changed during her postgraduate studies. First, she started questioning her idea of literature while she was doing her PGCE, and then, while she was doing her PhD on women writers of the 19th century. It was then that she started looking at women writers and their relationship with the canon. Now, she thinks that literature includes not only the classics but also the really modern books, even the ones that were published within the last two years.

Considering her previous conception of literature she said that she herself went to a mixed school where books were selected so as to be interesting to boys. This way of selecting texts was dictated by the need to discipline the boys as well as by the availability in cupboards. However, it was one of the reasons for which she found school reading uninteresting. Strangely enough she had to do the same when she worked as a teacher in a mixed school. On the contrary, things are much better in girls' schools, because they have extra possibilities, such as the opportunity to tackle various issues and girls' ability to talk about ideas. She agreed with my suggestion that these gender differences might be due to the different education and upbringing of boys and girls.

What criteria do you use when you choose texts for study with a class?

The choice of texts for class reading depends on her taste as well as on pupils' taste. For the A' level classes, she usually chooses texts that are more difficult and do not fit in categories like comedy, tragedy etc., such as Harold Pinter's writings. She has found that these texts generate discussion in class.

For the GCSE classes, the choice of texts is a departmental decision since they all do the same texts. English teachers in the department feel more secure with this arrangement as they have the opportunity of exchanging ideas, material etc. A text that they usually read with GCSE classes is *Macbeth*, which both she

and the pupils enjoy reading. Their choices are circumscribed by the availability of materials and they depend on the changing of the syllabus. She added that lately both the nature of the examination and the syllabus have changed, giving rise to a feeling of uncertainty. She agrees with the change of the syllabus but she would prefer it if the proceedings were more fixed. In any case, she thought that the examination criteria influence not only the choice of texts but also the teaching methods. Regarding the recent devaluation of coursework she commented that she would have preferred a balance between examinations and coursework. She argued that coursework gives more freedom to pupils to pursue a research project on a topic of their interest.

How do you read a text with a class? What strategies do you employ?

The strategies she employs depend on the text under study. First, they have to read it. If it is a play, then, they act bits out. If they study a novel, then, they read parts together in class, or they work in groups reading to each other, or they read some chapters at home. The last option depends on the availability of texts, because sometimes there are not enough books and pupils cannot take them home. After reading a text, they discuss it, either in groups or in a whole class discussion. When they work on a drama work, they might recreate a scene, or put a scene in another context.

The next stage of reading a text in class is the expression of pupils' responses in writing. When writing about a text, they might use two different forms of writing, creative and formal. In terms of creative writing, pupils might opt for writing the continuation of a novel, inserting 'missing' parts and chapters, or keeping a character's diary – an exercise that makes them familiar with different points of view. On the other hand, formal responses to a text are used only with older pupils, from Year 9 upwards. She said that usually there is explicit teaching of the rules of writing formal essays, such as brainstorming, paragraphing, talking about essays, redrafting etc. However, it also depends on the group she works with. For example, the Year 9 group that she taught the previous year was not very able and as a result she did not do anything of the kind with them.

Regarding the different ways of expressing a reader's response in writing, she said that she would prefer the two of them, creative and formal, to be balanced. On one hand, creative writing is enjoyable but does not include argument in an explicit way. On the other hand, formal essays lead pupils to argumentation, and thus, they learn how to write in a logical way. In general, she admitted being deeply committed to formal essays adding that this might have to do with her own education. She regretted the fact that formal essays are not there in GCSE. At this point I remarked that novels are well-structured even though they are 'creative writing', and asked her whether pupils' pieces of creative writing are structured or not, to which she replied that they are not structured at all. For example, when they write a diary they just put things down, at random.

How do examinations and examination criteria affect your teaching?

Nowadays, the GCSE and A' level examinations are scaled down in terms of the number of texts studied. For example, last year she read ten texts with her A' level class, whereas from now on A' level classes will not have to read that many. She criticised this change as being 'sad'. She thinks that there should be more texts in syllabuses so that pupils would have wider perspectives.

Moreover, she considered the scaling down of coursework to be sad as well. In the past, pupils studying English literature at A' level would write an extended essay on two or three books they had selected. The significance of this extended essay was really big, since it gave pupils the opportunity to focus on texts and issues that interested them. On the contrary, with examinations in mind, they will have to know every bit of the text under study which will make them approach texts differently.

In what ways would you like literature lessons in school to affect your pupils? What do you expect your pupils to 'gain' from the reading of literature?

She said that the ethos in her school is to reinforce independence and autonomy. The aim is that pupils will carry on reading on their own. The school library contributes to the development and encouragement of this attitude as it is a very well-used one and the librarian is particularly good, helping pupils a lot.

She suggested that learning how to read and reading itself helps pupils because it makes them think and address issues as well as develop empathy. Pupils learn how to read in many different ways: for pleasure as well as for specific purposes. Thus, in their future lives reading will prove useful in various ways, one of them being their remembering and citing quotations from various texts. This is what happens in the assembly at school: they read out quotations from books they have studied.

What do you think pupils mean when they say that a book is 'boring'?

She suggested that it has to do with the reading in class and the pace that they all have to follow. In order for a text to be read in class it has to be short and simple in terms of syntax and vocabulary. However, if the book is an evocative and interesting one, then pupils have to read it at home and then discuss it in class. She went on to point out a dilemma that teachers face when reading a book with difficult vocabulary in class. If they go on explaining too many words, then pupils get bored. On the other hand, if they do not explain

anything at all, then pupils do not have a clue of what they read. Consequently, one needs to keep a balance. She added that sometimes it is a good idea to let pupils ask when they feel puzzled.

Would you consider yourself a typical English teacher?

She said that she could be considered a typical English teacher, at least in comparison with teachers in the multi-cultural London schools, since they all share particular agendas. She felt that she had a very harmonious relationship with the other English teachers especially in departments with women leaders, like the one she was at the time.

However, this was not the case in the other schools where she has worked, which were all outside London. For example, when she was doing her PGCE, she was in a Roman Catholic school in [...], in a man-led English department. She felt that she was very different from the other English teachers, as they were all nuns and older than her. Most of the work done in that department was 'morally straight' and involved mostly comprehension, which reminded her of her own schooling.

Later on, in 1990 she worked at [... in ...], a school in a working-class area, close to the extension works of a motorway, where the whole community depended on these works. It was a huge school with 1750 pupils but there was only one girl doing A' level in English Literature – in the exams she took grade D. Pupils in that school would not read at all. Boys wanted to become workers in the motorway works and girls wanted to become bank clerks. These teenagers would look at her in amazement and wonder why she became an English teacher, where money is so little and did not go to work in the City. She found it impossible to persuade them to read anything at all. However, she definitely thought it would be worthwhile if they had acquired the habit of reading for pleasure.

When she moved from that school to her current one she found that things were very different, one reason for this being the fact that the school intake was mainly middle-class. Thus, pupils who were working-class would be affected as well. So, in this school it is 'cool' to read books, whereas in the previous one it was extremely 'uncool'.

English Interview No 2:

David

(8 & 29 / 6 / 1995)

David is a white man in his fifties and is head of English at a big comprehensive school in central London. He was very helpful and eager to talk about his practice. He did not object to our discussion being recorded. The interview took place in two parts on two separate days, as a result of his overloaded timetable. We had our discussion in the departmental staffroom and often other teachers would walk in and out of the room. Compared with the other English interviews, this one was longer but it was also rather confusing, as the interviewee often hesitated and changed direction in his speech. My editing has been minimal, as I tried to keep up the tone of the discussion.

Part A

E: The first question is more or less personal. What memories of reading literature do you have from your childhood? Or, from school? What do you remember of the reading of literature?

David: Yes... I'm trying to think... Not a lot really... I remember... I don't remember being a very keen reader. I read quite a bit when I was sort of learning to read and quite small, but I think from age about nine or so up to about thirteen or fourteen... I think, like a lot of boys, reading was a bit /.../ ... I don't think I did as much and I didn't really get interested in reading for myself until I was about fourteen or fifteen and then I really got interested in literature and started reading a great deal. My experience when I reached secondary school was very much like a lot of people's at the time, which was that literature was about the classics. So, right from the start, from eleven onwards it was reading Shakespeare plays and sort of, you know, classic novels, which I didn't find particularly interesting at the time... no... [laugh] This is the thing that put me, that put me off the idea of literature and it wasn't really until I started reading for myself around about fourteen, fifteen as I said. Also when I got into Sixth form to do A' level English that I got more interested in a wider range of literature...

E: What was it that made you change your attitude?

David: I'm trying to think. It's very hard to say. I had particularly... I didn't have... many friends. I moved, my parents moved house, when I was changing schools at eleven, that's from primary to secondary school, and so I lost all my old friends, and found it difficult to pick up new friends. And, then, eventually when I started making some new friends in school, I think it was the particular new friends that I made that were more interested in that sort of thing and therefore I got interested as well.... Also because I didn't have /some other/ close friends I found myself on my own a lot more, so reading being a more solitary activity I /tried to get/ more done at that stage.... And I also got to the stage where I wanted to read more adult literature. I think the difficulty then was that I got bored with the kind of teenage, the only sort of children's literature that was available at the time, which for boys was mainly war stories and school adventure stories etc.... But then, I got to an age where actually I felt I could go straight on to read more adult literature, which was what I started to do /at that age/.

E: Adult literature but not the classics that you would read at school?

David: Not at first, no, no. I read a lot of, I mean what, the sort of things I was interested in reading, that got me going, were more, fairly modern, what would now would be called, I suppose, more sort of /.../ It would have been twentieth century, mainly American literature, so it was things like Hemingway, Steinbeck, etc.

E: What do you remember about the reading of literature in school? You said that you used to read the classics and you found that boring. How would you read a text then and what were your reactions to that?

David: I think my, again my memories are vague, I think I used to read plays etc. just around the class or we would take parts. But it would be a matter of reading in class... and I think... /I don't remember much/ it was not much more than that. It was very much teacher-led and directed, so... I also very clearly remember one particular English teacher who wouldn't even let us read but took all the parts himself... It was a performance by him, I suppose, during the lesson...

E: You mean that you didn't have any discussions or anything like that?

David: I think we did. But I don't really remember much of it.... It would have been much more a question-and-answer thing ... And it was a lot more to do with understanding the vocabulary, and dealing with words and... certainly I remember Shakespeare being a lot about the sort of classical references in Shakespeare and things like this.

E: What was it later on that made you want to become an English teacher?

David: Well... Interesting. I didn't do English at University.

E: Really?

David: No. I decided, although I was interested in reading, 'cause I was not... wildly keen in more classic literature, I... and also because it's all parental pressure and other things, generally I decided I wasn't going

to study English, although it was my main subject at A' level etc., at University. So, I actually did Law at University. So, I got a Law degree... But I spent... I didn't... enjoy a lot of Law and so I decided, midway through the course, that I wasn't going to take up Law as a profession... and I actually did more reading of literature than I did studying of Law when I was /in/ University... So, I decided that I would do teacher-training when I finished and then teach, with English as my main subject. So, it was really sort of at the end of University that I got interested in teaching.

E: And, so, that's why you went on to PGCE and ...

David: Yeah.

E: and then on to teaching?

David: ... and then started teaching.

E: Do you think you, I mean, when you started teaching, I mean, what were these things that were most formative of your own attitude as a teacher, of your own strategies as a teacher? Was it the experiences that you had from secondary school or from PGCE or your own decisions and...?

David: It was really PGCE and the group of people that I was with at the time. In a way, it was reaction against the kind of way that I'd been taught. So, it was a feeling that my enthusiasm, that I'd got since, sort of about, outside of school, since leaving school, could be got across to children... in a better way than it had to me. So, I did a lot of work /along the/ PGCE with other people, in devising sort of work and looking at ways particularly of teaching poetry, at the time I did a lot of work on poetry... And it was also a period, it was around the 1970, when there was a lot, in the '60s, from the mid' 60s onwards, there were very dramatic changes in the way English was being taught in schools, and a lot of literature about English teaching and a lot of materials coming out that were very different ... to the kinds of... both books about teaching and also books for use in schools that were much more exciting and more dramatic than were the kinds of things that I would have experienced at school.

E: And you agreed with that? You would go along with that? Yeah?

David: Oh, yes, yes. It seemed, that seemed more exciting. And it was also connected as well with a whole change of the educational system at the time, which was a move towards comprehensive education...

E: And do you think it is... Do you think that the reading of literature was enhanced, was improved in a way after all these changes?

David: Oh, yes. I think so, very dramatically... Obviously my experience at school was of a grammar school, of a divided system with... I only had the vaguest idea of what, how literature was taught, or what was taught at secondary modern schools, at the other side of the system. My feeling from grammar school, where I was the... I was very much with the most able, the academically able and brightest pupils, were that the way that English, the way that literature was taught was that it put lots of people off anyway, even people who eventually became quite keen on it like me. So, if you then took all the other range of students who went on to do sciences and other things and would not read literature at all, then clearly it wasn't working for quite a large number. And then you go, then as I say, you go back down to secondary modern school, pupils who were going to leave without even taking any exam on it, there were very few exams at the time, so there had to be better ways of teaching... and particularly of teaching literature... I think there were mistakes made. I think there were some things that went too far, went the wrong way. There was perhaps too many, one of the things we, I kind of thought at the time was that, I think very often was that we couldn't make, we could teach certain types of literature in a more exciting way. But mainly we gave up on thinking we could transfer those methods of teaching to looking at Shakespeare or more classic literature. It was only some years later, not many years later, around about mid 70s, I suppose, or late 70s, where people began to see or feel that you could actually use the same techniques or use successful techniques with more classic, more 'high' literature /.../...

E: It is a question that I do not know if I would be able to answer. We have been talking about literature. What would you describe as literature, define literature? You also used the term 'high literature', well in inverted commas. I mean, what is literature for you?

David: Well, that's a good question. [laugh] I mean I would ... I can't think of a particular /.../ or useful explanation... I think much you'd start to define it you start to limit it... I'd think it's any work of, I was going to say, the imagination... I suppose I would say... it's any writing from someone's imagination... well, in terms to communicate experience to others, but I would say it's wider than just imaginative work. I would say, what might be considered, again in inverted commas, 'non-fiction' or 'non-literary' work that I would still consider as literature. So, I think it's a very difficult line to draw.

E: For example, in these coursework booklets, there is some creative, imaginative work. [I was holding some booklets written by pupils as coursework.] Would you consider that literature?

David: Yes. I think any imaginative writing by anybody is a work of literature. Well, we have to stop. We'll come back to it later.

[The beep was heard and we had to stop the interview.]

Part B

E: *What strategies... what do you do in class when you read literature with pupils? What strategies do you employ?*

David: Right. OK.... Let me think... You're talking about literature kind of generally with all ages or your looking very specifically at the older age?

E: *Mostly with GCSE and A' level. And, if there are differences, what kind of differences are there? I mean, in the way that you approach a text with a class.*

David: OK... right... OK... yeah... right... that's the way... how we approach it... [he is in fact mumbling to himself] right, that's right, I'm thinking of a way to start, organise myself, my thoughts... What we're trying to do, the first thing I suppose is to say is that we have to try to have as wide a range of approaches as we can but we, obviously the difference in approach is that at GCSE we teach mixed-ability classes so we have a range of students, from those, let us say, with relatively limited English who are still learning English, to very able pupils who will go on to do A' level, to pupils with special educational needs, etc. So, we're looking at approaches which can make literature accessible or a range of literature accessible to a very wide range of ability, whereas obviously at A' level we have a specific level of ability, because they are able to do A' level. So, there are certainly different approaches. We've developed a sort of approaches which mean that we can deal with /.../ what could be considered quite difficult literature at GCSE. So most teachers do Shakespeare, at GCSE, they do Macbeth... and... obviously they do that with a whole range of ability. So, at GCSE, what we try to do... Firstly to ensure that... we capture the interest of the students by making sure that they all understand whatever text we are reading as if it's a novel or a play particularly as story. So, it helps if we've got the sort of backup materials that can get across the story fairly clearly as well... That would mean video versions, /shortened/ versions. So, for example, for Macbeth we've got both film versions of Macbeth on tape and film stage versions, we've got the BBC animated version which was a /.../ of 30 minutes of the whole play. So, we've got a range of visual materials so we can get across the story and the basic plot quite well to all the students, and interest them straightaway. But, we also obviously want to tackle the language of the play as well... And, what we're trying to do is hard without sort of showing examples really, I suppose, rather than just talk about it. But, for example, with a play like Macbeth, there are ways to look at... Shakespeare's language. There is an exercise that we look at Shakespeare's language by translating it into different forms ... not just into, sort of just Modern English, but Cockney, or West Indian English, or whatever it happens to be. So, there are ways of looking at the language and just changing the language and playing around with the language...

E: *But, can pupils change it into West Indian and Cockney, for example?*

David: Well, obviously we give them a range. It is difficult obviously for pupils whose, who are still learning English, but, and it certainly is difficult to make a kind of language study accessible to them where you can make the plot and what goes on accessible. The problem with, that particular exercise is quite difficult but it's a way, a kind of range of opportunities that simply translate the language into whatever alternative language they want to do, just in short chunks, so they get to look at and play around with the language itself.

E: *Do you, do this exercise, translating it into other forms of English in order for them, because some of them are West Indian or they speak Cockney at home? Or, do you do it just in order for them to gain a wider experience of English?*

David: Again, we do it for them to understand and kind of appreciate languages. I suppose what we're saying really is that with something like Shakespeare's language, it isn't a language that any of us are particularly familiar with, so it's not that... It's more familiar to me because I'm a teacher and so I've studied it, but it's not a language that is automatically familiar to anybody. Anybody has to get familiar with it and look at it in terms of their own language. It's easier for some people than others but it's just simply a different form of English... and it's not particularly near what we want to give them. It's not more the notion that somehow this is some kind of language that educated people understand or academic people understand or... Even in Shakespeare's time it was a very specific poetic language ... And so the... And many of them have a language of their own that's equally poetic or equally /capable of/ translating. It's sort of a demystifying process, of trying to say 'this is not... it may seem very difficult to me and complicated but actually, it's just another form of language'. And /trying to say/ whether your forms of language would need translating for other people, that...

E: *Do you find that pupils who come from different cultural backgrounds or come from other countries and so on ... do you find that they approach texts differently?*

David: Emm.... [hesitation]

E: *Have you noticed any differences in the way that they would read a text and so on?*

David: Well... Well, obviously there's difference in terms of levels of understanding. I think... sometimes there are differences in terms of literature, of traditions, but also the way they see or what they see in literature as being. I think pupils that often come from some cultures see language teaching both in their own languages but also in the learning of English as a very formal exercise and don't necessarily see

literature as a part of that... So, it seems strange to them that we do a course, particularly at GCSE which is, it has quite a heavy literature content... And to see, a lot of pupils coming in, I'm particularly thinking of a lot of African people, who may have learned, who may be, English may be their first language, or certainly the language they've been educated in their own country, but they haven't been educated, their education has been a very formal English and English grammar, and so they don't necessarily will see literature as a part of the way that English is taught or should be taught...

E: Which means that... I mean do they react to it or ...?

David: Yes. Sometimes they do. Sometimes they wonder why they're doing it. It's less so now but it used to be quite common... when that was the case... They are a problem which we do a certain amount of, but I guess not a huge amount. It is trying to get across the context of literature with this sort of historical backgrounds, because even... Obviously... that we can't expect that any good teacher who teaches... there is an automatic understanding going on, very much understanding of background... they're obviously as pupils come from elsewhere... the whole context of place and of the times in which they are set are totally remote from them. So, there is a certain amount of that... again using /.../ getting them to do projects and to look at Elizabethan theatre and whatever happens to it...

E: You mean that for people, for pupils who have grown up here it is easier because they know better the historical background?

David: No. I'm saying most pupils don't, even those who have grown up here don't. So that obviously the ones who haven't... it's even more than any kind of cultural grasp... but even the pupils who have they don't necessarily have any... It goes on to A' level really. There are no longer the traditional kind of subjects that went together. So, I think for a lot of people, and I did A' level years and years ago, most A' level pupils would have done History possibly, they're probably doing A' level History as well, but they aren't really doing History A' level, they've done History up to the old O' level, they've done History in a very kind of linear form, like chronological and all the way through. So, they had some knowledge of Elizabethan era, different Victorian era, whatever happened to be, whereas even at A' levels, there is not really assumption that the students have any particularly strong knowledge of particular periods of history and particular backgrounds....

E: I see. Should we go back to what I asked you about the approaches?

David: About the approaches... Yeah... right... I suppose the other /.../ of approach is to try and ... when we get into kind of acting ... the text itself kind of interacting with them. So, for example, ... a notion of extending and using their imagination to look at where the characters react, doing things like... exercises like... what's in it, where you take a catch with a particular given point in a play or /.../ and get them to do a bit of role-playing on that character, interview that character /.../ Is the character... the other person interviewing saying: Why are you...? What have you done? Why have you acted the way was committed...? Why this or the other? So, it's kind of active, in drama type activities. What stage to get with the characters.... And things like creating extra bits, what's missing from the text... what's likely going to be between these two scenes, between these two characters... Well, so, it's that sort of more active involvement with the text rather than the details or specific language features

E: Is the assumption that... You said getting involved with characters and interviewing them. Is the assumption behind that that if they get into the shoes of the character they will understand the text better?

David: Yes. The assumption is, I think, that it's a more active learning thing. They've got to interrogate the text themselves in order to understand which way or what the characters would do. So, obviously what's going to justify what they're doing, it's what is, always come back to evidence. If you've decided in your little, if you're working in pairs, if you've decided that this is what this character would say this is how they would react, you've got to have used the text and so what's your evidence for that. Why you think that's what they were going to do?... I'm trying to keep it in the text. The same thing with extra things like creating a little extra scene, what happened, this character went off and met this character in, that scene isn't in the play and so what would they say when they met and why. Whatever went on after this is what happened between them. So, it's a way of getting them to question and look at the text more closely without... by doing some active /.../, by using their imagination alongside and the evidence in the text. So I think there is a whole range of activities that tend to do that...

E: What are the differences with A' level?

David: Well, in a way, with a lot of those, there aren't necessarily, there shouldn't be differences... It's... I think the only difference is obviously we expect a sort of high level of work, so that the text always has to be a lot closer, I mean, in the final /.../. And maybe... So we're not so much looking for the more imaginative outcome. We're looking for them to interrogate the text... Hopefully, I guess what we say overall is more or less ideally we're trying to get more group and pair activities for them to actively work together rather than them being teacher-led, 'in front of the class' stuff. I think it tends to happen quite a lot at GCSE, but it's more difficult for A' level because the groups are not that much sure, and maybe we feel we have to get across more information So, I think there is a tendency, I know by looking at people's practice, we're still doing much teacher-led work. But ideally we want them again to be involved with the text and do this kind of activities and actually look at the text themselves in groups or in pairs mostly as well.

E: Why do you think that more information needs to get across?

David: What? For the A' level?

E: Mm.

David: Eh...

E: Maybe this is related to why you think they will gain from reading literature.

David: Mm, yeah. I think it's the thing, you know, about what we want them to do really is to understand and be able to question and use and look at the text and how their understanding is based on what is written on the page. We want that to happen at GCSE as well obviously, but... in the end, it's... for most students it's not so important; they do it in that much detail. We're obviously just looking for more sophisticated response at A' level, so we want perhaps grounded on text more plus the fact that we're aware at GCSE we're expecting a different level of response with different students in the group. So we know there are some students who will find those activities quite difficult and at the end of the day we hope that the moment we get out of this they understand the story, that they know the play, they understand what's happened and they can write something simple about why Macbeth does what he does, or how he's influenced by, or how much he's been influenced by Lady Macbeth and... So we're not... we don't expect a hugely great response on that, we just expect... Whereas obviously at A' level we're looking for the highest level of response... What we are aware of, I suppose as well, is that we concentrate much more on very specific smaller parts, so it would be much more intensive if instead of looking at a whole section or a play or a novel, which we might be doing at GCSE, we've been looking at one speech, or one scene, or a couple of pages from a novel, one incident to do this, to do that kind of work on. So, they do really, they do have to look very closely at the language of a very specific piece.

E: I see. And, is your major aim that they understand the text? Are you interested in the particular text or...?

David: No. I mean, yes. Obviously we want them to understand and enjoy the particular text, but certainly at A' level we, I mean, part of the thing is looking at the relationship between the reader and the text. So, we're very much in the notion of how a different reading or 'a' particular reading of a text comes out. In fact, there isn't, again there isn't, we're looking at some extent at that at the GCSE as well, but that's the other big difference. We're making those kind of aims much more explicit to the students, so that... we're making it much more explicit that there are a whole range of possibilities in the way you read this particular text and how you come across, how does one particular reading come across, what are the alternatives... We're giving them more material, I guess, on what the alternatives are. We're getting them so and so and so rather than getting them to look at... their own reading of it. We say 'yes, you can read it this way, but here is an example of someone else who's read it very differently and here is something else. How they've done it, what...? It's the same text. Why? How these different readings come out?'...

E: How do they react to this? I mean, do they agree with there being different readings?

David: Usually, I mean, yes. I think they can, that they can see it. The thing about an A' level group particularly is, because it's more intensive, because it's a smaller group, there is a chance of a much more wide... particularly, I think, closer. It's easier to share those readings and those reactions amongst twelve or so students than it is in a whole class with a huge mixed ability at GCSE, where the kind of getting everybody together to discuss things is often just more of a kind of quick call-back on what particular groups have done. Whereas, once you get to A' level, because it's... It becomes very tedious and difficult to keep the concentration of the whole class together, but once you get to A' level clearly that's not so much, that's not a problem... So, you can share things. I think the other side of this is that if you find, I mean what you want ideally to do is obviously to get an argument going about it. You want strong views to come across. You want them to care about the way things come across and feel strongly about them. So that if you provide a... particularly contentious reading as an example, then they do, I think, they can get very involved with it. I mean the best example I've had with the A' level group that you've seen is a feminist reading of Arthur's *Crucible* which they got terribly... really strong reactions to it because they did see it as quite an extreme kind of reading attitude. With some of which they could disagree with or feel very strongly... So, they got into that quite strongly. The difficulty is, yes, it is difficult to get them to see ... the validity of other readings and if they disagree with them and where the evidence is and how you can use evidence in different ways.

E: What do you mean when you say 'strong views'? Or you said 'they get into their reading strongly'. Do you mean agreeing or disagreeing in a passionate way?

David: Yes, yes, yeah. I mean, yes. I mean really getting very angry about what another person said about the text or how they read it.

E: Do you mean that it is necessary for someone to hold strong views about a text?

David: I think it's quite useful sometimes to get things going, yes. It is quite a good... kicking off point to actually... show the strong alternatives that exist because often... obviously, if you're dealing with very fine differences in interpretation and ways of looking at particular aspects, characters or whatever... they all kind of go along, it's easy to drift into the teacher-leading lesson roles or drifting to whatever we all /.../, isn't it? ... Yeah, yes.

E: Because, I mean... When you read a text on your own, do you feel that you always have strong views?

David: No, not necessarily at all... No. I think it's much... it's really, if you're going to question a text, if you're going to look at it and try to sort out what you feel about it then I think it helps doing something that does sort of... that does get... to get discussion going on. I mean, the point about it is... I suppose, what you're looking to do... is to get them to talk about it and... also get them to see the effect of interaction between a text and themselves as readers. That they are, that there is, that there isn't simply a kind of natural meaning to a text. That this doesn't... it isn't just there and communicate the same thing and to everybody in the same way... So that they may not have a particularly strong reaction, they may read it very simply, but then to try and /get/ why other people might see it in a different way. And also how, what's informed their reading of it... I tend to start off A' level courses by using some short stories with a group and trying to use ones in which I get them to look at... often stories that are quite difficult and quite removed in some ways from their experience, but get them to look at what enabled them to understand and what they were needing to sort of fully understand and appreciate the story and what's missing and what's that matters there... which is the other side of it really. It's clearly all of us reading an awful lot of things that we don't have the c-, you know, that are not part of our own cultures, the cultures that we may look after. It doesn't mean that it bars that text from us because we don't come from that culture, that background or don't know about that particular period of time. So, it's a question of /getting the students/ to look at what they bring to the text... what knowledge they have, what knowledge they don't have, whatever matters... about how much knowledge they've got, were there changes in the way they read it. The last couple of years I've used a short story by Alice Walker called '1956' which has a very clear Elvis-Presley-type character in it, although it is not called Elvis Presley, and it's about his relationship with a black American blues singer, who is also based on a true blues singer. But the point about this short story is how does anybody recognise who this character is. Does it matter how... Does the story take the /.../ fact that you think while you're reading it 'yes, this is Elvis Presley'. And if you don't know about Elvis... So it's very /.../ trying to look at this kind of issues...

E: *I see. While you have been talking you refer to 'we'. 'We do this' or 'we do that'. Who does this 'we' refer to?*

David: Well, I suppose it's... I'm thinking in terms of a /.../ common, or reasonably common, approach in the department. I recognise that it's not always... there are variations. There is sixteen different people that teach English in the school. Not all of those teach at A' level, a more limited number will teach A' level, although all of them will teach GCSE at some stage. So, a lot of those broad methods of teaching, of dealing with literature, are fairly common, although people will use different... have different emphasis in terms of how much they deal with a particular type of activity with their particular classes. And they're also very dependent on the kind of classes they've got. But I have... I think there is a broadly common approach across the department but also there is a broadly common, there are common approaches, I would think, across a lot of English teaching in the country as well. A lot of the things we use are materials produced not necessarily by ourselves but by other teachers that have been shared, that are published by sort of teachers' publishing groups really or groups where... teachers' publishing groups. So, they share those common assumptions, those common approaches.

E: *So, how have you got to these common approaches?*

David: It's through discussions, meetings and the kind of materials. It's mainly done, it's often done through working on materials together or presenting materials to everybody else, that somebody has worked on. So, for example, the most recent one... meeting two weeks ago, some of the department presented a pack of materials they had worked on... for ninety pupils. So... and we looked at and talked about how we would teach that particular novel and the difficulties of it... again very much of it is set in Australia, part of materials were... looking at aboriginals, looking what aboriginals and what they believe in etc.... So, that's really, it's really hopefully looking at practical ways of teaching the range of literature that we teach, making it accessible to the range of pupils that we teach and looking at, as I say, really practically focusing on particular teaching materials.

E: *Now, a last one.*

David: Four minutes. OK?

E: *Yeah, just the last one.*

David: Yeah. OK.

E: *You said that you're interested in teaching texts but also you have been talking about ways of approaching, understanding texts, interrogating texts, which is more or less a process, isn't it? Do you think it is necessary to study English literature to learn this process or could literature of wider origins or from different cultures be used? I mean, what is the point of using English literature? I mean, many things have been said about this, but what is 'your' view about that?*

David: Right. So, you mean literature in translation or just literature from...?

E: *Literature in translation, yeah.*

David: Yeah, I mean. We've... it's gone backwards and forwards, yes. No, I don't think it has, I mean, I think we would study any literature and preferably we would like to study literature from a range of cultures and backgrounds and from time to time we have. Part of the difficulty is that particularly at A' level we, that we are obviously governed by the exam syllabuses and for a while we had a syllabus where it's given

us more scope with a lot of coursework to choose the text that we study, except there's been a block on studying texts in translation. So, we've been able to study texts from... originally written in English but from a wider cultural background.

[Interruption: another teacher asks a question for a student who did not sit an exam because she was ill and whether she can sit the exam some other time]

So, yeah... So we, when we've been given the opportunity we try to incorporate a slightly wider range of texts. But, I think the problem is strangely that although we've been very progressive in some ways in the kind of teaching methods etc. that we've used, I think we, most teachers are very much trapped into... I don't know how to describe it really... I think just very unadventurous and very limited in terms of the sort of text that we teach. It's as if somehow once you are looking at teaching texts for an examination, for GCSE or A' level, that you feel the texts have to have a certain way to them. Not necessarily just great literature but a certain sort of importance or a certain level rather than notion which would come out from what I've said and what I think most English teachers believe, which is that it doesn't really matter in a way what text you use, that you are teaching, as you said, process, you are teaching a way of looking at texts generally and therefore it shouldn't be important if you're not teaching 'the' cannon of great literature, which would be our attitude. And yet, we are very conservative in the texts we use and it's partly a battle of, between our own upbringing, our own education and what we believe in as teachers. It always comes across when the examiners write to us as they do and they all /.../ 'Can you recommend new texts that we can put on the exam syllabus?' And particularly at A' level it's often very difficult for people to come out with or think... Particularly recently, they're often looking for modern literature because clearly everybody has a whole range of classic texts from eighteenth, nineteenth century, whatever... But /when it comes to/ looking at literature within the last twenty, thirty years, I think we find it very difficult to say 'Ok, this text will be a good one'. I think part of it is that kind of entrapment, of feeling: why do you raise, you value one text more than others? Why do you suddenly pick up this novel written five years ago and say 'this is /.../ exam syllabus rather than the other things we've read'? What makes it...? I don't think we've cleared this sort of evaluation. 'I have that notion that somehow it's going to be a classic of literature, which...' So, I think we're a bit sort of trapped in that way. That's why coursework is much easier, because people tend to follow individual enthusiasms and /.../ take a novel they themselves have read recently, I think. Well, obviously we're also thinking in terms of 'as well as'. Although we want to extend what sixteen, fifteen, sixteen-year-olds read, we want them to be able to get a grasp on it as well. We don't want it to be too far removed from what they feel and they understand and what they can get to grips with. So, we're often looking for things that we think: 'yes, they will at least get that initial enthusiasm for...', whilst hopefully extending them as well. So, yes... I... It is difficult. It's the same issue really with things like the balance between male and female writers as well. We've sometimes very consciously looked at that, trying to cheat at some other times because we can't manage it at all and we still find that it's the old syndrome of, you know, that we teach the dead white males.

E: I see. OK. I think we have to stop.

David: Yeah, yeah.

E: Thank you very much.

English Interview No 3:**Susan**

(14 / 6 / 1995)

Susan is a white woman in her fifties and is head of English at a girls' school in London. She did not want the interview to be recorded because, as she said, it would sound like a definite statement. So, I took detailed notes as she was talking to me. In the interview, she seemed very confident and was eager and careful to address all questions. In fact, she used the list of guiding questions as an indicator of what would come next. It was only to her and to Liz that I gave the list of guiding questions at the start of the interview.

Reading texts as a child at school and at home.

When she was young, her family constantly moved to different places because of her father's job, and as a result, she attended various schools. As a child, she would read a lot and not watch any television or pursue any other forms of entertainment. Books were a substitute to friends for her. Moreover, she was encouraged to read both by her school and her family. Even though she attended an oversubscribed village school for seven years, in which three teachers would work with their classes in the same room, still teachers urged them to read. When she was young she would read a mixture of books, ranging from classic novels to *The Classics Illustrated* magazine and further on to comics from USA. Family friends would give these comics to her and she found their reading particularly exciting as they were outside her experiences.

When they would read a text at school, the teacher would read it aloud, and then, he (sic) would pass it around to pupils. On the whole, it was a very boring process with nothing exciting about it, since it only consisted of reading. They would talk about it, albeit only on a surface level about understanding.

She did not want to become a teacher, but she did not want to become anything else either. Moreover, since she changed schools so often, she changed curricula as well, which increased her indecisiveness about her future career. Initially, she wanted to do medicine, then she became more interested in language, thinking she would like to do something related to writing, such as a clerical job. In the end, she ended up teaching, but not because she was keen on it. Together with friends they decided to obtain teaching qualifications as an excuse to move into London and find jobs there. After she qualified as a teacher, she went into teaching for a while, then stopped so as to work for the production of TV educational programmes, and finally resumed teaching.

What would you consider as the most decisive period in your formation as an English teacher?

She read English at university. During her undergraduate studies she came across the new literary theories that had a formative effect on her teaching. She became familiar with reader-response theories and the practices of deconstruction and prediction, which she found particularly interesting and exciting.

What would you consider as 'literature'? Have you always held this view?

They look at this question together with the sixth form class she teaches. They consider whether literature should include 'the received canon' or anything written. They also examine the form of texts: should a film, a programme, or anything written in a book be treated as a text? Or else, what is a text?

She herself has gone through a constant change in the way she answers this question. Her personal feeling is that there is 'good literature'. However, she thinks that no-one can give a definite answer to this question and anyone's concept of literature is a formed one. When she was young, she thought that literature included only English literature. Then, she started thinking of good modern literature. Later on, she broadened her horizons even more so as to include world literature. Now, she thinks that literature is 'immense'. It might be anything which is creative, anything that gives pleasure and enjoyment, the written product of anyone's experience and imagination.

What are your aims as a literature teacher? In what ways would you like literature lessons in school to affect your pupils?

The umbrella of her whole literature teaching is her wish to develop enjoyment for children from literature. However, a number of subtexts lie alongside this. So, she expects literature to broaden the pupils' minds as well as to help raise certain issues, such as racism and sexism. Next to this didactic use of literature, she wants her pupils to manage to read literature just for the sake of listening to the poetry that can be found in it. Finally, she considers that literature has the potentiality to challenge people's ideas and prejudices. She emphasised that all these subtexts are set clearly under the umbrella of enjoyment.

How do you read a text with a class? What strategies do you employ?

With her classes they do a lot of reading aloud and dramatisation, because she thinks that reading is a skill and, like all skills, it has to be developed. Sometimes, they do reading in groups, a practice that is good for

weaker pupils. These pupils might not feel confident enough to read to the whole class and reading in small groups boosts their confidence.

What criteria do you use when you choose texts for study with a class?

Sometimes, a teacher has to teach a text she does not like, usually due to examination syllabuses. For example, she has to read Hardy's novels in class, even though she hates them. In the sixth form she tells them her point of view, explaining why she does not like it. Then, there is a debate since some of them might have a different view.

In general, a teacher's criteria used for the selection of texts depend on the departmental policy. In the past she taught in mixed and boys' schools. In those schools the ways of selecting books were not the same. Nowadays, the books that are read in a 1990s class are very different from those read in a 1950s class.

The policy of her department is to choose texts that present strong female characters and that abide by the equal opportunities principles, being non-racist and non-sexist. Moreover, their aim is to acquaint pupils with a wide range of genres and styles. Finally, there is a wide variety since the texts under study span more than a century.

At this part of the interview she spoke in a very assertive way about how there was a departmental ethos regarding the reading of literature. She said that the English department at her school consisted of like-minded teachers, and thus, there was consensus among them on their teaching material, methods and strategies. She mentioned that she took part in the interviews of new teachers and so had a say in who is to work in the department. Moreover, most English teachers are members of NATE, attend courses organised by it, or read articles in its publications. Thus, they share certain interests and points of reference.

Do you talk with other English teachers? What do you talk with them about?

She enjoys talking with other English teachers. However, their discussions are about irrelevant matters, full of jokes etc. In any case, if they talked about their job all the time, life would be boring.

Do you read literature in your personal life? How do you read a text on your own? How would you compare your personal reading to your reading in school?

Her reading habits undergo different stages. Sometimes, she might read six or seven books in a week and then nothing at all. She said that when she reads on her own, she reads quickly, feeling she cannot abandon the book until she has finished it. At that point, I asked whether she applies to her own personal reading the same reading techniques as the ones she teaches to her pupils. She replied that it is a process which is in her mind. She might apply it, but it is a subconscious analysis and review of books.

When they read a book in class together they use to break down the process, looking at the structure of the text and making predictions. Reading in class is a very condense thing. However, she thinks that if there are too many interventions, then enjoyment is destroyed. She hopes that pupils will follow this process in their personal readings as well. She went on to say that pupils read a lot of 'junk' in their spare time and in the time available in class. Yet, she added she did not mind their reading of 'junk' texts for a number of reasons. First of all, there are some times when one needs to read this kind of texts. Moreover, it is good for reluctant readers because in this way they practice reading. She thought this reading is OK so long as pupils read something.

Which part of your lessons do you enjoy most? Which parts of your lessons do you consider most successful? Why?

First of all, she pointed out that her personal enjoyment in lessons is interrelated with the successful parts. She continued saying that these enjoyable and successful parts are the interactive ones, when people work together. She particularly enjoys the creative work in the sixth form. She talked heartily about the 'magic moments' in class when everyone is totally involved in the reading process. These moments are not too many and you are lucky if you have three minutes in a term. However, these three minutes make up for your whole work.

How do examinations and examination criteria affect your teaching?

She said she tries to circumvent examinations even though she acknowledged that they do influence her choice of texts and teaching methods.

How do pupils react to literature lessons? Do they usually come up to your expectations? Did you - as a pupil - react similarly?

She said that pupils work on units of work, each unit lasting for six or seven weeks. Moreover, 70% of the work they do is on texts and not language. Usually, pupils come up to her expectations. It is only occasionally, when something new is introduced, that they might not come up to her expectations. In any case she pointed out that there could be no comparison to her own schooling. She added that she would never want things to go back to that boring procedure of reading and understanding.

Pupils - especially in inner city schools - have different cultural and social backgrounds. How does this influence your teaching of literature and their reading of literature in school?

First of all, she agreed that there are many differences between pupils and their backgrounds. She thought that pupils with different backgrounds are bound to read in different ways, because reading has to do with experience and exposure. She went on to say that some pupils, when they come to school, are years behind in relation to their approach to texts. These pupils are not familiar with a wide range and variety of texts. The librarian plays a very crucial role in the enrichment of these pupils' reading habits. At that point I asked her whether she had ever thought of systematising these differences. She replied that she had not really considered such a thing. Carrying on with this question, she said that first of all there is the difference between working-class and middle-class pupils. Middle-class pupils are 'active readers' and have plenty of books available at home. On the contrary, Bengali children are usually first-generation immigrants and sometimes their mothers might be illiterate. These children need a lot of encouragement. An example of the big gap between pupils, which relates to their backgrounds, is the fact that most Year 10 pupils who got grade E in coursework in the previous year were Bengali. At school they held a departmental meeting especially for these children. She mentioned that they have been thinking about this and try to consider ways to address the issue. One of the reasons she could think of is financial: books cost money and these pupils cannot afford to buy many books. Another reason could be that Bengali girls do not have enough freedom. They usually have many family duties, such as looking after younger siblings, cleaning or doing other house chores. These extra duties account for their long absences from school, which sometimes might be as long as six months. In class these pupils are not vocal and have very low self-esteem. She concluded saying that even though girls with different backgrounds are bound to be different in their reading, they do not voice their readings in class because they are very quiet and a teacher has to find ways to bring them forth.

What texts do you expect your pupils to find 'interesting'?

They usually find interesting books which are non-predictable.

What do you think pupils mean when they say that a book is 'boring'?

They use this comment for many different kinds of books. Sometimes, they say a book is boring because they have read it before, or because they consider it to be too young for them – since they tend to look down on children's books. Moreover, pupils older than twelve years old do not like books with animals. For example, Dahl's stories with animals are very interesting, but still they despise them. They also do not like books with too obvious issues in them, the ones that have a didactic, a 'stretched-finger' approach. Contrary to one's expectations, in her school pupils' perceptions of difficulty have nothing to do with difficulty. Pupils are not intimidated of reading a difficult book and they do not expect a book to open up right after the first page.

English Interview No 4:

Cathy

(23 / 6 / 1995)

Cathy is a white woman in her fifties and works as an English teacher at a girls' school in London. She was eager to talk but the time available was limited and the interview finished in haste. Our discussion took place in the school staffroom, during a teaching period, and thus, a few other teachers were around, albeit at a distance.

E: So, should we start from your personal history?

Cathy: Fine. Yes. That's fine.

E: OK. What memories do you have of reading literature during childhood?

Cathy: Oh, very good memories, because I was lucky. I had access to a lot of books. I was... I found reading easy and I loved it. I can never remember not reading, and I think I read what would be generally called 'classical literature for children'... what are now seen as slightly old-fashioned... books, strong diet of fairy tales and... rather literature of what you could call 'adventure', things like *Treasure Island* and... quite a lot of books that were sometimes thought of as boys' books. I was a bit of a tomboy and also my mother very sensibly didn't divide literature in any way. She simply let me read what I was interested in, though I think she put in front of me quite a lot of good books.... I read... It's difficult to say really, because I read so much. I read Kipling, *Jungle Book*... But, you don't want a long list, do you really?

E: No, no. How would you get access to these books? Would you buy them? Did you have them at home? Were they presents? Or what?

Cathy: I think I took it completely for granted that there were just always books around and I can't actually remember much shopping for books. I think my mother didn't have much money and I think she must have, quietly and unobtrusively, sought out books for me and it can't have been very easy for her. But, somehow books were just there. I borrowed from the library. I was getting books as presents by members of the family. I read books whenever I went to play in other children's homes. I just fell on their books, and... Somehow there were always books to read and if... And I would sometimes try my mother's books... So, when I went away to a boarding school in my teens, there were lots of things wrong with that school, in my opinion, and I'm not in favour of boarding school education, but it did have an **excellent** library, with fairly eccentric choices of books, which suited me, quite unusual books.

E: And, you used to read those books...

Cathy: Yes, enormously. Particularly since I didn't enjoy games. I used to find ways of avoiding playing games and read instead.

E: I see. You used to read books at school as well, didn't you?

Cathy: Yes.

E: How would you compare your reading at school and your reading at home?

Cathy: Not...

E: How would you feel about it?

Cathy: Yes. There wasn't really a divide. I think the kind of education I received was fairly a traditional one that emphasised..., if you like, the children's classics and the accessible adult classics, like Dickens. And, that suited me personally. I think, looking back, it was not very progressive and I would today feel that it was not suitable for more children, but for someone of my type and my class, in the time I was a child, it suited me.

E: In what ways?

Cathy: Well, I think... I did enjoy the books that today might be... that were presented to me by English teachers... which today in a comprehensive school I, as an English teacher, would think twice about presenting, because of their language difficulties, their conceptual difficulties for children today.

E: I see. How would you explain that you were more able and better at approaching and reading these books?

Cathy: I think the language used in my own home was such that I had a wide base of language, I had wide vocabulary and I wasn't... and I learnt, I have been lucky and I learnt to read early and I was quite comfortable with complex... use of English. So, the books I read didn't, didn't alarm me at all.

E: Hmm. This is interesting. How would you read the books at school? In what ways? What would you do?

Cathy: Very traditional ways of reading round the class, with everybody having to read a little bit aloud, which I enjoyed thoroughly because I was quite a show-off and I knew I could read well. Unfortunately, that's still so... And... Also we were tested frequently... in ways that looking back I think were probably very arid, very un-adventurous, and probably killed for many children their interest in literature. But, I was successful at those and was perfectly happy.

E: Did you say you were tested reading aloud and...

Cathy: ...and comprehension, yes. Yes, that kind of thing. How much we could remember and how much we'd understood. But, not a more open-ended, adventurous or personal approaches to literature that are now used.

E: *So, you feel that you use now different approaches than then?*

Cathy: Infinitely wider approaches than we would ever use in my... in the teaching I received. However, I still feel the teaching I received was in its narrow way very, very good and I often have reason to be grateful... to the teachers that I had.

E: *So, the teachers that you had influenced you back there in some way?*

Cathy: One in particular did, yes. I had a rather eccentric and witty Irish English teacher... who made me laugh and who encouraged in some senses my own abilities and... really increased my sense of pleasure in literature.

E: *I see. What was your way after school? I mean, did you go to University? To college?*

Cathy: Yes. I had a year between school and University and then did an English degree at [...] in London.

E: *And, had you already decided to become an English teacher?*

Cathy: No. It was the last thing I wanted to do. My mother was a teacher and I had long decided that that was not for me. I wanted to be an actress.

E: *And, why did it happen that you...? When did this change?*

Cathy: [laugh] It changed because of two things, really. One, it became very obvious to me that there were many competent actresses who never got anywhere and I didn't have that extra something which would lead to a success. Nor did I really have the drive. And, secondly, when I finished my college I had an English degree and didn't know what else to do and thought 'Well, if I do a year's training as a teacher, [explaining to me] the Postgraduate Certificate, at least it gives me time to think.' And, I wanted to stay in London anyway for personal reasons. So, it was a very pragmatic decision. But, once I'd started training I realised that it would suit me.

E: *Where did you do your PGCE?*

Cathy: I did at [...], which is a college in the south of London and I came up to the Institute for central lectures.

E: *And, then you started working here, in this school, right away?*

Cathy: This is embarrassing. [laugh]

E: *You don't have to talk...*

Cathy: I did my teaching practice as a student teacher here and I was asked to... I was given my first year as a proper teacher here. And, then, I got pregnant and left and raised a family and came back here, part-time... much later. And, I've stayed...

E: *Did you like the fact that... Do you like the fact that you have stayed in the same school all these years?*

Cathy: Well. I have very mixed feelings about it. At one level I like it very much because of the continuity and the sense of... well, seeing children growing up and knowing that this institution has shaped them and that I've been part of that. I am very proud of what this school does and has done. But, at another level I feel quite embarrassed about it, because nowadays people... well, people in my day, people didn't plan their careers in that way and I *should* have spent a few years in one place, and then, calculated a good career move and moved somewhere else and steadily built a career with wid-, with a wide range of experience. It's not ideal just to stay in one place.

E: *But, you did it?*

Cathy: I did it.

E: *Just because...*

Cathy: Just because I suppose I hadn't got the impetus and the... perhaps the courage to move on. At least not until I was at a point in my career when it seemed silly to move on.

E: *I see. Now that you have been here all these years and you teach literature, do you see any differences in the way that you teach literature, I don't know, some years ago and then now?*

Cathy: Yes, yes. Not, not huge differences because I think I'm still very much marked by the way we... the way we thought about literature in the sixties and the way we thought particularly about children in the sixties. Very much a whole approach to children and... the school being there for the whole child, every aspect of that child... I think there is a little tension in me as there is in many teachers between the progressive ideas of the sixties and the fairly... traditional methods that I myself was educated by.

E: *How do you experience this tension?*

Cathy: I think my underlying expectations are often slightly at odds with what my heart is telling me about how children learn. For instance, I'm often a little shocked at... that's difficult to explain really, because this is highly personal and doesn't relate in particular to me being a literature teacher, it's much more to do with me. I think part of me wants children to be obedient, respectful... good-looking girls, and another part of me encourages free thinking, exploration... if you like, a rather maverick quality in children. And there is undoubtedly some tension between the two strands. But, that's, that's so in some degree in all teachers, I think. But, there is a third aspect which is what happened to teaching in the last... fifteen, ten to fifteen years, when I think the stresses over the teaching profession have become steadily worse and the emphasis in recent years seems to have become so much on administrative work and on record keeping of various

kinds... and I'm being extremely uncomfortable for what we do. And all of that is correct at one level but it also seems to me to detract from some of the more venturesome teaching that I've seen, for instance, in certain colleagues in the past. Some of my most... some of the colleagues I have had in the school have taught literature with such joy and have given such joy through adventurous teaching, and I think that still continues but with difficulty in a climate that doesn't allow for /.../. This, this is difficult to put into words...

E: Yeah. I understand what you mean. I mean if you have too much work and if you have too much administrative work to do and record-keeping and so on, then you don't have the energy...

Cathy: Yes, yes. And, I feel very angry still about even the revised National Curriculum in that it seems to me to... to devalue by omission... so much of the imaginative side of English... and the personal development that I think comes about through good English teaching in favour of... details like 'how many adverbs a child can use?' or... you know, whether they can handle a full-stop correctly, and whether they can jump three little defined hoops, to use a metaphor... I feel something terrible has happened and English teachers are very well aware of it and fighting against it. But, we have to go on fighting.

E: I see. Do you think that the National Curriculum brings things back into the way that they were in the more traditional schooling, when you used to go to school?

Cathy: Well. Yes and no. Because we have lost a great deal that I think was valuable about the traditional schooling and that I think we... For instance, it was taken for granted that we would read pre-twentieth century literature in my day. It was not labelled 'pre-twentieth century literature'. It was simply 'good literature'. Now, it is put into a sort of ghetto called 'pre-twentieth-century literature'... Special courses are provided to help teachers to teach it. And, yet the whole labelling process seems to me to make it more remote from children. I believe very strongly in presenting children with literature that is good, exciting and relevant to them, and it is not, for me, an issue whether... the date when it was written.

E: So, you mean that it is not necessary that pupils should be taught the 'classics'? That they should read and enjoy literature?

Cathy: No... It's necessary and... in a sense I think that they have to have some awareness about how literature has developed and some nodding acquaintance with some of the great writers, such as Shakespeare and Dickens. But, I don't think that it's necessary for every child to study a sort of set portion, like a piece of /.../, a rather dent food put in a plate... at exactly the same stage in their lives and jump through exactly the same hoop. What I do want is for children to be curious and alert to different uses of language... and to read for enjoyment.

E: So, you mean that your aims are, as a literature teacher, to make them read for enjoyment and to understand the language and its development...?

Cathy: Yes, yes. And, to... this is again quite difficult to put into words, but I do think reading is part of personal development. It teaches in a very tangible way how to think and how to feel. And, if a child never read Shakespeare again in their lives it would not matter to me if they had had a marvellous, extending, developing experience at some point. It doesn't matter very much when... in... through an English teacher's work in... for instance, reading *Macbeth* and discovering the... discovering that it's possible to talk about and write about and feel about... ambition, remorse, guilt.

E: I see. And, you think that reading can do that?

Cathy: I think reading plays a crucial part in that. Yes! And, I think because of the way that a skilled writer manipulates words there is... if that is taught in a skilled way a child reader can learn about thinking processes, about the way words grow up towards a clarification and words open windows of experience... how words enrich your thinking...

E: So, if I understood it well, in order for this personal development and awareness to be achieved there is a need for a skilled way of teaching?

Cathy: Yes, there is.

E: So, it doesn't necessarily mean that reading on their own will have the same effect?

Cathy: No, it won't. I was very lucky personally in that I think I was a good interpretative reader as a girl. I'm sure I missed a lot. But, you know, I did... I think... intuit and understand a great deal of what I was reading without the medium of a teacher. But, most children do need the medium of a teacher to act as interpreter, guide, to encourage them forward and through, and encourage them to make their own paths as readers. I don't like the idea of a highly prescriptive teacher, though I think I'm sometimes a bit prescriptive myself. Again that comes back to this slight anomaly in that I know that the things I believe in I don't always put them into practice. And, I am a little too ready to tell children what to think. [She laughs.] But, ideally I think that... and I've seen this in action with, with particular past colleagues, certain past colleagues, there is a way of opening the door so that the child barely knows that it's been opened for them and they go through it. I keep talking in metaphors but it's actually easier...

E: Yes. Yeah, it is.

Cathy: ... than talking in strictly pedagogic language.

E: Yeah, I see. Why do you think, why do you find it difficult as you said sometimes to be non-prescriptive? You said 'ideally I would like not to...'.

Cathy: I suppose for two reasons. One, what is deep in me from the past, the way I was taught. But, another reason would be that in limited time one wants desperately to get certain points across to children. And, sometimes it's... there is a danger that one can underline and state and prescribe too much, because one doesn't have the courage to take the risk of letting some miss the point and some find the point in their own way... And certainly when you're teaching for an exam, you **do have to be prescriptive**.

E: *Why?*

Cathy: I can't afford, for instance, when I'm teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to let children miss certain points because they have to go through an exam and they have to do as well as they can and I want them to know everything about that book and to have it at their fingertips so that in an exam they can write well. Therefore my duty is to prescribe and to say 'this means...', 'that is...', 'you must remember this, this and this points...'. But, in other English teaching situations I would like, if possible, and I love the moment when a child's face is radiant with discovery and they say something like 'so, that last paragraph tells us that...', or 'that means...', or 'now, I understand what that bit means...' and they think they've done it for themselves and what you've done is no more than almost place the stepping stones in the river and they've got across themselves. It is **such a thrill!** Particularly in a not very able child, when that happens... [At that moment, she seems anxious, looking at her watch.]

E: *I see. That's interesting. Do we have time?*

Cathy: No, no. We don't. I've got to stop. I'm sorry. I've got to...

E: *OK. Thank you very much. You've been very helpful.*

English Interview No 5:

Claire

(14 / 5 / 1998)

Claire is a white woman in her thirties and works as an English teacher at a London comprehensive. She was eager to talk and did not mind the interview to be recorded. Our discussion took place at a quiet room in the Institute of Education and there was no time pressure. She even carried on talking after I switched off the tape recorder at the end of the interview.

E: First of all, I would like us to start from your childhood. What do you remember? What memories do you have of reading literature as a child?

Claire: Well... I remember enjoying reading. I remember that I read loads and I was always in my room reading books. But, I can't remember... there's nothing that sticks out in my mind as... what the books were that I read, that I loved. And, what I remember more than reading books is my father reading to me and making up stories, telling me stories when I was very young. And, I remember that more than anything really. I mean... Do you mean what sort of books did I read?

E: No. What memories you have in general of reading...

Claire: I read a lot. I read a lot and I loved reading.

E: How come and you liked reading? Why was that? Was it because of your parents? Was it because of your school?

Claire: It's very difficult.... It's really difficult and it's interesting because I'm trying to think about the same things for my MA. But, I can't honestly remember why I liked reading, because I don't ever remember my mother reading to me. And, I don't remember... Although I suppose I remember seeing my parents read, a lot. My father was always interested in reading because he was a... It wasn't his job but he tried to write. He tried to be a writer. Well, in fact, he has written things, short stories, and had a couple published, but nothing significant and it wasn't his job. But it was something that occupied him a lot. So, I suppose possibly that's where it comes from. But I don't remember any happy memories, of like sitting on my parents' lap reading a story. I don't remember anything like that. And, I don't remember anything at school that sparked off reading. I remember when I was about... very early on in my secondary education, I always wanted to do English literature and I had a friend at school who read *Wuthering Heights* and she loved it. And, I started reading it and I couldn't read it at all. I just couldn't get into it. And years later I read it again and I've really read it about ten times now and it's my favourite book. But, I don't remember what it was that made me move from not liking to liking it.

E: How old were you when you first read it?

Claire: I must have been about twelve, probably.

E: So, could it be the age?

Claire: Probably, I think I was just too young and I couldn't really... It seemed boring, you know, that the detail, the description I think boring. And that's the thing I loved... I loved literature when I did GCSE and A' level English. I loved reading and I was always the first one to my English lessons, especially when I did A' level, because I was just so keen to do it. But, I hated Dickens. I absolutely hated Dickens. I found it so boring and tedious and I just could not... I just couldn't read it. In fact, we had a Dickens' book for A' level that I never read. And it now... I've taught Dickens recently and I have discovered things about it that I just never knew it was possible. But, I think it's something to do with the way I was taught, the way we were read to at school, in secondary school. I don't think they made... It's not only that we were not ready to read it, but they never inspired us. My English teacher was so boring. She never inspired us in any way. She never made it accessible, I suppose. I probably just didn't understand what I was reading.

E: You said that possibly she wouldn't inspire you. How could you do that?

Claire: I just... like... When I've taught Dickens recently, you know, going through it in great detail, making them see all the jokes and really getting them to talk about... I suppose every little thing, every little detail... And, because I really enjoy it, maybe the enthusiasm is communicated. I don't know. I remember my English teacher just being very boring and all the enthusiasm came from me not from her. So, I was very enthusiastic about the things I could relate to, which didn't include Dickens because it just... was too dense, too much detail, too much stuff I really did not understand.

E: So, you mean that if your teacher had made a more detailed and intensive reading of Dickens, then possibly you would have understood it and possibly you would have liked it?

Claire: Yeah. Possibly yeah. If they'd made me understand the humour, made me relate to it in some way... to see how... the kind of thing that he was saying had some relevance to me... Because they would have done of course, but it just seemed so detailed and so distant, really. I think it was the detail, it was the minute detail. And, we were left very much to read on our own. We never read very much together in class. Or, if we did, we never discussed what we read.

E: So, what would you do in class?

Claire: When I'm teaching a text now or then?

E: *No. As a child, then.*

Claire: Well. We would... The teacher might read a chapter or she might say 'can you read a chapter?', or she'd just set us questions to write and she'd be sat at her desk. We wouldn't really discuss... we wouldn't discuss very much. She might ask us questions about what we'd read, but we wouldn't do, like, activities and we wouldn't look in great detail at images, ideas. We wouldn't discuss off the points, so to speak. Do you know what I mean?... It would be more a comprehension kind of 'you've read a chapter. Have you understood it? So tell me what's happened.' She never made the characters come alive, make you relate to the characters' emotions or... We never did any great... Everything we did we did very much on our own, really. But, I went to a grammar school and it was a very formal kind of education where we learned very much on our own.

E: *Was it that you decided to become an English teacher because you enjoyed literature or...?*

Claire: That's my main reason for wanting to be an English teacher is that I love literature and I wanted to teach. When I decided that I wanted to teach, I knew that the only thing I would want to teach was literature. Because that's what I love so much and I just saw it as a way of combining doing something I loved with... and being interested in education as well. But, I've only become an English teacher in the last three years and I'm not trained as an English teacher. My degree was in Philosophy and I trained as a social science teacher. But, only because I didn't think I could train as an English teacher, which is partly why I did the MA, to help me become an English teacher. But, I have since... anyway... I have... I found a way of becoming an English teacher without the qualification. So, **I am** an English teacher.

E: *And, do you think the MA will help you? Why have you been doing it?*

Claire: Well, initially I did it because I wanted to do further academic study in education and also because I saw doing in English as a way of, again, doing something that I would enjoy, and helping me to get a job as an English teacher, although I did get a job as an English teacher anyway.

E: *I see. Should we move on to your practice as an English teacher at school? Of course you've talked a bit about it while you were talking about your personal experiences as a pupil, because you compared it more or less. So, if I got it right... your teachers at school wouldn't make a detailed reading of the texts; there were no activities; it was more comprehension work; it was not so much about style and analysis of style, imagery and so on; not too much analysis of characters and so on. So, what is it that you're doing now that you feel is different from what you experienced as a pupil?*

Claire: It's difficult, isn't it? Because I have to analyse now what it is I do. I suppose I do a lot of activities in the class where I ask them to read small chunks of text and I give them hints a lot for what to look for. I mean, I might possibly, if I know what I'm looking for in the text, what kind of images or what ideas are in the text that I want them to bring out, I will possibly give them what I might think are leading questions. Like giving them clues what to look for. For example, we've been... say, today I was doing a mystery story with... in fact a Dickens' story called *The signal man* – it's a short story - with a Year 12 who are doing English retake. And, we spent a long time reading the first ten lines of the story because I thought it was really important that... sort of building up suspense in the story so that the reader always wants to read on. And, if they don't get into it in the first few lines of the story, then, they'll probably won't want to read on anyway. So, it's a very difficult text for them to read because of the language and because it's very complex sentence structure. So, I got them to read the story and read it again. Then, we concentrated on the first ten lines but I'd read it with them and I'd picked up all the things that I thought were important. I'd also given them questions to go away and do at home and they came back today and we were going to discuss them. And, one of the things I asked them to do in the first ten lines was to... sort of write down all the questions that they would ask, because so much was left out, so much was kind of hinted at but not said. And, they were descriptive words which, like an 'angry sunset', that I wondered if they would ask why the writer described it... why the narrator described it as 'angry'. So, I asked them to write a list of questions that they would want to know. And then, we spent time discussing the questions and discussing... Having read the whole story, of course, we were going back and reading the first ten lines again, discussing why the narrator, with the hindsight, why was writing that, from what perspective and we were able to talk about how the writer was building up suspense, how he was getting the reader to want to read on. And, they were thinking... of course, of all the implications of the language that the writer... that the narrator had used to describe things, because he was able to look back and, once they'd understood that, of course I think it was much easier for them themselves to have an interest and to go on. And then, we just... we went on and we went through and I'd given them leading questions really to make them think about things. We spent a lot of time talking about specific words, why the writer might have chosen those words, and all the implications that those words normally have for them, so that they could start to see why the language was so important. Of course that takes a very long time to do in that kind of detail, but my logic is that if we do it in detail for at least part of the story or maybe one story, then once they have that skill, they will tend to look more closely when they read something else and they'll be... they'll think that there's something there for them to read. They won't just dismiss it immediately 'Oh, it's boring, I can't access it', or 'I don't know what it's about and I won't read it.'

E: So, if I understand it right, your idea is that mainly you teach them a skill, a methodology, hoping that they will apply this methodology, this technique, to their reading apart from the reading that you do together? Is that right?

Claire: That's right. But, the other thing, at the same time as teaching that skill, is giving them an understanding of the text. Because a lot of them find it very difficult with that kind of text to even understand what's going on, to really place the characters and see who's... which even stories written in the first person but there's other characters in the story, it's very complicated. And, I find a lot of the time they don't even really understand who's talking and who's who. So if they don't get that sorted out at the beginning, they just tend to switch off. So I would spend a long time of course checking that they understand who's who, maybe drawing diagrams of... if it's a complicated story, once they've read it, who the characters are, making sure they understand who the characters are, how they relate to each other. So that, as well as the skills of learning what to look for, they also have a pretty good understanding of who's who and what's going on really. Because I think on their own... and a lot of the time they find that very difficult with difficult texts.

E: And, why is it good to do this? Why is it good for them to acquire this skill and understanding?

Claire: Well. I suppose I think it's good for them to do it because it means that they'll be able to access things that otherwise they possibly would have it dismissed as just being irrelevant or having nothing to say to them and... Of course a lot of English teachers might argue that we don't need to... we don't really need that, but if we give them texts they can access more easily, the ideas will come more from them than us. But, I suppose I think that when they can start to understand they will then have lots of ideas about a text, but if we don't give them an initial understanding, or if we don't help them to understand, if we don't give them the skills, they will just basically not bother, I think, to read lots of texts that... one they would otherwise... they're missing out on... Because I suppose I hold the view that those texts are worth reading. And, the second thing is that if they ever want to go on and do A' level or any further academic study to do with literature, they will never have the skills to do it, if they just stay at... at a more kind of... a less detailed... a more kind of imaginative, perhaps, way of dealing with texts. I don't know...

E: And, what if they don't do anything related to literature? If they don't study literature?

Claire: Well, of course it's a skill that they have for life because maybe they'll pick up books or read things that will say something to them in their life. I suppose because I love literature and I think that literature always has something to say to you, to help you understand your life, to help you understand relationships, it's very important... I suppose I think literature is very important in life. You don't have to study it but I think that people should read. [She laughs.] Of course that's not a view shared by everyone, I suppose.

E: I don't know. It seems that the younger generations they don't always see it like this. They think that playing a computer game is more enjoyable and fruitful... I don't know.

Claire: Yeah... I mean I guess that's really because I guess in lots of ways that lots of people don't think that it's important to read books anymore. And also there is a big... because I used to teach Media studies and a lot of kids tend to prefer to do Media studies and in some ways they are doing similar things with texts but actually... and I thought that was the case and I've now come to the conclusion that anyone who does English can do Media studies but not anyone who does Media studies can do English...

E: Why not?

Claire: I think that the kind of texts that they look at, when they're doing Media studies, their sort of visual images are... I wouldn't say easier but I think it's a different skill that they have. They don't have the discipline that's required to read a complex novel and to read it again and again and again. That there's no... The kind of... the way we teach English in schools doesn't really allow children, it doesn't encourage children to do that. The only kind of children that will do that are the kind of children that probably do that at home anyway. We don't spend enough time doing really reading and reading and rereading and doing lots of detailed work on text. Perhaps at A' level of course, but not below it. And, the problem is that... because we think it's boring, I suppose, for the students, that we don't want them to be bored, we want to always entertain them in the classroom, and personally I think it's a big mistake.

E: Why?

Claire: Because I just think that they end up not having the kind of skills that will allow them to really appreciate literature. Very few of them will really appreciate literature. I mean... I say... with my Year 11 GCSE English class that have just left I've only had them for two terms. I took them over from someone else so I didn't have them from Year 10 and... but I find it incredible the way that they are not prepared to look... to do close readings of texts. Like, they read a poem then 'I've read it. That's it.' And, that's their attitude. 'Well, I don't want to read it again. It's boring. I've read it once. That's all there is to do' and they don't see the value in reading it ten times, or in looking at every single line and maybe every single word. Because in a way, that kind of detailed studying is perhaps something that we expect of A' level students or degree-level students, but if children don't have that skill early and don't have the discipline, I don't see why they would have the motivation to do it later. The motivation would have to come from them and in a way that is excluding lots of children who would never have the motivation from within themselves because they've never got it from... maybe, from home or... And, they think they can't do it. They think they can't access. But, it's the skill they could have been taught.

E: So, reading has to do more or less, from what you've been saying, it has to do with how you are taught to do it.

Claire: I think so, yeah.

E: Because you mentioned earlier on that other teachers think that most of the ideas should come from the pupils, but it seems that you think that it is mainly related to what you teach them... ways of reading that you teach them.

Claire: I think that the ideas will come from the pupils in the way they relate to the words on the page, but I think that for a lot of students they will never get that far unless we teach them how to read and how to look at a text. Because they'll dismiss texts and think that they are inaccessible, think that they don't have anything to say. Because they don't see how their lives or their ideas will relate to this text. And, that's probably because they're not prepared to take the time to see and also because they don't have the frameworks for thinking about how to look at a text. And the kind of activities they do in school don't tend to be related to the text specifically; they tend to be sort of... For example, I was reading yesterday trying to find some poems to do with my Year 9s and I looked at, the English Centre has a book for Key Stage 3 and it had a poem by Shelley 'Ozymandius'. I looked at the activities to go with the poem and the activities... and I talked to teachers, what they were doing over there. And the kind of activities were sort of getting them to write study guides of going to far away places and deserts and things. I think 'well, that's great for imaginative writing but what's that got to do with this poem? How does it really get them to understand this poem?' And, I... my personal opinion is that that's OK for a primary school child maybe, but when they're in secondary school they should be looking at the text and looking at the ideas in the text, words on the page, and then relating their ideas to it. But, they've got to have an understanding of what's actually on the page. If they're writing a travel guide of going to a desert, if they can imagine that in some way, it's not really got anything to do with that particular poem. The poem is an inspiration maybe to get them to do a piece of imaginative writing, but I only think they should do imaginative writing if they actually... when they understand the poem, because otherwise what's the point of doing the poem. You know, is it a poetry lesson or is it an imaginative writing lesson? I don't know. Personally, I'd like to think that we could have imaginative writing lessons but they also understood the poem and were able to write a detailed commentary on the poem. But, most of the time, they're not asked to do that. They're just asked to do imaginative writing pieces.

E: You talked about how useful it is for pupils to learn how to make a close reading of a text. And, you also talked just now about how good it is for them to learn, first of all, how to read a text closely and, then, possibly use it as a springboard to do something irrelevant, something that has nothing to do with a text itself. What is this thing in a text itself, in poetry itself, for example? What is there in this close reading? What is there that pupils might find after reading a text ten times, after reading a poem ten times? Is there something that you expect them to find there? Or is it only the skill?

Claire: I think it's both really. I think it's the skill of being able to do that, but also I think that... I look at it the way I look at a text. I know that if I want to read and understand a poem I will read it once. But, when I read it the first time, I won't necessarily... I'll maybe see something in the text, an idea, an image. But then, I'll read it again and something else will occur to me. And, I'll read it again and again. And, there's two things happening, I suppose. One is that I'm learning to appreciate the language, the images in the poem, which is then learning to appreciate how a writer has chosen language for a specific purpose, why they've put language together in that way. I begin to understand the kind of images that the poet has used and why they've used them. And, because if you only read it once, you haven't got time to think about... like if you've used the word like 'an angry sunset', say for example, why would you use the word 'angry'? What does the word 'angry' mean? So, you think maybe it means something like 'angry – red – danger', all those things. Then, you start to think 'well, what has this got to do with the rest of the poem?' and you start to think about the ideas in the poem. So, I suppose their thinking about ideas... and that's when they start to think about ideas, then they'll be able to bring their own experiences and it will mean something to them. But, in the first instance, they have to even understand the language that's being used and appreciate why a writer has... or a poet has chosen to use specific language and appreciate the beauty of the language and the way it sounds.

E: So, more or less, multiple readings create multiple meanings as well?

Claire: I think so, yeah. And, understandings...

E: Or that we have many different layers of meaning, possibly?

Claire: Yeah. And, that there are different layers of meaning, of course, and each time perhaps they're getting deeper and deeper, creating another... or understanding a further level. Of course, not necessarily that I'm the one to tell them the meaning. I don't mean that it's for me to tell them the meaning, but I mean that they themselves will come to a better understanding the more they think, the more images and connections they make in their heads. They're making connections with lots of different ideas and concepts. And of course, if they talk about it to someone else in the class, then their ideas will connect together and they will begin to take some sort of shape or focus. They'll be able to focus their ideas more clearly. And of course, when they do that, then it has even more of a meaning for them. And someone could say 'Oh, yes. I can see what you mean' and it will become clearer for them.

E: How do your pupils react to literature?

Claire: The pupils I have at the moment... Of course, I have to say that I haven't had them for very long, because the school I'm at now I've only been since January. And, I have older students, because I have Year 9, who are nearly 15, and I have GCSE students, who are 16, and retake students, who are like 17. And, I have A' level Media students but we don't read texts with them. I don't do A' level English. They don't like literature... Well... When I said to them, like with my Year 9s, 'we're going to do *Romeo and Juliet*', they were like 'Oh, boring... you know... Shakespeare'. When we finished doing *Romeo and Juliet*, loads of them said they really loved it and they'd gone out and bought their own copy of it. They really enjoyed it. And they said... last week I said 'we're going to do poetry'. And they went 'Oh, no... Not poetry again...' Today we did a Sylvia Plath poem 'Mirror' and they were all really really getting into the poem and telling me really interesting things about... Because we started... we just had a discussion at the beginning of the lesson about... they had a discussion in groups about mirrors and why they look in mirrors and what they're for and what they thought the poem was going to be about, before they even looked at the poem. And loads of them, particularly the girls of course, they kind of... even some quite low ability students, came up with really interesting things about looking at your life in a mirror and sort of searching for who you are and that kind of stuff, which I thought 'Whoo! That's really incredible that they might say that' and... Having said that, they were debating... they also had an interesting debate about whether mirrors tell the truth or not, whether what you see in a mirror is truthful or not. Then of course, when they'd read the poem, they didn't have time to... we had time to read the poem and they read the poem and a few of them... I read it to them and they'd read it in groups together and then we were in the class and four or five people read the poem, so they were basically just reading it again and again. And, I said 'you must read the poem again because every time you'll see something new.' And, some of them were saying 'God, yeah!... I've just realised!...' Every time someone read it, someone put their hands up 'Oh, I've just realised something else...' So, without them having to really go away and do that by themselves they are learning... I think they're appreciating that that skill can give them something. But, I think they are, I mean... I don't know... We have to finish our discussions next week.

E: You said that initially, before you started reading 'Romeo and Juliet', they all said 'Oh, it's boring.' That's something that I've seen many times, I've met loads of pupils saying 'Oh, this is boring.' What do you think they mean when they say that something is boring? I don't understand it myself necessarily. I don't know what they mean but it is such a standard answer.

Claire: I know. I think maybe... I think that... because... I've got a theory that because they've always been given kind of sort of funny, interesting things to do that start from their own experiences, they tend to find... they're more inspired in a way, initially, when you ask them to do things that they want to do themselves. Like... they liked the idea in *Romeo and Juliet* of love, because they're about that age where they can talk about their own experiences and they were keen to write their own love poems, obviously based on their own ideas. And I think what they meant by 'boring' was 'Oh, it's something we've got to do. It's got nothing to do with us. What's *Romeo and Juliet*? It's a Shakespeare play. Who's Shakespeare? Some boring old guy that died four hundred years ago. And, it's a dense-looking text... it hasn't... there's no pictures in it... It's not going to interest us...' They're only really interested... in a way, they're interested in themselves. They're not interested in doing something which they see as being possibly hard work and dense. I think they're put off by kind of dense texts, really, something heavy. They see it as heavy, nothing to do with them... But in fact, I think that... I suppose you have to get the balance right between making it have something to do with them, but I don't see the point in spending the whole time talking about *Romeo and Juliet* allowing them to write love stories or make up love stories or write pages for their own times... their own stories. They can do a bit of that, to try to motivate them, get them interested, but you have to sort of balance that with getting them to look really closely at what they're doing. So, I mean, I don't know... Of course in fact they didn't find it boring at all, they really found it interesting. So, I don't know whether they even meant that or it's just a standard reaction to teachers, like 'I don't want to do this 'cause you're going to tell me, 'cause it's your idea to do it, not ours.' Because they said the same with poetry, but then, most of them were off and wrote a poem. But it was **their** poem that they wrote, so it's OK.

E: Do you think that it is necessary to read novels loads of times as well?

Claire: Yeah. I do, really... which I suppose is why it's difficult to teach them at school because you don't really have the time to do it. I mean I was teaching some short stories recently. Not that I would have chosen short stories. I would have chosen a novel for a set text for my Year 11s, but I had to read the stories several times to really appreciate... Because you have to go to the ends, to come back, to see the significance of things. So, in a way I think that they do have to read it... have to read it more than once and maybe it's not that practical to read a novel lots and lots of times. But, perhaps have close readings of parts of the text or... show them... a lot of them, if they've been made into a film or something, to watch that as well and... But, I think there must be some way of reinforcing it other than to just read it once and that's the end of it. Because you've forgotten a lot of what happened in the beginning, certainly can't remember the detail of the language.

E: It is true that pupils come from... they have different backgrounds. They all come from their own community and they have different experiences as well and so on. Do you think that these differences that

they have in terms of experiences and backgrounds and character, individual differences, and so on... do you think that these differences affect their reading of texts? And, if they do affect, do you see that in class? Do you see that when you read a text with them?

Claire: I think they do... And I do think that it does affect their reading of the text on one level. But, I think your different experiences will necessarily mean that the way you approach a text or things you can relate to in a text... or it will have a certain meaning for you that someone else may not see. However, I think there are meanings in texts... There are different interpretations, of course, because people have different experiences. But two things about that really. One is that I think that underlying that there is basically a meaning there, which... you're trying to understand something deeper than individual, different experiences. Like, different experiences are coming from a different ethnic group, being a man or being a woman... There's sort of underlying, human characteristics or issues about being a human being, and being in a relationship, that I think, in a way, are more important for me personally. Although I do see that different experiences mean that some children will... Like when... The school I was at, the last school I was at, the level of literacy was very very low. 90% of the students were black Afro-Caribbean. Some students were Muslims. And, when I had a Year 10 class, nobody nobody... I mean their level of literacy was so low that they barely did anything in class at all. But, we read Blake... I tried to read Blake with them, because it was on the GCSE syllabus and I had to, but I really love Blake anyway. And, a few of the boys in the class really were inspired by 'Tiger', because they came from backgrounds where... they were obviously quite religious or religion meant something to them... and because I think I'd sort of emphasised in a way a lot of the religious imagery in the poem and I'd brought that out for them, then they were able to relate to that. Then, one of them actually went away and he found some other Blake poems and he read them and he came back and he wanted to talk to me about them. So, obviously the fact that he was religious in some way had given him access to the poem, or an interest in the poem. But, maybe other students in the class weren't interested in or couldn't see. However, I don't think that that necessarily changed what was there in the poem. It may change... I don't think that there is just this range of interpretations that are all equally valid. I just think that it meant that it was more accessible to him, because he had some interest or he could relate... it was easier for him to relate to it. And, I suppose you choose books thinking perhaps the experiences of these children might enable them to be motivated enough to want to access this literature. Now, what I'm trying to think... Like, doing... choosing to do a particular novel, like... I've completely forgotten what it's called... a GCSE novel that we do... it's completely gone out of my head what it's called... Anyway, it's about a black girl who's a slave...

E: Toni Morrison's book *'Beloved'*?

Claire: No, no Toni Morrison's book. Not *Beloved*. It's by Mildred Pears... Mildred... anyway, something, *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*. And, I suppose choosing to do a novel like that because you think that, if you've got loads of black kids in your class, that you don't want to be patronising but you think they may be interested in the experiences of this black child growing up in America, and experience of alienation that perhaps they can relate to, because of their own experiences. And, they might be more interested and more motivated to read it. I don't mean... I don't think that that means that only they can read it. I think that it's... I would never choose a text unless I thought it was a valid text in its own right, it was a good book. But, I do think that you might choose a text and maybe you'll choose... I might choose to do, say, *Educating Rita*, as a play, because it's got a lot of issues about class and the importance of education, with a group of kids that I know are basically like Rita. Because perhaps they might relate to it.

E: And, do you think at the end they do relate?

Claire: Sometimes. I think sometimes. If it's made accessible to them and they're interested enough, they will. Of course, you can't... it's never... because there's always the issue of motivation which is very important. If they're not really prepared to do the reading... maybe they won't... But then again... You see, I read... I chose to do the 'Conflict' poems in the anthology which is the GCSE text and they have... for the literature paper, they have groups of poems and lots of the teachers in our school chose to do 'Hearts and Partners' because they're all love poems and they thought 'well, we'll do love poems because it's really easy for the kids to relate to.' I chose to do 'Conflict' because it's all about conflict and it's got some... basically because it's got better poems in it, as far as I was concerned. But, I had a Wilfred Owen's poem 'Exposure' and it had a couple of other poems in it that were really about war and also about family conflicts and different things... but they really... initially could not relate to that Wilfred Owen's experiences of war, because, of course, what do they know about the First World War? At a personal level, they don't know anything about it. However, by the end of the poem they... by the end of the section most of them liked that poem the best. And, I think that's because it probably, in my opinion, was the best poem. Because they'd understood it then, so they related to it. So, I don't think that they would... it may change the way they interpret things, but I think that it's about giving them access to something and if it's worth reading, it will be worth reading to everybody. But... if that's an answer to your question... I don't know.

E: Yes. You made many interesting points. So, if I understand it well you think that yes, the background is important, pupils' differences are important in the reading of a text, that you can have different interpretations, but still there is a meaning... there is an interpretation?

Claire: An idea.

E: ... an idea that is in the text and the other interpretations that they might make of the text are fine so long as they are motivated and feel interested in the text... Am I getting it right?

Claire: Yeah.

E: ... but still it is important to channel them, to direct them towards this...

Claire: To try to get them to access...

E: ... to access this meaning, this idea in the text.

Claire: At least the ideas, to discuss those ideas. I mean they may not agree but I think you can channel them to access ideas.

E: And then, there is this other thing... that if you choose texts that have issues to which they can relate to more then it is...

Claire: It's easier to motivate them.

E: So, it is possible to accommodate difference in class?

Claire: I think so, yeah. Because I think that if you have a mixed group in a classroom, the fact that it's of interest to some of the... there will be of course... but all the students in the classroom will have different experiences even if they come from the same ethnic background or the same class, they will all have their own particular, private experiences of things. So, you could never choose anything that would... You think 'well, I can fit this into this class because they are all the same.' They're all different anyway, aren't they? All the students are different, but the fact that they're all peers and if you teach in a way that they can talk to each other and share experiences, I think, and help each other to understand those experiences, that they will be interested. Of course, you can't account for the kids that are not at all interested in anything, those are... I think... I'm talking about... but generally I think you can motivate them.

E: And do you think that this teaching technique, this reading technique that you use in class, not only you but that teachers use in class, with the close reading, the activities, looking at the language, the style, the characters and so on, do you think that they help the pupils to express their differences? Do they have the chance, the opportunity of expressing their different readings?

Claire: I think they do have the opportunity when, for example, they discuss... when they discuss in groups what they think the meaning of the text is, they have a chance to... I mean, for example, I would never say to them 'you're wrong about that!' I would never say that. I would say 'you could think... Yes, of course you think about it like that' and they will have a chance to discuss with each other what they think. Usually there'll be a time when they... Like... I often ask them to ask questions about a text rather than to make statements about it initially, because I think getting them to ask questions about a text opens them up in a way to discussing it more than making statements about it. And if I ask them questions, set them activities which ask them questions, they're usually directing them towards something that I understand in the text, but I appreciate that I may read it differently because my experiences will be different to theirs. However, I'd probably think that my reading was more valid than theirs though, but I wouldn't say that to them.... But I would believe that, you know.

E: But you will keep it to yourself...

Claire: But I would keep it to myself. And, in that sense, I've never oppressed them and say 'your opinion is not valid'. So, I think they do have an opportunity. And, certainly in their writing they have an opportunity, because there's always... if I ever give them a structured essay to write, I would always put in their essay plan, if I even do an essay plan to help them, mainly to help them structure their writing, there would always be 'express your opinion, give your interpretation.' That would always be a thing I would ask them to do.

E: One last thing, one last question. Do you think you are a typical English teacher?

Claire: No, I don't actually. [She laughs.] I don't know. I think in some ways I'm a typical English teacher because... and I haven't been in teaching, in English teaching, long enough to know whether I am a typical English teacher or not. But, I know that I have lots of differences of opinions with other English teachers that I speak to. And, I only say that I don't think I'm typical in the sense that I very much... I very much feel very angry a lot of the time at the work I see children doing in school. For example, storyboarding poems and... Because I feel quite strongly that there is no reason to believe that a child can draw because they've reached the age of fifteen. That's art. Why should we assume they have the skill of drawing? And, why should drawing have anything to do with understanding a poem? I think maybe I take a harder line than a lot of English teachers, and a lot of things I want to do in a classroom are maybe more... I wouldn't say old-fashioned, but maybe they relate more to the way I did things, even though I already told you that the way I did things was really boring and I had that... perhaps it's more to do with... maybe it has affected me in some way. But, I sort of feel we should be more... we should be asking children to be more academic earlier on in school, and maybe that's because I was in a more academic environment in my own schooling and I see the benefits now. And probably also because of my own... well, I came from a working-class background and I feel very strongly...

[The tape finished but still Claire carried on talking for about a minute. In the closure of the interview she said the following:]

She thinks that it is easier for working-class students to gain access to literature if you teach them the skills, the techniques, in an explicit way. It is OK with middle-class students because they will do it anyway as they have these skills from home. However, with working-class children you need to be more clear if you really want to help them.

English Interview No 6:

Jennifer

(5 / 6 / 1998)

Jennifer is a white woman in her thirties and is head of English at a girls' school in London. She did not mind the interview to be recorded and was eager to talk. She gave me the impression that she was aware of the time and this is why at some point I suggested that we stop. Even though she asked me if I wanted to put more questions to her, still she seemed happy that it was over as there was pressure for her to attend to her duties. The interview took place at the department staffroom but there was nobody around and there was no interruption.

E: First of all, could you talk to me about the memories of reading literature that you have from your childhood?

Jennifer: You mean from school?

E: Yes, from school.

Jennifer: I don't actually remember reading an awful lot in my Year 7, 8 and 9, which was then first, second, third year. I was very naughty at school, very, and I would spend a lot of time outside the classroom... I remember our teacher reading us a book in our first year called *The Long Walk*, which was a sort of thing about a Russian miner escaping from a prison. I remember really liking it. I always liked the books that we read... But, I can't remember actually reading a lot of literature until I got to... my doing my O' levels. I really can't... Can I?... No! And... Now I remember reading the things that we did... We did *Under Milk Wood*, which was a play but we read it very much sitting behind desks. I don't think there was any attempt to sort of think about the language and the fact that it should have been probably read in a Welsh accent although I think we did hear the record, we had a record afterwards that we listened to... We read Shakespeare which was only done at O' level then, *Romeo and Juliet*. I didn't really... Again it was a play that we read sitting around in our desks and I remember **not** being interested in it at all much and thinking it was really boring, because it just didn't come alive. I actually remember reading it myself the night before the exam and remembering huge quotations and I didn't really... I mean I knew the plot, I knew the story but I didn't know anything like... the way the girls understand it now... the students understand it now. I just knew the story and then I'd memorised huge chunks of the text so that when I went into the exam a lot of my question, my answer was quotes and they must have thought that I had fantastic knowledge of the play, which I didn't at all. And, I got a B for literature which was just quite difficult, quite astonishing. What else did we do? We did *Far from the Madding Crowd* as well and I remember quite liking that but again it was always read in the same way. We used to start the lessons and then we'd read. We would all take it in turns to read or he would pick on people to read great chunks of it. And, then we had to read a bit at home and discuss it and do essays. It wasn't exactly exciting stuff really...

E: Why was it that it was not exciting? Because, I mean, you read it, you discussed it and... What was missing?

Jennifer: Any sort of relating... I think there was no... Nobody tried to relate it to our sort of lives, as far as I remember. I think it was just huge, huge periods of reading where we would start getting a bit... you'd start drifting off and start thinking about something else rather than stopping or even trying to put something into some context. There was no... never any attempt to do any role-plays or to think about the situation and try to possess it and to try to do something with it. For example, *Far from the Madding Crowd* when Asha writes the letter to Mr. Boldwood. Why didn't we have a go writing that letter? First, for example? Because we would have loved that, writing a love letter. But none of that sort of thing happened. It wasn't very active. It was just very dry reading. And, I think we just felt that it was just going into the lesson and read huge amounts of text and he would explain words that he thought we might not understand.

E: And what about the discussion? What were the discussions about?

Jennifer: Very much to do with what was happening in the plot, I think. More than looking at why people... I mean this is a long time ago for me and I might be doing my teachers great injustice... But I can't remember getting excited about... looking at why people behaved and what sort of situation was in terms of the characters and why... looking... trying to look at why... how we would behave in those sort of situations at all... It was very much to do with what's going on in the plot really, so that we could go... I think what it was, it was a big book and I think it was very geared to this exam. You know, we were going to go into exam and take exams on these books. And, it was very much to do with recall of how much you remembered in those days, I think, more than how much you could really appreciate and understand.

E: So, it was more exam-oriented?

Jennifer: Yeah, I think so. And also in Hardy there is a lot of description of place and I remember sometimes sitting through huge chapters of describing things and thinking 'Oh, God!' But there was no interaction with it. We weren't really expected, I don't think, to actually interact with the text. We were expected to read it.

E: Would you read outside school?

Jennifer: Yeah. I did. I read a lot outside school. I read... I had two sort of things going. I had one... Because I was a very naughty girl at school I wanted to promote an image, especially with some of the boys that I fancied, but I was actually quite clever naughty, I liked that image of being naughty but not stupid. Because there were a lot of naughty girls at the school who weren't very bright. And, I know the teachers didn't think I was very bright because I was entered for CSE first, and then, I was entered for O' level as well. But... So, I used to go around with sort of books that I thought really looked really good in my pocket of my coat. Like... one of them I carried around with me a lot was Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, 'cause I just thought that was brilliant. And I read probably a little bit of it. I never actually got to finish it, I don't think. But, I used to have a green parka coat, really scruffy coat... my mum desperately wanted me to throw in the bin... and I'd go around with a copy of this and a packet of Winston cigarettes, soft top, because it was an image thing. But, I actually did enjoy reading. I remember reading *Three Men in a Boat*, and thinking it was fantastic. I used to... because I liked to be funny at school as well... I used to like to take... lift things from books that I found really funny. I used to use sort of sarcastic language as well, picked up from these texts, in situations. So, I read a lot of Isabelle Blightman when I was in the first year, but then I did start reading other things, like... *Three Men in a Boat*... I don't remember... I remember reading... *Little Women*. So, some sort of classics... But I never read anything like Jane Austin or anything like that. And I read sort of modern stuff as well. And... It is very difficult for me to remember...

E: So, I get the idea that it was not the school that made you, encouraged you to become a reader. It was something else... it was an image that you wanted to create...

Jennifer: Partly yes. And the fact that I did like language. I liked reading... I liked reading books that... like... Do you know... Have you read *Three Men in a Boat*?

E: No.

Jennifer: There is a sort of very... it's a pre-twentieth century novel, very famous sort of quintessential English novel but it's a funny novel and the language is very funny, and kind of quite sarcastic and lofty.

E: Was there anybody at home that encouraged you to read?

Jennifer: Yeah. My father was a teacher as well and so... Well, he was... He was an academic really. And, he certainly encouraged me to read. But, I am a twin and my brother never read. He never read anything. My sisters used to read too.

E: And then, you moved on to study English at the University?

Jennifer: I did A' levels at another school... Because I was a very naughty girl I had to pay to do my O' levels because no one thought I would get any. And this is perhaps one of the things why I wanted to promote myself as a clever person because all the teachers thought I didn't have the slightest chance of getting anything. So... and then... the whole year group did a mock O' level and I got by far the highest grade and they thought they'd better enter me so they entered me for the O' level. And it took on from there. And then I went on to... So, this was a school that didn't have a sixth form. So, I went to do A' levels at a College. And, I was still not really committed there as well. I nearly got chucked out. And I read some books through... I read there some A' level stuff, but I can't remember what we did. We did /.../ and another Thomas Hardy somewhere along the lines and the Shakespeare *King Lear*. And then, I went and did... I got A' level... really quite poor results, A' level results, because I was never at College. I was always... I was off with boys and friends and things. And so, the only place that would take me on... Because I wanted to go and do a degree, really because I didn't want to do anything else, not because I desperately wanted to... I just didn't want to have a job and I wanted to carry on having fun at school. And so I went and did a degree in Humanities which had an element of English in it. So, it was English and Philosophy.

E: And then, you became a teacher? An English teacher?

Jennifer: No. Not really. Then, I went to Greece for four years...

E: Which part?

Jennifer: Are you from Greece?

E: Yes.

Jennifer: Oh, yeah. I went to Kozani for a year which was very strange. It's a very strange place, not the Greece I thought I was going to, very industrial, near Thessaloniki. And then, I went to Crete for three years. Where are you from?

E: I'm from Athens.

Jennifer: OK. So, I went to Crete for three years and lived in Chania and taught English at *frontistiria*. And I had a great time. And I've got into teaching then really. Because I wasn't a teacher. I had no qualifications to teach and they would let you teach in these places. Because they run... because they wanted an English person. And I used to teach very badly there. We didn't really do any teaching I suppose, really, not properly. But I liked it. I liked standing up in front of a class. And I really got into reading in a big way. There was a library there, where you could borrow books from. There was a community of English people who had got books when they came back from England and would share them.

E: Should we move on to your experiences with teaching literature? I guess it is different from the way that you experienced teaching literature... I mean, the reading of literature in your school as a child.

Jennifer: Absolutely.

E: What kind of differences would you identify?

Jennifer: Well. Choice of texts. We, particularly in Year 7, 8 and 9, we spend a lot of time thinking carefully about the students and what sort of texts would relate to them. I'm not saying that we do texts that are just about young Asian girls /.../, in no way. We do do classics as well. We do... we try to think of a broad range. Our starting point would always be trying to find a connection with the students. So, if we're doing something like *Macbeth* for example even, you'd start with the connection with the students. It depends on what's going on... you could do some Rose West... you could use *The Lion King*, I do when I do *Macbeth*. There's a range of things you could grab from their experiences before you go into a text. It's much more to do with... we try very much to relate it to the students' lives. We do a lot of... it's much more active. There's a lot of... It was very... when I was at school, for example with Shakespeare, it was very... we were very respectful of Shakespeare and we just don't do that any more. You can do what you want. With *Julius Caesar* you can turn it into *East Enders*, use the soaps because the students love it. So, you can cast... Do you know *East Enders*?

E: Yes.

Jennifer: Do you watch it?

E: No.

Jennifer: You can cast... you can think about *Julius Caesar* and the characters and you can create an identical situation in *East Enders* from *Julius Caesar*, using the gangster theme that's going on there. And, we let the students... encourage the students to do scenes in their own language. And to think about, for the Asian girls, to think about how these things would emerge in their sort of culture. We have... we do not read Shakespeare sitting down behind desks, but we're up doing things with it the whole time. There's an active thing because it's supposed to be read like that. So, we have people up from their seats running around the room. It's chaos when we do Shakespeare. It's just completely, people running about shouting and we have musical instruments. And... it's much more alive and the students love it. They really do.

E: Do you work on all the texts like that?

Jennifer: Absolutely. But that would be our start. I don't think you can just go in and start pulling a text apart without having a huge understanding of where it's coming from and the context and everything. And then, you can start looking at it. And so we do. And, the students, the girls love things like looking at some of the metaphorical language in Shakespeare, because they... Once you understand the situation, it's like a puzzle, a crossword puzzle of some kind, unravelling things. It's the same with poetry. If you're going in with a /cold/ poem, you can sort of like spring it on the students and the students you say 'Here is Seamus Heaney. This is about his father dat, dat, dat. Let's have a look at this.' The students are /.../ of them... especially in our school where we have mixed ability, we don't stream. So, we have got a huge range of ability in the classroom. And so, what you try to do is think about your family, your father, your parents, your... to get the whole thing... maybe spend a couple of lessons doing what we call the 'launch', trying to relate... putting the whole thing into some sort of context. And then, going into the text and looking at the language closely. So, you might start broadly and you narrow it all the way down to looking at the language. So, you're not looking at language in isolation, which is what I think I was doing, without any kind of connection with anything. But, the students should quite appreciate the context and where they're part in it.

E: So, when you were at school what you would do was that you would explain words and discuss the plot. But then, now you move on to something that is broader?

Jennifer: But I think you need to... there needs to be something before that. That's what I'm saying. It's really... it's trying to /initial/ your students. Because it would be different depending on what sort of school you are. And, you'd be looking at how you can go in there and connect with the students and address their identity as well. You're looking at their identity and how... what... if you look at a text and you're thinking 'what relevance has this got to our students?', 'How does this address their core identity?'... 'What... How can we make this relevant...' And once it's relevant then they become interested in it and they know how it connects with their lives. Then, they're more likely to understand and more likely to be more wanting... more willing to look at language closely. I think we get very good results because of that.

E: I see. What is the intake of the school?

Jennifer: You mean how many?

E: No. Basically, are they from minorities...?

Jennifer: Yes. There's a... probably it's changing now... but there's probably about... I couldn't tell you exactly... between 40 to 50% Asian, Pakistani. We've got quite a lot of African Caribbean students, some African students, and East London white students, collect a sort of... clutch of middle-class white students, sort of quite... parents sort of quite well-to-do who want to send their children to a state school. So, it's a multicultural school really.

E: Do you think that their different background affects the way they read? Because you talked about addressing... the need to address their identity and you also talked about the need to find a relation, a link between the text and their lives. Do you think that students who come from different backgrounds, who have

a different background, different gender and so on - but of course this is a girls school, anyway... Do you think that their different background affects the way they read a text?

Jennifer: Yeah. I mean... yes. I think it does. I think one of the interesting things is that when we have students who... often we have students who've come from Iraq or refugees or students from... the Asian students as well. Actually, people say 'Gosh! It must be so tough doing Shakespeare with those students because they don't have... it's very difficult for them to understand the language...' But, themes for them are actually easier to understand than it is for the white indigenous population here. Because if you're looking at *Romeo and Juliet* and you're looking at arranged marriages, the idea of a forbidden relationship, or a relationship where the family certainly doesn't want the other family to marry... for the children to marry... There is a far more... actually, a better understanding of that from the Asian students than there is from the white students. Because for them you can marry who you want. OK, parents might not approve but it's not a question if it's not approving. And then, you talk about life and death situations... it's the same with some things like *Othello* or if you look at *A View from the Bridge* by Arthur Miller, where it's a question of honour and male pride. Again these sorts of concepts are actually quite... I'm trying... and I hope I'm not stereotyping... but are far stronger in sort of those cultures than they are in our culture... you see what I mean... in sort of the London white culture... the idea of somebody rather dying for their honour or behaving in a certain way. And so actually, those sorts of things are very interesting. So, one can make misconceptions... We can think that the background does affect but not in the way that most people think that if you're coming from a household where you speak a different language then they're going to find it very difficult to understand these things. In fact that's not always the case, because the culture might even be so advantageous to them that it will help them to gain a deeper understanding in some cases. But, I mean I don't know... we... I teach girls and the girls read. We're lucky because girls do read. As you know, it's the boys that... where the difficulty is. And generally, they're well-motivated...

E: Do you think that the activities, the methods that you use in class promote the expression of different readings from the different students?

Jennifer: Yes. I think so. Because I think that if you... we do... it's not always read as a whole-class text and they can be read as groups with interpretations coming across. And if we give the students their own time to... role-play, prediction, or to think about what's going to happen next, then you are going to get different readings. You are... we are going to give them room for that. But, when you're doing GCSE exam work you haven't got room for that. You've got a right answer really, to give it to them. So, when we read *To Kill a Mockingbird* or something, they've got a mark scheme that we've got to make sure the students have before they get into the exam and they know what... So, lower down there is room for interpretation and there's certainly space for different readings.

E: But not when it is exam oriented?

Jennifer: Not always. No. Because you are constrained by the right answer.

E: You mean that the exam boards ask for the right answer?

Jennifer: Well, in the... Yes. Because their questions have mark schemes very tightly connected to them. And, if you're going to go in and write an essay about a character in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there're certain things you have to say in order to be able to get a high grade... to fulfil... they literally tick these exam questions with a list next to them of points that they're supposed to have raised.

E: And do you think there is a right answer?

Jennifer: Sometimes. Sometimes, perhaps. Not always. It depends.

E: On what?

Jennifer: Well, it depends on your interpretation of why people behave in the way they do... what the message is supposed to be. It's difficult to talk about this if you don't know the text I'm talking about too... I mean there is a short story that a lot of people use called 'Turned' and there's... what happens in the end... there's a very open story, really. Some girls think that the ending is a lesbian ending, some girls think that it is not. And, we used to say what's right there and what's wrong.

E: But, there are other texts that promote, that have a right, a correct reading?

Jennifer: Yeah.

E: So, it depends on the text?

Jennifer: Yes. And, I think you have to point that out, because sometimes if you're reading books that are about racism, and this is something that happens very early on as well, some of the students find it difficult to understand that if you're reading a book with racist characters in it, that the book isn't racist. So, they read a book where it's got... language and like... a character is calling another character 'Paki', or maybe it is narrated by a racist character and the students would say 'This is awful. This book is racist!' And, you've got to point them in the right direction because what we're doing here is... in order to write about racism you have to have racist characters. And so, that's an education for them. So that there is a danger that students could take something like that and get the wrong impression and I'm not going to say 'Oh, yes! Whatever you say is right! You can interpret this in any way you want.' Because I don't want that message. It's too important for them to get it wrong. So, we do point things out. It's very flexible, I think, depending on the text that you're reading.

E: How do they react to the reading of literature in general?

Jennifer: They love reading... Again it depends I suppose on the teacher as well. If you're going full of enthusiasm about a text too and if you like teaching it, then that wipes off. It's the most... in a way for me... still, although the changes of National Curriculum, is the thing I most like teaching. When I first started teaching all we did was texts... all we did was read. And all the work came out of the books that we did. And I loved that. And now we have to do things that I'm not that keen on. And, even poetry is... if we'd read a book of which... are set in autumn... we'd read some Seamus Heaney autumn poetry or something... and that would all come out, the whole thing... that's what would be the context in the novel. Now, we're moving on to doing different things, there's more demands in the curriculum. And I think... I don't know... it must depend on the teacher. If you feel secure with what you're teaching as well the students respond better. But in my experience the students read. We have silent reading lessons where the students read. We do... have a culture of reading here, where we recommend books to each other, teachers going there with books. I read a lot of teenage fiction and I go in and promote things. Sometimes, the students will read what I am reading.

E: One last question because I think you need to go. Do you consider yourself to be a typical English teacher?

Jennifer: I don't know. I don't know. I really don't. Because I really, I really love the job and I love teaching. And I spend most of my life engaged in the job in some way or another. Perhaps too much. So, I don't know really. You'd have to... I mean here we are very like-minded. So, there's a typical teacher in [...] School for Girls. Have you got lots more questions?

E: No.

Jennifer: Are you sure? Is that OK.

E: No. That's OK. Thank you.

Jennifer: Thank you. I hope that's OK.

English Interview No 7:

Mark

(18 / 6 / 1998)

Mark is a white man in his forties and is head of English at a comprehensive school in a working-class area of London. He was eager to talk and did not object to my recording the interview. Our discussion took place at a small quiet office and was interrupted only once, when another teacher came in to take some books.

E: I am basically interested in the reading of literature as a process in schools and I've been interviewing English teachers about how they see literature and the reading of literature. In fact, we usually go back to their childhood memories, and then, moving on we come to their present thoughts and perceptions of the subject. So, would you like to talk to me about what memories you have of reading literature at childhood?

Mark: When you say literature, are you meaning specifically works within what might be construed as the 'literary canon'? In other words, things... works that somebody has decided are literature with a capital L, if you like? Is that what you're talking about or just reading any sort of fiction at all?

E: What do you think?

Mark: 'Cause the answer... OK. Let's talk about the literary canon for a moment. By the way, have you read the stuff I wrote about *The Merchant of Venice*?

E: Yeah.

Mark: OK. Fine. The first memory, I suppose, I have of reading a text that would be construed as part of the canon would have been when I was about twelve or thirteen and I went to a boys' grammar school, a selective school on the outskirts of Liverpool. And... maybe... I was eleven or twelve, I think. And, we were reading *Great Expectations* in class and we'd just started and the lesson wasn't being taken by our ordinary English teacher for some reason. It was being taken by a Deputy Head. And, the school was... I suppose this is back in about 1970. The school was very traditional. The teachers, who were nearly all men and it was a boys' school, wore gowns, academic gowns, that sort of thing. I think that the Deputy Head in question, who was a very sort of remote authority figure to me as an eleven or twelve year old, fairly new in the school, was rumoured to have a wooden leg as a result of a wound from the Second World War. And whether it was true or not, who knows? But, that was all part of the kind of context within which this reading of the text happened. And, the thing I remember is sitting somewhere near the back of the room in a classroom where there were individual desks for each student and we were assigned a place, I imagine in alphabetical order. And so, I sat at the back because my surname is [...] and the rows had fend around and there I was. And, it was a sunny afternoon and it was quite warm. I suppose it was September or something. And, I remember nothing of any interest until... I imagine that the teacher was reading the whole thing and we were merely following. I think that's what was happening. And, it came to Magwitch's line when he says to Pip 'Hold your noise.' And, it's this moment that has made the memory stay with me. Because suddenly from a reading that was flat and uninteresting, the Deputy Headteacher taking the lesson shouted – and I won't do it now, because it might hurt your microphone – shouted 'Hold your noise!' And at that moment, Magwitch's position as an adult in a position of power, however precarious, over young Pip was compounded and reflected in the power relationships in the classroom. But it was also because of that, that sense in which the Deputy Head wholly became Magwitch and we became Pip, I suppose, it was a moment in which the text became dramatised. And, I suppose we were terrified in the way that Pip was terrified within the text.

E: Do you mean that it would be the teacher who would read the text?

Mark: The teacher was reading the text. And then, I don't remember. I remember nothing else about *Great Expectations* from that reading of it at all. I don't remember doing any work. I don't remember talking about *Great Expectations*. I only remember that moment. I don't know what else happened. I remember at more or less the same time reading Gerald Durrell's *My family and other animals* in a similar sort of classroom, in a similar sort of way, and there I'm sure that what we did do was for each of us to have to read a portion of the text in turn. And I remember... I didn't hate it but it meant nothing. It had no significance to me and this story about a kind of slightly eccentric but clearly very middle-class English family in the Mediterranean and about the flora and fauna of the island and all sorts of stuff like that, just seemed completely remote and... I think it would be dangerous for me to overemphasise the significance of this memory, but I do remember thinking it was a slightly strange way of spending the time to be reading about the noise that cicadas made when I didn't have a clue what a cicada was. And why should I? And so, that text certainly was something that we had to read. We had to read when the teacher told us to read a bit aloud. Why? I don't know. But, that was how it was organised. Again I don't remember any other activity, any writing, any discussion of the text. I only remember reading the text. I don't know how that fitted into anyone's conception of anything else that might have been going on. After that... what else?... I remember reading, again at the age... maybe when I was twelve or thirteen, *Henry IV (Part I)*, Shakespeare's *Henry IV (Part I)* and liking it because at that age I liked history. And it seemed like that was real because it was

historical. So, it wasn't its status as literature that conferred any significance on it for me. It was the fact that this was something to do with real history, I think.

E: Would you read literature, fiction at home at that age? Because, I mean sometimes there are some people who say, usually men, who say that 'You know I was a boy and usually boys we wouldn't be very fond of literature' and so on.

Mark: No. I remember earlier reading boys' adventure stories 'Biggles'. Do you know that? It's terrible, awful. If I were to look at it now I would choke myself. Terribly racist, terribly self-satisfied with a view of British imperialism. But they're all... they're novels about this guy called Biggles who's this kind of fairly upper-class fighter pilot, British fighter pilot, and his crew in a succession of aircraft. And they're both in... I think some of them might even be set in the 1914-18 war. But certainly, through from then on and through into the Cold War. But, that's what I read. I read dozens of them and I read them voraciously when I was eight, I think. And that's my first real memory of reading, being something that I did because I wanted to. I remember spending summer holidays just reading and I remember Friday nights reading after I was meant to be asleep and sort of reading surreptitiously. That reading was kind of real and a passion and something that mattered to me.

E: Why?

Mark: Because the world of Biggles and his friends was a very attractive one to me and I escaped into it, I think. I think it was kind of dead, straightforward in a sense, identification with fictional characters and... yeah... I think that's what that was about.

E: Was it also because of the culture, boys' culture...?

Mark: Yes, yes, definitely.

E: Because maybe your friends would read these books and maybe you would discuss these with them?

Mark: No. I don't remember that at all. It's possible but I don't remember having conversations with my friends, my peers about what I was reading. No, I suspect not. I think the books were around in the first place because I have three older brothers who were all about ten years older than me. And, the books that I started reading were their books. And, at school with my friends I remember talking about football and reading football magazines but not any conversations about the novels I read at home even though they were adventure stories. You know, they wouldn't have been out of the question. They weren't sort of transgressive in any sense. But, no, I don't think so. I think it was a very private...

[There was an interruption because a teacher came in to take some books.]

E: And then, you went on to do A' level English?

Mark: Yeah.

E: Was there the same situation?

Mark: No. Different. One of the things was that between the ages of about eleven, maybe twelve, and when I started doing A' levels, when I was fifteen or sixteen, I didn't read fiction outside school at all. I read other things. I read history books, I read some politics, but I didn't read fiction. I sort of decided that it wasn't relevant or important or something. And even when I was doing A' level... I did A' level English literature, but I read the things that I had to read for the A' level. I didn't read independently. I didn't read any fiction outside that. And the only... I mean I liked it, I enjoyed it but I didn't think it was serious. I did history as well. And I thought history was the serious subject and English was just... Well, it was easy and it was, now and again, pleasurable but it was... Yes, I was dismissive about it really, I suppose. I mean it was a pleasant way of spending the time but I didn't think it had any sort of curricular seriousness. I mean I'm sure I wouldn't have used these words then but that was how I saw it.

E: Why was it that you became an English teacher then?

Mark: Well. That's a much longer process. I read English at University but my decision to read English happened fairly late. It happened really... practically after A' levels when... I'd always assumed I was going to read history. I suppose for most of my secondary schooling I had assumed that I was going to study history at University. And... I don't know exactly why the change happened but... I suppose partly I suddenly became aware that it was possible... possible in the sense that people really did do it, people really did read English. And, then actually I did sort of enjoy it and maybe I was quite good at it. And that's another thing, that it's very difficult to disentangle because of the traditional nature of the schooling that I experienced and because of the extent to which the reading of literature was perceived by me to be not something that happened because I wanted to read something so much but because our teacher said 'We will read this now.' And so, my sense of what I wanted to do was very closely tied up with a process of validation that depended on the teacher, the teacher saying 'Yes. You are good at this. Yes. You can do this. Yes. This is a good essay.' Or whatever. And so, because in the end I could even, I think, represent my choice to read English, to read literature, as being possibly determined by the fact that my English teachers gave me more praise than my history teachers. I mean it's as silly as that, I think, possibly.

E: Well, it's not silly.

Mark: Well. Silly in the sense that... Why do I think that's silly? I think it's silly because I think the division between literary texts and what I was doing in studying history was a very arbitrary one and one

that acted as a block on my really learning as much as I could have done. The fact that I was studying for A' level largely sixteenth and seventeenth century history at the same time as reading Shakespeare and yet I never had the opportunity, it never occurred to me that there might have been a connection between these two activities. Which seems a bit odd to me now really. And I don't think that's a particularly kind of effective or productive way of organising a student's experience of the curriculum. And even for my decision in terms of what I was to do at University, to be starkly posed in terms of literature or history but not both, seems something that is worth kind of questioning or problematising a bit, at this stage. Not then, though. Then, it seemed straightforward. But even so, even in reading literature at University, it still seemed to me to be a starkly frivolous thing to do, I suppose. And it wasn't... and I stayed at University and did research into seventeenth century drama after I'd finished my first degree. But, it wasn't really till after that that I came to London to train as a teacher. I think things to do with reading and therefore with literature started to begin to make sense. Because I suppose it was when I was training to be a teacher, a school teacher, that questions about what reading is and why people do it and how people do it, were first posed for me. And, it was through thinking about literacy that I think ideas about literature started to make more sense.

E: Was this in the Eighties?

Mark: It was. Yes. I came to [...] to do my PGCE in 1984. Yeah. I suppose I have always felt that I learned more about literacy and therefore more about literature in the year I spent doing my PGCE than I have done in seven years in [...], ostensibly studying literature and literary texts. And, I sort of was clearer on, a bit clearer, on what this process might involve, I think. Anyway. So, that's a bit of background.

E: And then, you moved to be an English teacher.

Mark: Yes.

E: Was it in this school?

Mark: No. I spent seven years, I think, no, six years in [...], the neighbouring borough. First of all as an English teacher and then as a Section 11 teacher, in a school that was 98% Bangladeshi, in terms of the student population, by the time I left. And then, I came here.

E: And... I know it is really difficult to sum up your ideas about what goes on in a literature class. I know that this is really difficult. But... I have a few questions. For example, what are your aims as a literature teacher?

Mark: [He puffs.]

E: Or...

Mark: No. I think it's a good question to ask. I don't have one aim. That's probably the first thing to say. And there are a whole number of different things. I'll try and just sketch out very briefly what I think probably I could characterise as being in some way my aims. I think using literature to foster the literacy would be one thing, using literature to help students to think and to give students a space in which to think. Clearly there's a lot more that could be pulled out of that statement but just as a broad aim. Two, to give students at some times in some ways a sense of fun and a sense of their power as readers, I think. To problematise what reading is, what the text is, what the relationship is between the text and the reader. And you think literature in some way to stand for all sorts of different texts. In giving students the opportunity to reflect on what's involved in our reading process. And also I suppose particularly in terms of my aims in the classroom, the more I think about it the more convinced I am that the reading that happens in the classroom is essentially collaborative. That it isn't just that collaboration is something that happens round the edges of the process of reading which can be characterised as simply leading towards the classic bourgeois reader, individual, isolated, a consumer of novels in splendid isolation. I think that's a misrepresentation of the kind of reading and of the processes of reading that are happening in classrooms. I think as teachers we have, at times and in places, paid attention to that collaborative process but it's still something which isn't recognised anything like enough. And here I'm thinking about, for instance, the conception of reading that underpins and is embodied in the National Curriculum documents, that actually doesn't recognise the extent to which reading happens amongst people, between people. That the model of reading in the National Curriculum is 'a' reader with 'a' text. The text delivers up its meaning to the reader. He'll comprehend its meaning more or less entirely, more or less correctly almost. Other aims... I suppose particularly thinking about literature with a capital L, the canon, whatever. Giving the students we might teach a sense that they're not excluded, that the canon isn't something that exists for other people, that it's something that they can have access to and can have useful and valuable things to say about, and that their ways of reading a canonical text are no less valid than other readers' ways of doing it. And, I suppose there are also other more short term, more functionalist aims. Like, in reality, for students in the last two years of statutory education, part of my aim is to get them through their GCSEs. And for any student that matters. It matters that they get the best grades they can. And, that's not the... There are contradictions between the aims. There are contradictory pulls. The sense that I've just nodded in the direction of, the sense of readers having power over texts, readers having valid ways of reading a text, is clearly to some extent in conflict with a system of accreditation which is largely based on terminal exams, on ways of assessing students as readers that depend on them giving answers to questions that are posed by unseen unknown examiners in exam

papers in exam rooms. And there are contradictions there, there are pulls. And my aims in the classroom, I suppose, kind of... to some extent teeter uncertainly from one aim to another really.

E: You have to find a balance or...

Mark: Well. A balance in a sense, but also in a sense accepting that at some stages it's possible to give greater emphasis to one thing and at other stages... Like, for instance, for Year 11 students, students approaching their GCSE exams, my immediate aim, because of the imperatives of the exams, is to say 'This is an artificial situation. It's not in a sense like the real reading that happens in a classroom. What I can do is to offer you some tips on how to get through this process.' And, you know, that's different from what I might try to do, say, with a Year 9 group and introducing them to *Romeo and Juliet* for the first time, where there is more space, there is more space for them to explore what's going on, there's more space in which they can operate as real readers of texts.

E: Because you don't have the exams at the end...

Mark: Yeah. I mean there is the SAT, but the fact is that the Key Stage 3 SAT means little or nothing. It might be something that schools get worried about in terms of how their results appear. But for the students themselves, who cares what SAT level they get at age fourteen, whereas the GCSEs that they leave school with are important for them.

E: The next question comes out of this. I could phrase it as what criteria you use when you choose a text for study? Or... You talked about studying the canonical texts, literature with capital L. So, I guess you have to do that. Do you read these texts because you have to, because of the syllabuses, or because you think that they must know these texts? How important is the text itself? Or, is it just the way you approach it and play with it? Is it clear what I'm saying?

Mark: Yes. The question is clear. The answer is not straightforward. I mean... Is the choice of text important? Well, yeah, kind of, it is. And I still remember one of my first experiences as a teacher back in Tower Hamlets, in the school, with a group of twelve thirteen year olds, giving them V.S. Reed's *Young Warriors* which is a novel written for young readers, I suppose teenager, pre-teenager readers, about a group of marine boys in Jamaica fighting back against the Red Coat soldiers. And, I think it's not a particularly interesting text in many ways. What I remember most clearly from that experience was this group of, I think there was one white boy in the class and all the rest were Bangladeshi, but they looked at the back cover and saw a picture of V.S. Reed and said 'This is written by a black man!' And, this is only twelve - thirteen years ago but they clearly... and most of... some of the kids were very recent arrivals from Bangladesh, others had been through primary schools in East London, and they clearly hadn't ever been aware that they'd be reading something written by a black person before. So, in that very straightforward sense it mattered that even within the limited resources of what was in the English stockroom there was a text that communicated a set of messages to them about the possibility of what they were encountering in English lying outside this... Here we're not talking about a particularly clearly defined literary canon but the fact of authorship and therefore in some senses authority being possessed by somebody with whom as Bangladeshis they identified.

E: Why?

Mark: Because he's black. Yeah. But, it's the fact that what they'd been given to read isn't simply the product of a white European consciousness mattered to them.

E: Is it because both come from the Other?

Mark: Yes. Yeah. I think. Again what I remember is that shock, that interest, and arising from that, a commitment to reading this text from the students. And I think it has mattered that in lots of classrooms, particularly in areas like Inner London, over the last two decades, there has been a much more serious attention paid to writers of literary texts who have come from outside any sort of narrowly defined notion of Englishness, who have to some extent reflected in their writing the experiences of the diverse student population reading these texts in classrooms in places like Inner London. And, I'd say that for many students whom I've taught or whom I've been aware of in the schools where I've been working, the simple fact that they have had the opportunity to read texts that represented and reflected on experiences of otherness, experiences outside any sort of narrowly defined or circumscribed notion of Englishness, or European-ness, has been important, has been a validating experience, has encouraged students to see themselves as learners in a more positive light, I suppose. But, I also think, going back to your question about criteria, I think even within the canon, however narrowly defined, there are good reasons for choosing some texts rather than other texts. From what I've already said, it matters and I would be sharply critical, I am sharply critical of the National Curriculum. For the fact that all the authors named in the National Curriculum as part of the English cultural heritage are white. And even when you look at the way that, for instance, Irish writers are treated, it's absolutely extraordinary that H.G. Wells is included and Oscar Wilde is not. It's absolutely bizarre. Bizarre but also I'd have to say that I don't think it's just bizarre. I think it is in extraordinarily overt ways an encoding of a British imperialism, an English imperialism, with a kind of blatantness that is quite shocking really. However, having said that, even if I was looking at, say, Shakespeare, I think there are good reasons for choosing one Shakespeare play rather than another to study with a group and I mean... I've written about this a bit. I'm clear that the reasons why I'd rather read *The Merchant of Venice* than *Henry IV*, say, but I think there are reasons to do with the space that different texts

open up for readers to think about what's going on, the opportunities for readers to foreground questions of interpretation varies from text to text. The extent to which I as teacher have to mediate a particular text isn't a constant, it varies. If I work... when I tried... when I did read *Henry IV (Part I)* with a group of fifteen year olds here a few years ago, I think it was a mistake. I think it was a mistake for a number of reasons. Partly because the history plays are just so male, so terribly male. And that's a problem if you're teaching Shakespeare to a mixed ability, mixed sex group, the fact that there are a couple of female parts and that's all, is a disadvantage. It counts against it in terms of... The experience I had of teaching that text to that group was that there were a number of very able, very articulate, actually quite motivated African Caribbean girls in the group who were bored rigid by the experience. And I think that was to some extent attributable to the particular characteristics of the text that I'd chosen. And my experience of reading, say, *The Merchant of Venice* is different partly because of the different opportunities there are to explore gender and also because of the simple fact that there are some kind of good interesting positive and problematic women's roles in plays like *The Merchant of Venice*. I think there are other things that make, for instance thinking about the age of the group which I teach, the fact that I teach up to sixteen, though in some ways I would quite like the idea of teaching *Othello*, say, I think *Othello* is very difficult for students of the age that I teach because I think the subject matter is less accessible than, say, the subject matter of *Romeo and Juliet*. I think Baz Lurman's *Romeo and Juliet* film, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, is brilliant in all sorts of ways. I don't think it's brilliant because it kind of... I don't think it misrepresents the text. I don't think it distorts it in any way. I think it is a wonderful interpretation. But one of the things that it makes absolutely clear is the extent to which it's a dynamic representation of adolescent sexuality. And I think it works absolutely superbly in that. But what I think... one of the things that *Othello* is dealing with is sexual relations that are not adolescent. It's dealing with the problems that confront older people in a relationship. And to expect fourteen-fifteen year olds to make sense of that is maybe expecting not very much. When I think it's... one of my colleagues here has been reading *Hamlet* with a group of fifteen year olds and it isn't... classically it isn't the kind of Shakespeare play that one would normally expect to do with a mixed ability group of fifteen year olds. And it works very well. She's had a very positive experience using it. I think partly because *Hamlet* is quite an adolescent figure and it's actually **not** hard for students to make sense of his experiences, however grotesque and non-naturalistic they might be. There are things there for students to grab hold of.

E: Going back a bit to what you said about this black writer's text that you used in [...], I got this feeling that it was successful because the students could identify more or less with... not identify but relate...

Mark: Yes. Yes.

E: And then, you talked about how important it is for students in Inner London because of the different communities, student communities in the schools, how important it is to read texts from these other cultures. And also you talked about the different plays by Shakespeare and how some are more appropriate, more easily read by students because they are more related to their experiences, more close to them. So, about the texts, is it a matter of them being close to their experiences? Is it a matter of them being able to relate, to identify with characters and so on? Do the texts have to be close to their ways? Do you see what I mean?

Mark: I do see what you mean.

E: Or, for example, it is not necessary for a teacher in a white middle-class school, somewhere in the Midlands, to do anything by a black writer?

Mark: No. I mean that wouldn't be my position.

E: Is it a matter of closeness and identification or is it a matter of seeing in texts different perspectives?

Mark: I don't think reality is either-or. It's both. Clearly I think it would be possible to marshal a different set of arguments when I teach in an all-white school, somewhere in the suburbs or somewhere in the wilds of wherever. Partly because, however all-white the school and the local community might be, it's still part of a society which is absolutely clearly and forever a multicultural society and so that sense that a range of literary texts can help to bring to any group of students a sense of otherness, yes, but a sense of the diversity of experience is kind of important. But also I think one of the complicating factors, of course, is that the way that students, the way that any of us reads texts isn't simply to do with a kind of naive identification with characters, their predicaments or a sense that the world of a text represents in some way a reflection of the world that we know. It's also to do with the extent to which we can read a text because of our ability to place it within a tradition, a set of generic conventions with which we are familiar. So, for instance, reading, let's see, *Romeo and Juliet* with a group of kids in this school. Turkish girls reading it will be able to identify with Juliet's position in the sense that the real constraints of parental authority aren't a long way from them. There is something there for them to identify with. But, a group of... say [...], who keeps on wandering in and out, has taught, when I've interviewed her as part of the [...] research, was talking about how a group of Asian girls, both Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian girls, before reading *Romeo and Juliet* but having been introduced to a kind of bit of a plot outline recognised it as a stock plot from Indian popular film. And so, it isn't just a question of identifying with Juliet's predicament in a sort of realist way. It's also to do with being able to fit that story into a convention of story-telling with which those students were every bit as familiar as the Turkish students might have been with aspects of life, if you see what I mean.

[At this point the tape came to the end and I had to changed to the other side.]

A narrative can provide a link with other narratives, other stories, other ways of telling as well as with what lies outside the literary or the filmic world and in the... world. So, the connections that students make with texts are kind of... there can be all sorts of different connections. And in some cases I have been really clearly and strongly aware of a direct... a student making sense of a text and a student feeling the power of the text because of a kind of one-to-one correspondence between something in the text and something in his or her immediate direct lived experience, whatever that means. But that wouldn't be my sole reason for suggesting that a kind of diversity of cultural experiences encoded and embodied within a range of texts being important as part of what my job is as an English teacher here. Because... I mean again the story that I started off with about the Bangladeshi boys reacting so positively to this figure of a black African Caribbean author is more complicated than that. It's not to do with a one-for-one identification with this figure. It is to do with a sense of possibility that's opened up...

E: One last question because I know that... Do you mean that the differences can be accommodated in a class? Differences in all sorts of ways, differences in terms of the students' background, cultural and social background, and differences in terms of the ways of reading, approaching a text, and so on. Is it possible to accommodate these differences, given the restrictions, the restraints of the National Curriculum? And do the students feel that 'Yes. It is open to differences.'?

Mark: I'm not sure there is one answer to that. And I'd even go so far as to say that the answer I'd give could well vary from group to group, from one group of students to another. Partly depending on the choices that I or whoever has been teaching them might have made. Partly depending on the dynamics of a group. Partly depending on the vagaries of the GCSE syllabus, and the anthology that we are using at the moment will be replaced in a year's time by a different anthology by the exam board. The new anthology seems to me to be vastly inferior in terms of offering far fewer opportunities for students to... not just for me to accommodate the diversity which was in a sense how you posed the question... but for students to be able to bring their diverse identities, subjectivities into the classroom and to make use of them together in reading the texts that we read together. I mean, very simply, the anthology that we use at the moment for the NEAB, for the GCSE syllabus that we follow, includes one of the named poets Seamus Heaney. The experiences that are reflected and encoded in the selection of Seamus Heaney poetry in the anthology are in no sense kind of close to or a mirror of any of the experiences of the students in the groups with whom I've read the Seamus Heaney poems. But, to replace Seamus Heaney, as has happened, with poets who are from a far narrower conception of Englishness is a problem for me. Because the fact of Seamus Heaney's Irishness opens up a possibility for exploring difference in the classroom in a way that what's going to supersede him doesn't. If what one has is simply English poets, because that's what they are, it's a problem. It makes it harder not just to accommodate difference but to use students' sense of their differences as an active constituent in the reading process. So that's part of the answer. The other thing is that it kind of varies from group to group because of the different ways that groups read the same texts. I mean, I go back to *The Merchant of Venice*. I'm still struck, I've been reading it now for about five years, I suppose, with different groups, and each group undoubtedly comes out with a different reading of it. And I think that comes across most clearly in the way that different groups read Portia, the character of Portia. Some come up... there is... I mean it's going back to what I was saying about collaborative reading and I think in a sense that my experience has been that groups, in ways that it would be very difficult to unpick, though I'm sure one could, come up with different conceptions of Portia's role that relate to a whole series of things going on in a particular group, particularly to the gender dynamics of a group. The more there are strong vocal girls in the group the more, the higher the chance that they'll come up with a reading of the whole play that recognises the absolutely pivotal role that I think Portia plays in kind of manipulating everyone else and affecting what happens. The more the girls in the group are pushed to the periphery within the dynamics of the group the more Portia will be kind of flattened out and become a set of plot conveniences rather than a dominating presence. Does that make sense at all?

E: Yes. It does.

Mark: All of which... I mean the fact, if it is a fact, of all these possibilities even in reading one text suggest there is still space there. What I think is worrying for me, I suppose, is the extent to which, because of the influence of the National Curriculum, because of the influence of GCSE syllabuses that are more and more prescriptive, what has been lost to a really significant extent during the time that I've been teaching in Inner London is the necessity for teachers to be accountable to the students about the choice of text. When I started teaching if I handed out a set of books and said 'We're reading this', if students said 'Why?' and they did, you know, they posed the question, I would have to answer that. I'd have to answer that. I would have to be accountable to them and that, I want to argue, was a very real reason why what was read in London classrooms in the 1980s began to pay more attention to that diversity of the student population. What's happened in the 90s effectively is that if students asked that question both the easiest answer and the most truthful answer for a teacher to give is 'Because we have to. We have to.' And, it isn't just that that's uncomfortable for me. It's also that that closes off possibilities and it deprives students of power as well as taking away power initiative from teachers. Does that make sense?

E: Yes. Of course it makes sense. Because I work as a Greek teacher teaching the Greek A' level and we have to choose four texts out of twelve. So, it's a very conservative choice I would say. And it is easy to say 'We have to do this. It's the easiest possible, the most accessible, so that's it.' OK. Thank you very much.

Greek Interview No 1:

Nefeli

(27 / 10 / 1998)

Nefeli is a white woman in her early sixties and works at a Lyceum (i.e. Upper Secondary School) in a neighbourhood of Athens. The interview took place at her place and thus there was no time pressure. She did not object to the interview being recorded and got used to the tape recorder after a little while. Like the rest of the Greek interviewees, she had not done a similar thing in the past, and thus, seemed a bit uneasy about the set-up of the interview, especially at the beginning. However, after a while, she relaxed and the discussion went well. Nefeli was also present at the last part of the interview with Stella, who is a friend of hers, and made a few remarks on that occasion as well. The interview with Stella (interview No 2) got the form of an open discussion towards the end, with both Stella and Nefeli contributing to the discussion.

E: What do you remember about reading literature as a student at school?

Nefeli: Well. What made a very strong impression on me were the detective stories. From the start I was trying to find the murderer at all costs. They made a strong impression on me... I am talking about a very young age... Children's novels made an impression on me as well, talking about children who were unfortunate and sea-beaten. In general, those who suffered and were possibly vindicated after a while.

E: Why was it that these particular novels made a strong impression on you?

Nefeli: These novels made a strong impression on me, firstly, because they excited my interest. In particular, the detective books excited my interest. I was stressed, in suspense, I was kept in suspense. I thought I became sharp-witted by making combinations of the people who were around the murder, because this was important for me. As for the other books, like *With Family* and *Without Family*...

[There was an interruption caused by the entry of a visitor.]

E: So, you were saying that you liked reading children's novels about unfortunate children. But first, you talked about the detective novels and why you enjoyed reading them. Then, you said that you liked reading children's novels about unfortunate children. Why?

Nefeli: Maybe because I was an unfortunate child as well.

E: And?

Nefeli: I was suffering with them. {i.e. I felt empathy for them.} They would talk to me. They fitted my psychology. I felt for them, I experienced their situations. I would cry, I would be filled with enthusiasm when things went well for them, I would be in great distress, I would hate those who exploited them.

E: Can you remember any titles of these books?

Nefeli: Yeah. *Without family*, *With family*, *The Secret of the Tower*, *David Copperfield*, *Uncle-Tom's Cabin*. Well, they were not all about children. *Notre Dame*...

E: Where would you get these books from?

Nefeli: I never owned a book. I would always borrow them or... in general, they would loan them to me. Sometimes, some rich children that were in my class would make me presents.

E: These were the books that you read at home, in your spare time. At school, what do you remember? What would you do in literature at school?

Nefeli: At school, especially at primary school, I remember a whole poem called *Matrozos* by Stratigis, which was about two and a half sides long and which I had learnt by heart. {I also remember the poem} *Meriase vraxe na diavo* by Valaoritis, which I knew by heart. These are from primary school. Some poems... In general, I would learn by heart all the poems that were in the primary school textbooks and would recite them with great ease. No matter whether they were about homeland, or about... Oh, yeah. 'Pity, oh, brother Christians, pity. God gives plenty to those he gives to.' I could memorise any poem with ease and recite it, because I liked reading.

E: And, at secondary school?

Nefeli: At secondary school things were completely different, because we would read Varnalis, we would read Livaditis... as far as poetry is concerned... Well, there we would read many more things. Solomos, Calvos, Elitis, Seferis, Cavafy...

E: And at school, in class, what would you do in a lesson? What you just said was what you read...

Nefeli: Well, yes. We would gather at the sand-pit {in the school yard}, for example, and we would read *If you want to be called a man* by Livaditis without permission, illegally. That is, I remember things that did not take place in class. But, texts which I would read of my own accord, because I had a certain ideology. And some poems met my desires, my hopes, my aspirations. For example, we would read *Kyr-Menti* by Varnalis, we would read Varnalis' poems and we would be touched, we would be moved, we would sing. There... Ritsos.

E: Do you mean that you don't remember anything about what was going on in class, in a lesson?

Nefeli: No, nothing. Absolutely nothing. I don't remember of a single teacher who managed to 'give' me a poem. Nobody at all.

E: *And you don't remember how you would read it, how you would approach it...?*

Nefeli: Neither how we would read it, nor how we would approach it. Absolutely nothing.

E: *You don't remember if you discussed it, for example?*

Nefeli: No, no, nothing.

E: *Can you think why it might be that you don't remember anything?*

Nefeli: I don't think that it was my fault. Because, when I think about it, I had a teacher who was very unfortunate, sea-beaten, and, for example, she had me do the lesson in Ancient Greek. That is, I would read the text in the original, I would interpret it, I would say everything, the syntax, the grammar, and so on. I don't think that she ever came to read us something, not even once. And this was how things stood in all five years, because I had her in all five years, this particular one.

E: *Do you mean that you remember what the lesson used to be like in Ancient Greek but...*

Nefeli: Yes, but I don't remember at all... Because in Ancient Greek I would say everything, but in Modern Greek I don't remember anything, anything at all. The only thing I can recall is that, during a transitional period when I was about to take my exams in Year 8 of Lyceum, I would translate my essays from demotiki into katharevousa.¹ Because it was compulsory that essays were written in pure katharevousa. Further than that, nothing. Ah, yeah. I also remember some topics {that we did} at the frontistirio, for the only two months that I went at a frontistirio.² There, a teacher called Leontaris had a class in discursive essay writing, in which I was extremely weak. By giving me a plan on a topic, apart, of course, from the introduction, I could write an essay that would be almost perfect, based on this plan and without making many additions. But, after I had memorised... after I had made... after he himself had given us the plan, which I would write down and would learn by heart. That is, the teacher would deal with the topic. Maybe, {if I were on my own,} I wouldn't manage to come to the point where I would see all the points that he could offer to me, because of my limited breadth of learning.

E: *But, this is not about Modern Greek literature. It is about essay-writing.*

Nefeli: No. It has to do with essay-writing.

E: *Let us move on a bit. You decided to become a Greek teacher. Why?*

Nefeli: Because my mum wanted me to... I wanted to become a civil engineer, because I was in a big... I was in financial difficulties, family worries, and in those times people {i.e. civil engineers} made a lot of money.³ Also because I liked maths and I excelled in maths. However, my mum said that 'If you become a Greek teacher, my child, you will be appointed straightaway. You will make your living, marry a teacher and satisfy your hunger.' That's how things stood, if you want the story of my life... But, I didn't like philology.

E: *Why?*

Nefeli: I didn't like it. Because in the Faculty of Greek there was archaeology as well. And, because I was crazy about ancient sites and all archaeological findings in general, I wanted to become an archaeologist. But, again, she dissuaded me.

E: *So, you wanted to become a civil engineer and you didn't...*

Nefeli: I didn't because I didn't have the money, she didn't let me to. So, I sat the entry exams for the Faculty of Greek. I got both into the Faculty of Law and into the Faculty of Greek. I came 13th in the entry exams to Law School that year. {But} she told me that my father does not have... that I don't have a father with lots of money and with an office where I could work after I would finish... She felt that the lawyers'

¹ When Greece became an independent state after the 1821 revolution, there was the need to decide upon the official language of the young state. Nearly all the Greek people spoke Modern Greek, i.e. what we call the demotic language. [demotic < demos (noun): people] However, the elite imposed katharevousa as the official language, the one to be used in courts, in administration etc. Katharevousa was an artificial language that was rather close to Ancient Greek. Moreover, all loans from other languages, such as Turkish and Italian, had been removed, so that the language would be 'clean'. [katharevousa < katharizo (verb): I clean] The whole issue was deeply ideological and has been fervently debated by all Greek linguists as well as authors. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of authors have used the demotic language and not katharevousa. Finally, the demotic language became the official language in 1976.

² A *frontistirio* is a private educational institution which offers instruction on school subjects as well as foreign languages. Pupils go to a *frontistirio* in their spare time, either to learn a foreign language or to get extra help on those school subjects they are weak. In older times, students would go to a *frontistirio* only in the last years of secondary education to get extra preparation for the entry exams to University. Lately, this practice has become so widespread that nearly all students of secondary education attend a *frontistirio*, while many, especially the more wealthy ones, have extra tuition lessons at home.

³ Nefeli was in her late teens in the late 50s. In the 50s until the 70s, a big percentage of the Greek population gathered in the big cities, and in particular, in Athens. For this reason, in those decades, the construction sector was booming.

profession was very insecure. That's why she forced me to go to the Faculty of Greek. But then again, while I was at the Greek School I did not want to follow philology as such. I wanted to go into archaeology because I was mad about archaeological sites and the archaeologists' findings.

E: But, you ended up...

Nefeli: I ended up going into Greek Language and Literature.

E: And why did you not like philology?

Nefeli: Maybe I didn't know its field well. Maybe because of this. But, when I got into it, I followed it and studied it with a lot of passion, with great willingness, because its subject matter is the child. In other words, I would be totally carried away when I managed to give to a child something from what I knew. I got to the point where I would take over children who couldn't write a single word in Greek and would sacrifice myself giving them lessons for six hours per week, for twelve hours per week, with minimal payment, or even without any payment at all, so that they would manage to finish school. It is a crazy love for children, nothing else.

E: And, generally, for the development of a child?

Nefeli: Yes, for the development of a child. My aim was children's development. In other words, when I saw a child who would make progress intellectually, I was capable of sitting down and studying for a hundred and fifty hours per day.⁴ That is, I never went to school unprepared. Of course, my memory skills would not help me a lot. Because if I could remember everything I have read... Absolutely, it wouldn't help me.

E: What would happen if you could remember everything you have...?

Nefeli: {If I could remember} all the things I have {read}, maybe I would be able to give much more to students. And, why I would give more? Because, I realise that when I know a topic extremely well, I succeed in giving something. However, when I still search into a topic, I don't give anything. It is precisely for this reason. In other words, a teacher can stand up {in front of a class} only when he knows the subject extremely well. You need to know too many in order to give little. You shouldn't be searching into the subject at that moment. {i.e. when you are in class / while you teach the topic}

E: Let us move on. Let us talk about your teaching now. How many years have you been teaching?

Nefeli: I started with private tuition lessons from 1960 until 1967, that is seven years. And then, systematically from 1975, when I was appointed, until now, 1998.

E: So, we are talking about...

Nefeli: We are talking about twenty-three plus seven, thirty years in total.

E: In class, what aims do you set for the subject of literature?

Nefeli: I will move on...

E: What do you aim for in a lesson? What do you want to achieve in a lesson?

Nefeli: Well, in a lesson I want to achieve the following. If I can, {I want} give to students what a poet or a novelist gives, so far as I can interpret him, of course.⁵ I should not keep back that I select a poem or a novel or a short story to teach, on the grounds that it talks to me as well.

E: What do you mean when you say...

Nefeli: That it talks to me? What do I mean? {I mean} that it should agree with my ideological beliefs.

E: Which means...?

Nefeli: What do I mean with 'ideological beliefs'? Well. In general, I like those short stories, novels and poems, which talk about the oppression of people, injustice, inequality, suffering, in general about those issues.

E: So, you consider that those texts which have such a theme, you like them more...

Nefeli: I, personally, like them. However, from the experience that I have in life and from the various... because I do not teach only those {texts} that I like. I do other texts as well. {I also do} texts that somebody else might have suggested to me, which tackle issues, modern issues, that interest students, and which I might not have read before. For example, violence, crime, indifference... When, for example, I do Varnalis' poem *In the underground tavern*,⁶ and I see that this poem talks to the students, 'amidst smoke and swearing, outside the hand-organ could be heard screeching, all the friends were drinking yesterday, yesterday like every evening', this poem, {you know which one I mean} so there is no need to recite the whole lot... seeing that it moves the students, maybe because they might also have some experiences from

⁴ Exaggerations like this are a common stylistic feature in spoken Greek and are mainly used for emphasis. E.g. 'I've been working twenty-four hours a day' etc.

⁵ When referring to the generic noun for 'humans', 'students', or 'teachers', I have used the masculine pronoun 'he' in the translation of the Greek interviews, whereas I have used the feminine pronoun 'she' in the rest of my work. The reason for this distinction is because the Greek teachers that were interviewed did not seem to share any feminist preoccupations.

⁶ Here she makes a minor mistake. The title of this poem is not 'In the underground tavern' but 'I moireoi' (i.e. 'The fated ones') and was published in 1922. Kostas Varnalis (1884-1974) was a left-wing poet whose ideology is manifest in his poems, prose and critical essays.

the environment of a tavern. Or, maybe because it is very simple and they can understand it. {At least,} it seems simple {to them} because the poet presents his subject in this way... Well, this poem, I have to do it {i.e. such a poem that students like}, irrespective of whether I like it or not. Of course, I like this particular poem {so it's not a very good example of what I'm trying to say}, but when I see that children are touched by some poem, some short story, some novel, then, of course, I will present it to them.

E: Tell me, so that I get it right. You said that you apply two criteria in order to choose a text. One, if it talks to you and, two, if it talks to the students. Because I am not very clear about what you mean when you say 'it talks'. At some point, you said 'it talks, that is, it moves'.

Nefeli: It moves. That is, students can follow it, students can recall it later on. Do you see {what I mean}? They can recall it. They might assent to read something more, other than that. Or, the next time, {in the next lesson, because they will be} looking for something interesting that they found in a poem or a short story, or an experience which they had from the reading of a previous poem or story, they might accept something else as well. In other words, so that they follow the lesson. Because they do not follow it. They do not participate if it does not interest them.

E: Tell me now. What do you mean when you say 'to follow the lesson'?

Nefeli: We look at the poem, if it is a poem, we look at the novel... Are there any elements that will touch a child? In order for something to come out of their mouth? So that they talk, because not all of them talk. Do you get it? They need to take something out, so that it moves them. For example, in the story 'The secret poppy', at the point where the small flower bud appears, the small poppy with its bud, {well, at that point} god also appears. So, students need to look further {than the surface meaning and think}... what is god? They might find it.

E: Let us move to something else, a little different. Could you describe a literature lesson to me? Or else, what procedure, what practice do you follow?

Nefeli: It is not always the same. The procedure is not always standard. Just a second. It might, for example... For a poem or a short story?

E: You tell me.

Nefeli: For a poem. Is that OK?

E: OK. Tell me about a poem.

Nefeli: For example, I take *The underground tavern* by Varnalis⁷. I might tell them a few things about Varnalis. Or... I will not tell them. It is not necessary that I tell them. I might ask them 'Do you know anything about him? Who is he? Have you read anything {by him} or not?' If they tell me that they have read something, whatever they say to me, I will accept it. OK. Then, in almost all the cases, apart from the times when I am exhausted which is definitely not the right thing to do, I read the poem. It is always me who reads the poem. Because no matter how good elocution a student might have, no matter how well a student might know the poem – because it is probable that some student might know the poem that I am planning to read – he can't present it in the same way as a teacher. That's at least what I think.

E: Are you trying to say that through recitation...?

Nefeli: No. It does not need to be recitation. The modulation {i.e. the colour} of the voice, the tone of the voice, in general, the way in which he reads, the teacher's expression {i.e. the style}, in general... You can see that a teacher's voice vibrates. OK? A student cannot give it in the same way. I think that it is necessary that he {i.e. the teacher} reads... And then, because a teacher knows the text under study very well, he has marked the points where he will raise his voice, the points where he will lower it, how he will modulate it, how he will make it sound sweet, how he will make it sound harsh. And, maybe, by laying emphasis on some points in the poem, he might sensitize the students, might give them some stimuli and might succeed in taking something out of them. Now, when the poem finishes...

E: When the reading finishes...

Nefeli: Yes. The reading finishes. It is not always necessary that I start from the very beginning. 'Well. What does the poem say? Does it say a, or b, or c?' No. {I might start} from a single line. For example... Could you remind me that verse from 'Eleni'...?

E: 'for an empty shirt...'

Nefeli: 'for an empty shirt, for some Eleni.'⁸ {I might ask them:} 'What is this empty thing?' In other words, you can start from a single line, the central one, if there is a central one, because there might be others as well... Do you see what I mean?... So, you can start from the central line and see if this one, this last one... if students have understood something from this one, from this stimulus. So as to catch their attention in some way. Of course, that's how I see things. Somebody else might take it from the beginning, in a monotonous way. I, however, start from there as well. {i.e. I might start from the middle as well.}

E: OK. And then, what happens afterwards?

⁷ See previous note No.6.

⁸ This is a well-known line from a poem with the title 'Eleni' by George Seferis (1900-1971), an established poet and a Nobel prize winner.

Nefeli: Well, after I start from there and after I see that the discussion gets moving somehow... and after they say a few things...

E: Do you mean that your aim is to make them talk?

Nefeli: Yes. So that they talk. Because {in general} they don't talk. To talk and at the same time to start in some way, to get excited, to understand something. Because it is not certain that they will have comprehended even a single line of what the poet writes. Because each one {i.e. every writer} writes about his own matters starting from his own experiences and his own psychology. It is not necessary that a poem written by a poet has the same psychology as that of a child.

E: What happens in these cases?

Nefeli: In these cases, your aim is that the class will manage to talk. In order for the class to talk, you need to find some piece, the most intense piece, the most vivid point, the one which you think is the most interesting. It might not be this one {i.e. the starting lines}. It might be some other. So, if you see that the class gets moving a bit, then, you come back to its beginning, to the beginning of the poem, you come back to the start. Of course, if the title of the poem is problematic, that one might be tackled first as well. For example, in the poem *Is tous Agarinous*,⁹ you might start with... '*Is tous Agarinous*'. What are these Agarinoi? What does the poem talk about? Are they the tyrants? Are they the enemies? Is it all of them together {i.e. all the enemies put under a single name}? Because here {i.e. in the textbook} it says that they are only the Arabs.¹⁰ In other words, before you start the poem, you need to prepare the students a bit, to set the scene.

E: Do you mean that before you start the poem you might start talking about...

Nefeli: I might even talk about the title of the poem for a while.

E: And then?

Nefeli: Well. Then, I will take the {first} stanza... I will take {the stanza}: 'In the underground tavern, amidst smoke and swearing, on the outside the hand-organ could be heard screeching, {and on the inside} all friends were drinking yesterday, yesterday like every other evening, so that all bitterness would be washed away.'¹¹ Well. 'What can we say about this bit? What comes out of this piece? What does it say to you? What is happening? How is the setting presented? What is the situation inside the tavern?' OK. 'Does it portray only the tavern? Or, can they walk out of the tavern as well? Does it present the outside area?' People are inside the tavern, in an environment which is stuffy, amidst smoke, swearing etc., but they can hear the hand-organ from the outside. And this hand-organ does not come to them as something which is tender, something soft, something that would liberate their thoughts, as the situation inside is so horrible, but... 'amidst smoke and swearing, the hand-organ could be heard *screeching*', it is *screeching*... That is, I might point out some verbs, some words, if they cannot find them on their own, so as to give them a clue that will help them grasp the stanza. Now, these words might be verbs, they might be adjectives, anyway, whatever a line or a stanza can give you.

E: What is this thing that a verse or a stanza can 'give' you?

Nefeli: What a stanza or a verse can give you? It might give you the situation which prevails in a state where conditions are unbearable, in a tyrannical regime. It might give you the psychology of a person who has suffered in life. It might give you {the psychology} of a person who is disappointed. It might give {the psychology} of a person who is in love. It might give you the psychology of people who have lived in conditions and circumstances that you haven't lived yourself. That is, feelings which are yours but also something which is completely remote from you.

E: Do you mean that it can give you... it is a way for you to see other people's psychology...

Nefeli: Yes, and at the same time...

E: And at the same time, it is a way for you to see your own psychology?

Nefeli: ...To experience, one more time, conditions and things which you yourself have lived through and which another person gives you through his poetry.

E: So, you might realise that there is something common? That there is an element shared between your psychology and the psychology presented by the poet?

Nefeli: Yes, because this... We said that I do a poem {in class} either because it talks to me and so I try to give it to the students {i.e. and so I try to make the students understand it}, or because it talks to the students and so I interpret it for them, so that they can understand it more. Or, another aim that I have is to try, by using a poem which I might find very good, very tender, very nice, very intense, very sad... to try to make them feel moved and motivated so as to read a few more lines.

⁹ This poem *Is tous Agarinous* (i.e. *To the Agarinous*) is a poem by Andreas Calvos (1792-1869), a poet from the island of Zakynthos. Agarinoi were Arabs who were thought to descend from Agar, Sarah's slave. According to the syllabus, teachers are obliged to teach this particular poem in the second year of Lyceum, because students are examined on this in the end-of-year examinations.

¹⁰ Each text included in the school textbook has an introduction, footnotes and questions on it. So, teachers are circumscribed in their teaching by all these comments.

¹¹ This is from the poem by Costas Varnalis that she referred to earlier on. See note No.6.

E: You mean on their own? In their spare time?

Nefeli: On their own, in their spare time. If they can. If I achieve this, then that's perfect. But I don't know if I succeed in it.

E: So, your aim is to make them get used to reading, reading in general as well?

Nefeli: Yes, {for them to get used} to reading in general as well. This is the aim. The aim is not just to finish with the lesson. It is not to go through a poem so that we can say 'Ah, we know a poem by Varnalis, we know a poem by Cavafy, or we know a poem by Ritsos.' The issue is whether, by reading, by experiencing situations that others might have faced and which are similar to their own, whether they will search for themselves in some other poem, and whether they will search for things that might be... that might talk to them...

E: OK. I got it.

Nefeli: Ah, and at the same time, there is no need for them to experience only things and situations that might make them unhappy or to feel their own {i.e. to visit again their own experiences}. {They should also read} something that might please them, so that they enjoy themselves. Because we do not use only poems that give messages to them. We might use a poem, a short story, a novel, with which they might laugh, that will make them laugh. Or, they might make a joke. Well, just a minute, it is not only the case ... that we put them down {all the time} so that they get distressed. Because they might not like what we like.

E: You choose texts which relate to and talk to you, or texts which talk to the students. Has it ever happened for you to do a text which talked neither to you nor the students? A text which had no relation to your experiences or to the students' experiences?

Nefeli: Yes. But, I would read it first, so as to be touched by it.

E: A text that would have no relation to your own experiences.

Nefeli: Well, yes. If I have heard that it is... not 'classic', I can't say 'classic'. If I have heard that it is recognised... it is...

E: That many people know it...?

Nefeli: Yes. That's exactly it. As with *Fanela*...

E: Fanela me to noumero ennia.¹² Why? Because it has been read...?

Nefeli: Because many people have read it, it has been heard, they discuss it among themselves. In general, I have the judgment... Ah, I might find... I might do a text, I might teach something which I haven't read but some other people might have read, whose judgment I trust. This, as well.

E: OK. Let's go back a bit. After you analyse the poem, stanza after stanza, line after line, then, what do you do? Is it finished?

Nefeli: Of course not. It is not finished. When we say line after line, stanza after stanza, {it means that} we might stay for longer in one stanza, or we might stay for a shorter time in some other, and so on. We do these. Then, we do a summing up, what has stayed with us from what we've read... In this analysis there might also be included some analysis of the figures of speech... or at least, that's what they've been discussing of under the new system {i.e. under the new education reform}.¹³ In other words, if he {i.e. the author} succeeds this... {We try to make} an aesthetic analysis of the text as well. So, I might make an aesthetic analysis of the text under study as well. No, not 'I might make...'. It is **necessary** to make an aesthetic analysis of the text, as well. I talk about the language of the text as well. I talk about the meter of the text as well. For example, I did the poem *Is Agarinous* by Calvos, and was obliged to talk about the language and the meter. About the Calvian meters. Now, it is probable that students did not like some of it. However, I was obliged to do it because they will be examined on this. Do you get it?

E: Yes. So, tell me, after the synopsis and the part where you talk about what has stayed with you, what do you do?

Nefeli: What do you mean {when you say} after the synopsis and the part where we talk about what has stayed with us?

E: You said that after the analysis you make a summing up, that is after the analysis, after the aesthetic analysis and so on...

Nefeli: After all these analyses?

E: After all these types of analysis and the summing up and the part where you talk about what has stayed with us, after all that what do you do?

¹² This is a novel written by Menis Koumantareas, a contemporary writer, which was published in 1986. The title means *The Vest with Number 9* and it is about a footballer. It has become a best-seller.

¹³ In September 1997 a reform was introduced to the Greek education system, related to Lyceum and Tertiary education. All changes were imposed on the education community as the Minister of Education, Mr. Gerasimos Arsenis, refused to enter into a dialogue with the agents of the educational process, that is the teachers, parents and students. The whole enterprise was strongly criticised for its off-handedness and precipitation, and there were strong reactions to it. For many months in the school year 1998-99, students in most schools even occupied the school buildings, demonstrating rigorously against the reform. See Appendix 2.B. for a synoptic presentation of the 1997 Reform.

Nefeli: Well, just a minute. I might read the poem again. I might repeat the reading.

E: *You?*

Nefeli: Myself, or I might ask a student to read it at that time, so that we change a bit, if I see that it has talked to them. No, it is not necessary that I read it again. A student might read it. I might ask from a student to read it, or I might say 'Does anybody want?' I might address the whole class. 'Does anyone want to speak? Does any of you want to read the poem?' Well, after the poem finishes, usually there is no time left... but if there is time left, {then, I ask them} 'Would you like us to read something else as well?' OK? If we have something at hand, we might read it at that moment. If we don't have anything at hand, {then, I ask them} 'Would you like us to do the next one as well?' That is, a reading of one more poem by him {i.e. by the same poet}... if there is one in the textbook, of course. If there is not one in the textbook, then we might have brought a book with us, etc. Of course, if we want to draw out the case – something which is not done in school, because we don't even have sockets – if it is a poem and it has been set to music, we could bring in a tape and listen to it.¹⁴

E: *Have you ever done this?*

Nefeli: Me? But we don't even have sockets at our school. I don't have the appropriate conditions. But, other teachers have done it.

E: *How? Since they don't have a socket?*

Nefeli: At other schools, I have heard that they do this.

E: *Would you do this, if you had a socket?*

Nefeli: If I had a socket, of course, I would do it. Because, it is a different experience for a student to listen to a poem set to music from listening to me reading the poem. And then, from a song... when you sing something you learn it more easily than when you read it.

E: *And then, that's it? Or, do you ask them to write something?*

Nefeli: No, {that's not it}. They will take some exercises {for homework}.

E: *What kind of exercises?*

Nefeli: What exercises will these be? They might be exercises like those included in their textbook. That is, they might refer to the content, they might refer to the ideas, they might refer to the meter, they might refer to the language... to some verses that they should analyse. You can ask them for anything on that text. You simply need to have these {exercises} prepared. You have prepared them.

E: *And then, they bring in their work and you read it? Do you read it? Do they read it to you?*

Nefeli: Wait a minute. When they come back with the exercises... because I have seen that there are answer books {available in the market} and they find the answers ready {in these answer books},¹⁵ I prefer... so that something stays with them from what they have written and they have not done only mechanical copying... I prefer that we read the question aloud in class and then they tell me the answer, in their own words, as simply as they can. {i.e. I prefer that they give the answer orally instead of reading it out of their exercise books} I do this lately because I found out that copying is not the best thing they can do. In other words, nothing stays with them {by the mechanical copying of answers}. Do you get it? When you ask them 'How is god presented here?', if they give the answer orally then they will learn it better. Or, 'How is the persona of the tyrant portrayed?', if they say it orally, it might be better. I shouldn't forget to say that each time I take five or ten exercise books {with me at home} so as to scare them and make them write.¹⁶ OK? In order to scare them but also in order to see how they work. Because they might cheat you and never write, especially when you ask them for oral... to read the question and answer it orally. Of course, this is not always the case. Now and then, I might say 'OK. Read a question as well.' so as to see if they have done it. The way they are examined is not always the same. It is not monotonous.

E: *Up to now, you have talked about the aims, the criteria you use in order to select the texts for study, and you also talked about the teaching practice that you follow...*

Nefeli: The teaching practice is not always the same.

E: *Yes. It is not always the same. We take that into account. How are all these determined? Who decides on what the aims will be? Is it your responsibility? Does the school staff decide on this? Do Greek teachers gather and decide on these matters? Is it from the Ministry of National Education? Is it from the reference books that are available in the market? What is it?*

¹⁴ Many poems by a wide range of Greek poets have been set to music by famous Greek composers and these compositions have been very popular in Greece.

¹⁵ All students in all schools, both in the state and in the private sector, have to follow the same curriculum and to use the same textbooks, which are supplied free of charge to all students by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. As these textbooks are in use for several years (for example, the same literature textbooks are being used since 1980), many publishing houses bring out 'answer books', where one can find the answers to all questions of school textbooks.

¹⁶ It should be noted that there is no coursework in the Greek education system. So, this work that students do on literature is read only by their teacher.

Nefeli: Well. Up to now the texts studied have been from the textbooks provided by the Ministry of National Education. The way in which I work on these texts has been mine. Of course, I should say that I have always tried to draw near to the questions that are found in their textbooks underneath the texts, which have also helped me. How I have found the way in which I teach? In the course of time. In class. I would observe the ways in which they learn. And I would adjust my teaching accordingly. That is, if I saw that the level {of a class} was very very low, then I would try to take even a single word out of them. I would try to use the simplest possible text. I would try to do something in the simplest possible way. I would not be aiming at taking out high meanings and high ideals and high theses.

E: Do you ever meet with the other Greek teachers of your school to discuss these issues and to decide on some common practices?

Nefeli: Until now, we never met, because we didn't have any inspections or anything.¹⁷

E: Are you saying that in these twenty-three years you have never talked with the other Greek teachers about what you do in class?

Nefeli: Only this year, for the first time. This year, for the first time after twenty-three years, because the system has changed and because they imposed on us the way as well in which... they forced on us the way in which we will teach...

E: What do you mean?

Nefeli: They prescribed a certain way in which we need to teach... with these multiple choice questions... by setting a certain way in which students will be examined...

E: They have determined the end-of-year exams.

Nefeli: Exactly. So, we've started adapting our lessons to the requirements for the June examinations. In other words, our aim at the moment is not children's learning any more, in a wide sense, whatever students learn and if they learn. Do you get it? Now our teaching aims at what students will be examined in, in this particular subject, in these particular questions, which come ready-made from the Ministry of Education.

E: So, now, you have met with the other Greek teachers? You have started to think hard on it?

Nefeli: Yes. So, now we are starting to think hard on the issue, because we cannot work out the new questions easily. And, because they {i.e. the new questions} are far too many {i.e. the new syllabus that needs to be covered is extremely wide}, we have agreed on what we will insist on.¹⁸

E: You are saying that your teaching practice needs to adjust to the new examination topics. What do you think are the aims behind these new examination topics?

Nefeli: I don't think there is an aim... The aim is to make students enter the University. I don't think there is the aim of students learning...

E: Through these questions, on which students will be examined, what seem to be the aims of the subject? The aims that those who devised the new system had in their mind?

Nefeli: It is possible that those who devised the new system assumed that students would learn in this way. For me, however, students do not learn like this. Not for any other reason but because the subjects are far too many, the hours that students have at school and at the frontistiria are endless, children get too exhausted, and because their only aim is the exams.¹⁹ The moment when only a single aim is acknowledged and this is how to secure entry into University, as I see things being at this moment, well, {at that moment} the free way of teaching and the free way of learning stops. It stops. It is limited. Set questions have come from the Ministry of Education... set... they tell you 'these, these, these, and these questions'... These questions need a certain answer. That's it. That's what we will do {because that's what we have to do}. Both in literature and in all other subjects.

¹⁷ In older times there used to be *inspectors*, one for each education region, who would inspect all teachers. These inspectors would put a grade on their performance and teachers' promotion depended on this grade. This system was abused as a teacher's career hung on a single individual's judgement. In 1981, when a socialist government came to power after a succession of conservative governments, the whole system was changed. The institution of inspectors was abolished and that of *advisers* was introduced. They would still visit schools – in practice, though, they wouldn't do that very often – and would give advice to teachers, instead of marking them. In 1997, again with a socialist government in office, inspectors as well as a rather rigorous evaluation system are reintroduced, as part of the education reform. Even though legislation for the reformed inspection system has gone through Parliament, it has still not been implemented at the end of 2001, as a result of its unpopularity with teachers.

¹⁸ At the beginning, instructions regarding the implementation of the education reform (starting in September 1998) were hazy and often they are contradictory. Moreover, the MNER (Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs) was not very responsive to teachers' opinions and views.

¹⁹ One of the aims of the education reform had been to eliminate the reasons that make students attend courses at frontistiria (see note no.2) and to restore their confidence in state schools. However, as has been reported in many newspapers, it has failed in this, as students' attendance hours at frontistiria have doubled. What has driven even more students to the frontistiria for even more hours is their feeling of uncertainty and lack of confidence in the education reform.

E: Now, let us move on to another issue, which will be the last one as well. Your students come, I guess, from different backgrounds.

Nefeli: Yes.

E: That is, they come from different social and cultural backgrounds. They have different gender, boys and girls, they come from different social classes etc. Do you think that these differences affect the way in which they read, interpret, and view literature?

Nefeli: Definitely.

E: How? I mean, what have you noticed?

Nefeli: I'll tell you what I've seen happening. I have noticed that students – to a bigger extent, because this is not absolute – when their family environment is intellectually elevated, that is, when they come of a father who is a teacher, a lawyer, {when they come} of a mother who has a similar profession, or an engineer... in general, when they come of parents who are thinking people, I have noticed that the level of these children is much higher as well. This means that such children understand more, because, first of all, they have learnt their language better. Because, at the present moment, if both a mother and a father work, or if they take less interest in their children, there is terrible want for vocabulary.

E: And what has this got to do?

Nefeli: Of course it is relevant. {In these cases} a child cannot express himself, cannot read fluently... Neither does he read fluently, nor does he read fast... He is not used to reading. So, he does not read fluently and does not understand what it {i.e. the text} says. There are no people {at home} to explain it to him. Because, when there is a medley of students in class, you {i.e. the teacher} cannot sit with each of them separately over their head and find for them those twenty, thirty, forty unknown words they might have {in a text}. And such a child will have unknown words more often than not. And at the same time, he cannot put his words in order. Some children get tired even by listening to you, no matter how simply you might talk. You are trying to talk in a simple and clear way but still they don't understand you. They get tired. Because they have no cultivation.

E: Apart from the social class in which their family belongs to and the educational level of their parents, have you seen any other determinant factors?

Nefeli: If a child has psychological problems. If he hasn't matured... no, no, that's not what I want to say... If he does not go out a lot, that is, if he is confined at home more. If a child is more withdrawn. In other words, if he doesn't have very many friends, if he hasn't grown up abruptly, and hasn't left home, and doesn't stay at home only because he has to, then, this child might read more and might give more than the other students who have left home. When I am talking about them leaving {home}, I don't think it is a matter of maturity. Because those children {i.e. the ones who leave home very early} might be very immature as well. {When I am saying that they leave home, I mean} that they have gone out, they make many friends, go out at night, go to bars... well, these kids, you see them... Of course, there are always some exceptions. These things are not absolute. When they make friends with women, when they go out, when they have relationships, that is, when they make... The younger a child stays... no, I don't mean the younger... The more close to childhood a student stays and for the longest period, the more he learns. In other words, if a student has sexual relationships at the age of twelve, thirteen, or fourteen, then he doesn't have lots of room to read. There is no room. That's how I see things.

E: Do you have students from minorities?

Nefeli: Students from minorities? I had an Albanian girl, who was a clever student, a very clever student. And I could see that she followed {the lesson} well. When I would set an essay, this student, if she understood and spoke Greek and could express herself in Greek... if you explained the essay topic to her, because she might not understand the title, you could see that she would answer in a more mature and correct way than many Greek students. A proof of this is that this student finished both secondary school and the Lyceum, and now she has gone to Albania to study at the University. Because she wouldn't be able to enter into University here because of the language. In other words, she had maturity of thought, but the language did not make it easy for her to express herself.

E: We said that there are many differences between students. Do you take into account these differences in the way you shape your teaching?

Nefeli: I try. I try to. However, when you have a specific syllabus to cover, as we do now, things are not so easy... when you have a specific programme to follow.

E: How did you take differences into consideration before?

Nefeli: I tried to simplify the lesson as much as I could. {I tried to make it} as simple as I could, so that even the last one would get something {out of it}. Without, of course, saying that I always achieved this in the end. Because there were some students who wouldn't usually get it, but then again, {there were others} who would.

E: Do students usually come up to your expectations?

Nefeli: In general, to a large degree, I think yes. Because... Of course, to be honest with you, in the beginning, for a couple of months, because of the tone of my voice students are a bit scared. But then, I think that they get to love me in the end, because I am very lenient with them.

E: Well. It's another thing if they love you or not. I am asking you something rather different. You have certain aims for the subject of literature. Do you think that these aims are met in the end? Do students rise to what you expect of them?

Nefeli: It has happened that... For example, we went on a school trip and my students were reciting the poem 'Treli Rodia' for me.²⁰

E: So you were pleased?

Nefeli: So I was pleased. And they also made a picture... and they drew the crazy pomegranate tree, a girl with the dreams etc. I was filled with enthusiasm. I will show it to you.

E: Who made them draw it?

Nefeli: {They did it} on their own. Nobody told them. On their own. Completely on the own. And through the entire drive they were singing the poem 'Treli Rodia'. 'I am the crazy pomegranate tree.'

E: Do you think that the habit of reading literature stays with them?

Nefeli: Well. If I look at some students, they might be reading literature, because you can also see it in class that they do read. Now, if the others acquire the habit or not, I can't say it. I can't say it definitely, that they might be reading.

E: Let me go back a bit. Apart from this year that the new system has been put into practice and, as a result, you met with the other Greek teachers and started thinking hard about what to do in order to meet the new demands, before that, were there ever any seminars where you would discuss your teaching practices or anything of the sort?

Nefeli: Of course. There were some teaching sessions.

E: What kind of sessions?

Nefeli: Well. There were these advisers or some other teachers who would do these lessons that were called 'model teaching sessions'. That is, they would present a poem, they would present a short story, or a novel, one teaching period.²¹

E: And you would watch?

Nefeli: We would watch, and in the end, we would discuss the positive and the negative {aspects of the lesson}...

E: And you would get ideas?

Nefeli: Yes. We would take ideas about the teaching methodology. This would also take place in Modern Greek language, in essay-writing, in Ancient Greek, and in history. We had attended...

E: How many times did you do this with regard to literature, in the twenty-three years that you have been teaching?

Nefeli: Two or three times.

E: OK. That's it. Would you like to tell me anything else?

Nefeli: What could I say, Elena?

E: Well, anything. If there is anything else that you have been thinking about in relation to the teaching of literature at school...

Nefeli: Look. First of all, I think that there should be more hours set apart. When I say that there should be more teaching periods set apart, I am talking not only for literature, but for all humanistic subjects. All humanistic studies, that is. They have now got to the point where they set two hours for Ancient Greek in Year 2 of Lyceum, so as to do *Antigone*, which is impossible. It will never finish.

E: Apart from more hours {is there anything else}?

Nefeli: Apart from more hours. Well. {To have} bigger choice in topics that interest students nowadays. It might not be of any interest to them something that has passed by, something that they don't feel for, something that they don't love. For example, it is probable that a story on a football match would work positively for them, a story that would be about football players. Do you see what I mean? A story about football players, a story about a game, a story about something that interests them... about a music group.

E: So, you would like different...

Nefeli: I want different?... I don't want anything different. I am simply wondering whether we can find a way to motivate them to read. I am not saying that they should watch a football match as it is broadcasted on television. I am talking about a story that would be close to their interests. Because they are not interested in anything any more.

E: Apart from more hours and a different selection of texts, is there anything else? Is there anything else that you have thought about or that you would like to be different? Or, something which I haven't asked you and you might have thought about?

Nefeli: Well, I might have thought about other things at some point, but I can't think of it now.

²⁰ 'Treli Rodia', i.e. 'The Crazy Pomegranate Tree', is a poem by Odysseas Elytis (1911-1996), a well-established Greek poet and a Nobel prize winner.

²¹ In these 'model teaching sessions', a teacher who is selected by an education councillor gives a lesson to his/her class and other teachers observe the lesson. A discussion follows on the methodology. Teachers are expected to learn from these observations and the subsequent discussions.

E: OK. That's it. Thank you.

[After the end of the interview and after I had switched off the tape recorder, she added one more comment.]

She said that she would like to have more time available for them to read texts that will not be examined in the end, for students to get to love the subject.

Greek Interview No 2:

Stella

(28 / 10 / 1998)

Stella is a white woman in her late fifties and works as a Greek teacher at a Gymnasium (i.e. Lower Secondary School) in Athens. The interview took place at my place, was recorded and there was no time pressure. Stella had never given such an interview before and thus seemed a little uneasy about what was expected of her, especially at the beginning. Another Greek teacher Nefeli sat in on part of the interview. At the end, she also added some thoughts. As a result, this interview got the form of an open discussion towards the end, with both Stella and Nefeli contributing to the discussion.

E: What I usually do in these interviews is that we start from the old days, from childhood, when you were a pupil at school, and then, we move on to the present. So, if you could talk to me about how you used to read literature at school, about anything you remember from the reading of literature when you were a pupil at school. Anything you remember...

Stella: I don't remember this subject with love, because our teachers did it in a very narrow way. That is, we would read a text and they asked us to talk about its meaning and to find the figures of speech. This was the standard thing to do. And also, {they asked us} to find the words we didn't know. That's what I can recall at least. I think they were teachers without a broad knowledge of literature, of poetry. And also, people with narrow ideas.

E: In what sense?

Stella: In the sense of progressiveness, of knowledge, of love for children. Petty people, that's what I think. Not all of them, of course. A big percentage of them, though. They were... I don't condemn them, of course, because this was in the years after the Civil war and they were all basically scared people and the subject was wide and {the situation in that era} did not allow them to have enough freedom of expression and of thinking.²² In classical subjects, of course, and when I say classical subjects I mean Ancient Greek, there were many of them who had wide knowledge and were good in the subject. Do you want anything else?

E: In literature, though...

Stella: In literature they didn't leave me... Now, what can I say? I shouldn't run them down. Well, they didn't leave me a good impression, no.

E: In a literature lesson, you would read the text under study...?

Stella: We would read the text, we would talk about its meaning, they would make some comments on a few bits of the text. I can't deny it, they would make some comments. But these were only minimal points on the unknown words and the figures of speech. And when I say figures of speech, I mean similes, personifications, etc.

E: So, until the end of school, you would deal with these figures of speech?

Stella: In the six years of secondary education, they would occupy themselves with these. Now, of course, I remember a teacher, called [...], who made a strong impression on me at the time, from the fact that she would bring a... she would bring some literature books in class and would read to us. I remember she would read to us Venezis' novel *Block C* in installments. And this made a strong impression on us children. This was a little advanced. This was in Year 8 of Gymnasium {i.e. in the last year of secondary education}. She did Venezis to us and would read *Block C*. She would read on end, so as to give us some message, to introduce us to literature, so that we would understand a few things. At the time, I couldn't understand her rationale, but in any case, I liked it.

E: Would you comment on the text afterwards?

Stella: No. We wouldn't comment on it. She would read it. She did a text by Venezis with us, I remember this, and then, she brought one more work by him to show us. The young woman would read it on end. She was a very nice teacher. I remember her with love. And I also remember of a headteacher who gave us some very good lessons on *Antigone*. When I say 'a very good lesson', I mean that he would read it to us, would point out to us many features of the text, would stress out {certain things}, and wouldn't spend too much time on the grammar and the syntax.

E: So, it would be more a discussion on the characters...?

²² After the end of the German occupation (April 1941 - October 1944), a civil war shook the country from October 1944 until August 1949. The whole country was split into two and many people died from both sides - most of the casualties, though, being from the communist camp. The right-wing camp won the war and the Communist Party was declared illegal, a ban which was lifted only in 1974. During the period after the civil war, all left-wing people were terrorised and for a number of years many of them were sent into exile and in concentration camps. Democracy was stabilised in Greece only after 1974.

Stella: On the characters, the theme, the social issues tackled in the text, the folklore elements, the mythological elements, he would give to us all these things. I remember that.

E: *Would you read literature in your spare time?*

Stella: Do you mean when I was a child?

E: *Yes.*

Stella: Yes. And, you know what I would mainly read? In those times, a magazine was published which was called the *Illustrated Classics*. And so, all literary works would come out in this magazine and we would read them. Like *Uncle-Tom's Cabin*, many novels by Victor Hugo, and various others. Many works came out, then. Many of them but I don't remember them {now}. In any case, I recall that I read all works by Victor Hugo. I read them like this, from the *Illustrated Classics*, not from the proper literary books. The times were difficult as well. We couldn't buy books easily. At all events, I would read. I also read many Greek works, many Greek writers. Papadiamantis, Karkavitsas, whom they had at school.

E: *So, it was basically the Illustrated Classics, the magazine, which you bought as it was easy, and...*

Stella: I got many literary works. We would borrow loads {of them}, you know how it goes. Papadiamantis was every day in the agenda in those days and I still like him a lot up until now, Karkavitsas, Venezis, all these were there. Many others as well. I can't remember them now, but there were many.

E: *How would you compare the way in which you read literature at school with the way you read texts at home in your spare time?*

Stella: {Do you want me} to compare how we would be taught a text and how I would read a text?

E: *You, as a reader, did you feel the same {in both occasions}?*

Stella: No. It was very scholastic... The teaching of a literary text at school was more pedantic. At home I liked it. I felt a psychical euphoria. I liked it. With whatever I could understand with my soul and mind. At school it tired me. On top of that, we didn't pay too much attention. {i.e. we didn't concentrate much in the lesson.} It didn't leave us many things. They were also short extracts. It was pedantic. I didn't like it.

E: *Was it maybe the fact that they were short extracts and that it was very scholastic, that made you dislike it?*

Stella: Yes. I didn't like it. Or rather, it seemed indifferent to me, so that I won't say that I didn't like it. {That's} from what I remember, {because} it's been many years since I finished school. I don't remember all these very well. Me, I am an old woman.

E: *Well, no. And then, why was it that you became a language and literature teacher and not something else?*

Stella: Look. If I told you that I sat the exams and had a deep love for the subject, I would lie to you. I was a good student, and took the entry exams to the Faculty of Greek. It was also a Faculty which seemed more appropriate for girls. I would find a job easily afterwards. Of course, I had a lot of sensitivity and the subject helped {in that}. I was very sensitive.

E: *How long is it that you've been working {as a teacher} at school?*

Stella: Thirty years.

E: *OK. Now let us move on to something else. How do you see the subject of literature in school, now? That is, after all these years that you have been in a class etc. And, first of all, how do you do a lesson? What is the teaching practice that you follow?*

Stella: At present, as you know, at school, they still put extracts from various works {in the syllabus}.²³

E: *And how do you judge this?*

Stella: I choose a unit which consists of various excerpts and I do two from each unit, {that is,} two or three {extracts}. There is a variety of themes. Some have social content. They might be about the countryside, about the city, many {themes}, as the textbook has them. They might be about the manners and customs, various. I choose {from them}. And then, I do poetry. At the same time, I do poems as well. How do I do the lesson? Do you want me to tell you?

E: *Yes.*

Stella: First of all, I read the whole lot, so that they don't make... Because if you ask a student to read, he won't put the right emphasis on it, and that's very important. I think the reading in class is very important. I give them some information, mainly the place and the time – if there is such an element – so that they have a grasp of it. I try to make them give it to me, to tell me what it says. If they don't understand it, then I give them the main points and guide them through. Then, I take big portions of the text, portions which have a complete meaning, and analyse their most basic elements. Elements which, according to my understanding, I must give in class.

E: *What kind of elements are these?*

Stella: It depends on the text I have given, it depends... They might refer to the manners and customs, to traditions. They might be social features, they might be cultural features, judgments, ideas, opinions...

²³ School textbooks are supplied free of charge to all students from primary school up to University level. The idea behind that is that education is everyone's right and should be free for all. At the end of each year, students are not obliged to hand their textbooks back, but instead, they can keep them.

E: Judgments, ideas and opinions of the characters, or...?

Stella: Of the characters, of groups... Do you want anything else?

E: And, {what comes} after the analysis?

Stella: After the analysis, if it {i.e. the text} gives a message, I give it. Otherwise, I leave it there. If it gives a message at the end, I give it. I find the aim. Where it {i.e. the text} aims at. I try, though, for the students to find it themselves.

E: How do you achieve this?

Stella: With various questions... with appropriate questions.

E: So, you already have something in your mind...?

Stella: I have something in my mind, the aim, and with appropriate questions I guide the students there.

E: And, after this? Let us say, {after} the lesson finishes...

Stella: The lesson finishes. If I have time, I ask them if they liked it, and why they liked what we read, if they liked it at all. And, {I will ask them:} 'Would you like us to do a parallel text?' If they like it. Not always, though.

E: What do they usually answer to this question about why they liked the text?

Stella: {They might answer:} 'We were fascinated by the lesson because it was easy. We understood it because it had elements that are close to us. We can understand them {i.e. these elements}.' If it is difficult, {then they might say} 'we don't want it, we didn't understand.' They react. Because there are also texts which are difficult as far as their meaning is concerned. It depends. I should say that I avoid these texts {i.e. the difficult ones} pretty much, so as to get more, especially with the younger students, to get more into... A text should render them sensitive, it should be more immediate and direct, so they can understand it.

E: In what sense {should a text be} direct and immediate?

Stella: It needs to be close to them. The words, the way of life. It should be close to them so they can understand it. It shouldn't be very remote from them. If it is {remote}, then I analyse it.

E: What do you mean when you say that you analyse it?

Stella: Of course. I explain all the difficult points, {deal with} all the difficulties that a student has with a text {under study}.

E: These difficulties might stem from their {limited} knowledge of history and of past historical periods, for example?

Stella: {The difficulties might relate to their limited knowledge} of past historical periods which you need to explain to them. You need to position yourself from a historical point of view as well. You must to. For example, if it is about a work by Xatzis which was written twenty-five or thirty years ago, children are out of contact with it. I must explain it to them, {I must} put it in its historical perspective. However, this doesn't take a long time. For a little bit. For a short time. And, I make them understand it. Now, for example, on account of the {national day of the} 28th October,²⁴ I did an extract {from a work} by I.M. Panayiotopoulos, called *To Epeisodio* {i.e. 'The Incident'}, which referred to the Greek people's sufferings, to the trials that the Greek people went through during the German occupation, in the German occupation. Students are out of this. I had to explain it to them. Let's say, it refers not only to the starvation that Greek people suffered but also to the resistance they put up and the hope they retained in these hard conditions. I had to tell them all these things. I put it in a historical perspective a bit. Because students cannot understand that it was possible for such bad, miserable conditions to exist. And I told them that... I gave them a message... I told them that around five hundred thousand people died from starvation during the occupation, that hunger is a great evil because it starts from the brain and if a man is hungry he might even turn into a cannibal.²⁵ Despite all these, they were impressed by the fact that {in the story} in these miserable conditions the son of this man would still resist and would wait for death to put an end to his ordeal. It says so, in the text. They liked it. Little by little, in time. Of course, you can't finish with an extract in a single teaching period. You need at least two periods.²⁶ I made the appropriate questions – I {usually} ask my own questions as well as the ones from the textbook – and they got the drift of the text. It was simple. But, first, I had to put it in a historical perspective.

²⁴ In October 1940, the Italian dictator Mussolini asked the Greek government for the right of entry to Greece. The Greek government denied, and thus, the Italians declared war on Greece. So, the 28th October is established as a national day and celebrations are held for the 'No' answer to the Italian fascists. The front line was on the borders with Albania, on the north west of Greece. In the fight, which was a real bloodshed, the Greeks were winning. They continued their victorious course until April 1940, when the Germans came to their allies' assistance and won over the Greeks. The German occupation, which started in April 1941 and ended in October 1944, was a very difficult period for the Greek people, full of suffering and terrorism. The Greeks, though, did not give up and organised the Resistance.

²⁵ OXFAM was initially established as a fund-raising organisation for the relief of the starving people in Nazi-occupied Greece.

²⁶ Saying this, Stella goes against the official guidelines that ask teachers to complete the teaching of each extract in a single teaching period.

E: When you say that you make the appropriate questions, is this after or during the lesson?

Stella: No. During the lesson, with suitable questions I help them comprehend it. And, afterwards I give the homework. The textbook has {questions for homework} but I also give one or two of my own.

E: What is the homework that you ask them to do?

Stella: It is from the text, of course, because that's what we have analysed... I mainly give them {questions} of judgment. Since the text has been analysed in depth, I ask them questions of judgment about their personal opinion, characterizations, if there is such a thing... I also ask them to make characterizations.

E: Do you mean that you ask them to characterise a character?

Stella: To characterise a character, how they see him. Some emotional elements...

E: Of their own?

Stella: Yes. Of their own. What the students themselves have felt.

E: And then, when you come back to class for the next literature lesson, do they read their answers aloud or do you take their exercise books at home to correct them?

Stella: Look. Because it is difficult for me to correct all exercise books every time, from time to time I take ten books from one row, let's say, I correct them and give them back to them. Another time, ten days later, I might take the exercise books from ten other students. But, students also read their work, their answers, in class. Of course. And everybody listens. {And, I might ask:} 'Do you agree?' Another student might say 'May I add something, Ms?' 'OK. You can add something.' 'Do you agree?' If there is an error, {I never say} 'No, this is not like this. It is like that.' We don't want to snap at anyone that he went wrong. {Instead, I will say:} 'Have you got something to add to this?' I don't want to disappoint them.

E: Do you mean that there is no right and wrong in this type of questions?

Stella: Of course, in literature there is no absolute right. Another student adds something to it, and then, another one completes it. 'Ms, I found this as well.' Of course, all these need to be done briefly, because you don't have time. It is not easy. All these need to be brief.

E: Why is there not enough time?

Stella: Yes. Time is short.

E: Could we go back a bit to the criteria that you use in order to choose a text? You said that, on the one hand, you choose two texts from each unit and, on the other hand, the units are fixed.

Stella: They are fixed in the textbook. I can't do any other. These {are the ones to be done}. The school syllabus is specific.

E: And, do you prefer some texts which are more immediate, more close to the students, without leaving out some which might be from different periods, etc.?

Stella: No. I look at various periods. I put in {texts} from various periods of literature. They should be close to the students. Of course, I don't... However, as time passes, Elena, as students grow up, I also include texts that are more difficult. My rationale is that they need to put their mind {to think}... they need to think more, to think harder, as time goes by.

E: And, which texts are more difficult?

Stella: The critical texts are more difficult. Texts on social issues are more difficult.

E: Why are these texts more difficult?

Stella: Because children cannot understand social questioning easily. We need to prompt them. Poetry {is more difficult as well}. With poetry I go about more slowly. Even though they say that poetry is easier for children, I think that it is harder. I do poetry at a slower pace, especially symbolic poems. And I also do the demotic songs.²⁷ In the middle of the year, I do the demotic songs, after I have given them many details. {First I explain to them} what a demotic song is. I give them loads of information. How we put them in categories...

E: You said that you consider poetry to be more difficult.

Stella: I consider it to be more difficult for children.

E: Why?

Stella: Because it has many symbols and they don't understand them easily if it is a poem.

E: Do you pay any attention to the language {of a text} in a lesson?

Stella: In a text?

E: Yes.

²⁷ The demotic songs were folk songs created by Greek people in the Byzantine era (330-1453) and during the Turkish occupation (1453-1821). They passed on from one generation to the next and were sung by many people. People had songs for all occasions of their life and often there were many versions for each of them. These songs have been put into categories on the basis of their themes, such as the songs about marriage, about death, relationships, emigrating etc. Many of the demotic songs, which are saved nowadays, date back to the 11th century.

Stella: Well. If there are any difficult words, then, I give them {i.e. I explain them}, what each word means, because there are difficult words. Papadiamantis is hard.²⁸ There are other {writers} as well, older ones, {who are difficult}... I look at them, interpret them, explain them to students.

E: *Do you do any other sort of linguistic analysis?*

Stella: Linguistic study? I don't think I can do any further linguistic study in a literature lesson. I simply explain those words that they don't know. Because language itself is a... our very language is also an ideology. If you don't explain the language itself, if a student doesn't understand it, then, he won't be able to interpret {i.e. to convey the meaning of a text} a text. The very language is an idea. He needs to know it. He needs to know every single word. If he doesn't know it {i.e. language}, then he won't be able to enter a text, he won't be able to interpret it.

E: *I would say that the next question is a difficult one. So, what do you aim at in a literature lesson? What do you want students to take with them as they leave the class?*

Stella: That's a difficult question. Very difficult.

E: *I think it's difficult because there are maybe many things to say about it. What do you aim at?*

Stella: Personally, I aim at sensitizing children to social issues. Through this I want to make children feel love and solidarity for one another. Especially, nowadays, when we have many foreigners.²⁹

E: *What do you mean?*

Stella: This means that... I have noticed that when we have a foreigner, there is not, of course, open racism in class, but... {When there is} a foreign child, an Albanian, a Pontios, they {i.e. the other students} leave him alone, to sit at a desk on his own. I have noticed this happening in many classes. And, I insist on this, without, of course, saying it in a direct way so as to avoid humiliating the child, {I insist} that they should feel love and sympathy for their fellow classmates. He is the same as they are. I have insisted on this. And I tell them where to sit. 'You come here. You sit over there.' It is a social questioning of my own but I think that it passes over to children, because they are young and sensitive. It rubs off on children.

E: *And in what ways do you think that literature helps in this familiarization with the 'other', with the 'strange'?*

Stella: It helps. With the sensitivity it has, with the characters that it has, with the characters that a text itself portrays. For example, when we do the short story 'To Vaptisma'³⁰ by Xatzis, the child in the story, who struggles for life, is no different from a child who comes from Albania, from Romania, or Eastern Europe. They all face the same difficulties. So, through this I give the message. We were the same {as they are now}, the only difference being that this was thirty or forty years ago.³¹ The social issues, the characters... I analyse the characters, whether it is a child, a mother, or a father, the sensitivities that they might have, whatever these might be... poverty does not make them wild as well {i.e. the fact that they are poor does not mean that they are wild as well}. That they should always have hope. Or, that they should be optimistic about life, because it is a bad thing for them to be pessimistic.

E: *Is there anything else?*

Stella: There are other things but they don't come to my mind now. There are many things.

E: *It's OK. If you think of anything else, we can talk about it later. Up to now, the aims that you have, the criteria that you apply in order to choose a text, or the practice that you have in class, how have all these things been determined? Is it from the Ministry of Education? Are these your personal decisions?*

Stella: {They are} my personal decisions. I have not taken note of the Ministry of Education at all. Honestly. {They are} my personal decisions. What I think. Neither am I very informed and up to date in educational matters. Because at University we did only very few things. My experience... Look, teaching is not a fixed, set thing. It is not a square that we can divide into pieces. Teaching is a different thing. It is something which is alive. You think of something, then, you say it. You come back to a point. What is it

²⁸ Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851-1911) was a Greek writer who mainly wrote short stories. He used the *katharevousa* and this is why students find his writings difficult nowadays.

²⁹ The Greek word 'ξένος' that the interviewee uses means both foreigner and stranger. In its plural form, it is also used for the immigrants.

³⁰ 'Το Βάπτισμα', i.e. 'The Christening', is a story by Dimitris Xatzis that is to be found in his collection of short stories entitled *The Defenseless* (in Greek: *Ανυπεράσπιστοι*) and published in 1966. The story is included in the anthology used in year 1 of Gymnasium, in the thematic part no.6: 'Labour'. It is set in the first half of the 20th century and is about a young boy from a farmers' family stricken by poverty. The father takes their mare and goes to work in the road construction site, leaving his young son behind to finish the threshing with their young baby colt. Both the boy and the baby colt are unused to such hardship but they both manage to pull through, being thus 'christened' in hard labour.

³¹ There was a big emigration wave from Greece to America and Australia in the 20s and 30s. Later on, in the 50s and 60s there was a second emigration wave directed mainly to Germany.

{i.e. teaching}? A framework? And we start: number one, number two, number three...³² It's not like this. Especially in our subjects, it's not like this. There is no fixed, stable teaching framework.

E: Which means that if an idea flashes through your mind, then you might follow it and...?

Stella: Yes. According to what I think.

E: Do you discuss with the other teachers at your school about these matters?

Stella: With some colleagues, yes. But, not a lot, though. With some I might discuss. With some. And not many times.

E: Have you ever been to seminars?

Stella: I've been to, in the past. Not recently. In the past I went {to some seminars}. Some of them helped me and some didn't. Very few of them were good, for me to enjoy them.

E: Those that helped you, in what sense did they help you?

Stella: In the course of a lesson.

E: You mean that you got nice ideas?

Stella: I got some things that helped me.

E: So, this means that in these thirty years {that you've been teaching}, apart from some discussions with colleagues, a few colleagues, apart from some seminars... how many were these?

Stella: Well, Elena, I can't remember now. But, I have attended quite a few.

E: Apart from these there is no other exchange of ideas or... It has been your own course?

Stella: Yes. It has been my own course. The state does not help {us} in this, at all. It hasn't helped us. It hasn't come to our schools often.³³ They haven't given seminars to us in the various school subjects. They have never come, nearly never, from what I remember. Ah! Only with regard to language. When the *Nea Elliniki Glossa*³⁴ was first published in 1980, they did some seminars about how we should teach it, because it was a new subject. This was in 1980 or 1982, I can't remember. When the new textbook of *Neoelliniki Glossa* came out, they gave us some seminars. For one week, ten days, I don't remember. In 1982, in 1983, I can't remember when they took place. And then, we had to go through it ourselves.

E: I'd like to ask you about the students. Students come from different backgrounds.

Stella: Yes.

E: That is, they come from different social backgrounds, different cultural environments, they are from different races etc.

Stella: Not races, because we don't have too many foreigners, only a few. This... they are not part of the... they are only a few, so that I can't say that they are a social group in class. One, two, three students, or even none. So, we can't say that they form a separate social class. There are some but they are not many so as for me to include them.

E: Do you think that these differences between students influence the way they read and interpret literature?

Stella: Of course. It depends on the cultural background, the social, the financial {background}, everything. It depends on parents, the parents' level, the intellectual level has a major role to play. The financial as well.

E: Why?

Stella: Because, first of all, if their parents have a certain level, then, they teach them more... better... to speak the language more correctly, first of all. {And, this is} something very important. They discuss with them and teach their children how to think.

E: While the other students?

Stella: While the others... while the other students are cut off, especially today.

E: Do you take these differences into account, especially in the way you shape your teaching?

Stella: I adjust teaching to the level of an average student. As far as I can, of course. Because it is difficult. Don't think {that it is easy}. It is difficult. At an average level so that a lesson is comprehensible by most students.

E: I see. How do students usually react to literature?

Stella: I think that it is the subject that they like best, in my opinion.

E: Why?

Stella: Because it is a more free subject. It is made with greater ease, with greater freedom. They are not obliged to learn by heart certain {grammar} types, as they are in Ancient Greek, which is tiring. Students can move in a more free way. They {i.e. the grammar types in Ancient Greek} are tiring. You make a lesson in Ancient Greek in a more pedantic way than a lesson in literature...

³² In the 'model teaching sessions' (see footnote no.21 in Nefeli's interview), the view often promoted is that there is an ideal teaching practice to be followed. Saying that she does not believe in fixed lesson plans, Stella again goes against the official discourse.

³³ When she refers to 'it', she means the government's education bodies or people from these bodies.

³⁴ *Nea Elliniki Glossa* means *Modern Greek Language*. It is a series of three textbooks which were introduced in 1980 to the three years of Gymnasium. In these textbooks, some extracts from literary works are included, but they are mainly used for the purposes of linguistic study.

E: So, they don't need to memorise things...

Stella: They don't memorise, they don't get tired, the lesson is not sterile. We can't help it, they are obliged to learn the types in Ancient Greek. To memorise them, to work on them. Here {i.e. in a literature lesson} we move in a more free way, each student can express his opinion freely, his judgment, his impressions, his views. He is impressed by certain things. 'Ah! So, this is how things used to be twenty years ago in the countryside, Ms!', for example. 'This is how they lived!' These things make a strong impression on them. So, it is a lesson for almost all the students, so as for everybody to participate in it. They can as well. Everybody says something, contributes something to the discussion.

E: So, you succeed in making everybody speak?

Stella: I make it. Especially in this subject I succeed in it. In the other subjects, I don't {necessarily succeed}. I don't want to boast. In the others, no. Because if I teach them, for example, the present perfect infinitive of the verb 'γράφω', one or two students say it. But then, we need to come back to it, they make mistakes, they get tired, and then, back to the beginning again. It is more difficult, more difficult. {Whereas in a literature lesson,} students work with ease, and with more freedom. I also think that more hours should be allocated to literature.

E: Why should it have more hours?

Stella: Because children learn with literature.

E: What?

Stella: {They learn} life, the daily routine, let's say, and the... how can I say it?... people's sensitive points, their culture. We can see this culture mainly in the cultural elements of the demotic songs.

E: Apart from more hours, in your opinion, is there anything else that could be done in a different way in this subject?

Stella: You mean to teach literature in a different way?

E: Yes. Something that you would like to be different...?

Stella: I would like {some things to be different} but I can't think of them now. I can't think. I would like it to be different. At least if it was done in a more... if some pieces could be shown in slides as well.

E: You mean if it was possible to use other mediums as well...

Stella: Yes, other mediums. It would be good if we could use them.

E: OK. I think that's OK.

Stella: Only that? So few? Well, Elena, I haven't told you many things, have I?

[At this point, the other teacher, Nefeli, who sat in on part of the interview, broke in.]

Nefeli: Tell her... You should write down that literature unites children, that it brings down the borders...

Stella: I said that it creates solidarity, that there is sympathy between children. I said it.

Nefeli: That it pulls down the borders. It is like music.

Stella: It is a language. Nefeli is right about that...

Nefeli: You should include this...

Stella: Because literature...

Nefeli: Now while I was listening to Stella I thought of many things...

Stella: I think of many things as well, but then I forget them.

Nefeli: I didn't tell her that literature brings down the borders {yesterday, during my interview}.

E: In what way does it bring down the borders?

Nefeli: The borders between children. It shows that there are problems that are common to everybody.

Stella: People face the same problems... that's true.

Nefeli: {There are} many injustices, the economy, school, education, everything. People face the same problems. A proof of that is the uprising which is now taking place in France. Students are constricted by the number of students {per class}, they want a smaller number. Is that not it, Stella?

Stella: Of course. Literature unites the people. Because, let's face it, a Greek does not differ from a French, or a Romanian, or a Russian. They are the same... they face the same problems.

Nefeli: The issue of unemployment, the issue of education.

Stella: The issue of health and of the economy. All people face these. It is not...

Nefeli: There is no difference...

Stella: No, there is not...

Nefeli: Because in a literature lesson we do not start from a historical event so as to praise the bravery of the Greek people. Instead, we rely on the fact that people might starve...³⁵

³⁵ When teachers do a lesson on the 28th October 1940 and the Greek Resistance against German occupation in the Second World War (see also footnote no.24), some of them stress mainly the Greeks' victories together with their heroism and patriotism, while others also talk about the evils of war and the hardships of the occupation that followed the victorious start.

Stella: I told her that we put more emphasis on the social questioning. And now that foreigners come {in our country}, and I told you as an example that I discern a lurking fascism among children, which might be unconscious {but still it is there}, when they put him {i.e. the foreign child} in the corner and nobody sits next to him, it means that we need to help these children understand that the other... that their classmate is the same with them. And what Nefeli said is right. People all over the world are more or less the same. That is, they face the same problems in their daily routine, about education, about life, about the economy. And I think that {literature} unites {people} more. It is an international language, I think. It is an international language like music. It unites the people. {Whereas} the {other} specialised subjects are different.

Nefeli: First of all, it {i.e. literature} mollifies them.

E: And should there be taught literary texts from all over the world?

Stella: I think that yes. It should... They have included some, but they are very few. In Gymnasium they are very few. However, I think that literary works from all over the world should be taught, writers from all over the world. I think that together with the Greek works we should have foreign {writers} as well.

E: More?

Stella: Definitely.

Nefeli: And from these, students would be able to see that apart from...

Stella: Life itself, that's what they would see.

Nefeli: Not only the manners and customs but life itself, as Stella put it so nicely.

Stella: Life itself.

E: What do you mean when you say that they would see life itself?

Nefeli: They would see that they {i.e. the others} have the same problems as they do. That is, unemployment is the same for them as well, education is the same, the feeling of insecurity is the same, stress, life itself, oppression by society...

Stella: I have the impression that insecurity in all aspects of life is the same for all the people.

Nefeli: Among all the people, there is no difference...

Stella: There is not. Because when the French people raise an outcry...

Nefeli: When we don't have enough to eat {we feel the same} as any other would do. We all feel hunger in the same way. Unemployment, which might plague me or the homeless in France, in Britain, or in Germany, is exactly the same thing. When people are persecuted, they experience racism and oppression in the same way.

Stella: I put it in a more narrow frame...

Nefeli: It doesn't matter if it is French, Spanish, or whatever, does it Stella?

Stella: No, it doesn't. I put it in a more narrow frame, so as to show you racism as it is in a class. And students are not conscious of this racism. Alas! I don't believe that children are bad. To make myself clear, {I don't think that children are evil, but} from this school {i.e. from our school} children will go out into society. It can't be that they see a child, and because he has come from a foreign country and is sometimes badly-dressed and badly-nourished, that they see this child like a fly³⁶ or that they don't want {him} unconsciously... they push him to the side. And, I forgot to tell you, they do this not only to a foreign child but also to a Greek child who lives in the margins – no, I shouldn't say in the margins – to a Greek child who is excluded. Because there are such children. I have such examples from my work, examples of excluded children whose mother might be working day and night, or children whose mother might be a frivolous woman who wanders about trying to survive in all sorts of ways and has deserted her child. And these children follow the same path at school³⁷ And the parents {of the other children} say 'Don't be friends with this child. It won't be good for you.' And, they marginalise him in class. And he sits at a desk on his own. And, I can see him feeling sad. And, such a child gradually becomes worse. If you exclude and marginalise him, then, he becomes worse all the time. So, there is local racism as well, between the Greeks. It's not only against foreigners. Isn't that so, Nefeli? Don't we also have this sort of racism in class? The others don't want to be friends with the marginalised children, with the miserable ones.

Nefeli: No. Because they are dressed in a more poor way, because they behave differently...

Stella: And this behaviour... A Greek mother, me, you or anybody else, doesn't want her child to be friends with this one, who comes from a 'bad family' and might lead her child astray, and we don't want him with all the bad words that he uses etc. etc. [The interviewee said all the above in a strongly ironic way.] And he becomes marginalised. And it is... it makes your heart bleed even more. Because you can see that there is racism even within our country between children. I have seen this happening in a class many times. Even teachers sometimes treat these children in a racist way. We shouldn't close our eyes to that.

Nefeli: They pay more attention to those who come from a certain family. They look at their essays with more care. Because they think that somebody will check them. Whereas, with regard to such a child, they

³⁶ 'To see someone like a fly' is a Greek expression meaning 'to despise and look down upon someone', 'to treat someone as unwanted'.

³⁷ I.e. the children become excluded from the school community like their mothers are excluded from society.

are not scrutinized by anybody. There, off he finishes with it {i.e. a teacher corrects the student's essay very hastily}... who cares about what he writes? However, if you know that you have a lawyer above you {i.e. if the student's father is a lawyer} and you know that you will be checked, when you know that you have a civil engineer, for example, {to deal with} then you are more mindful of your work.

Stella: Which means that he {i.e. the marginalised child's parent} won't come to school to check you and ask you about his child... So, these children are excluded both by the teacher and by society. As things are, these children will not come out decent people. {Instead, they will be} miserable, full of complexes. They are the ones who will steal, who will hit, so as to survive. They become tough, they have toughness in them.

E: So, literature, because it presents characters who might face the same issues, the same problems...

Stella: It makes children feel sympathy.

E: It makes them understand...

Stella: It makes children feel sympathy for one another. Of course, this is not the case with all teachers, we should get this right. Teachers do their job. They do their job, each of them in his own way. {Some teachers} don't bend their head over these a lot, because they have their own problems, or because they don't want to, or because they haven't thought of that. I don't know what the reasons might be. However, there is another group of teachers who are sensitive people. That's what I believe. That's what I want to believe. These people are sensitive, but there are others who say 'Let him go. Let him, the excluded one, go further to the edge. Let's give him a push so that he goes even further.' Like this, many more {excluded and marginalised people} will be brought into being in our society. And these people will come out of the students of Gymnasium and then of Lyceum and so on. And don't fool yourself that these children do not have any positive elements. On the contrary, they have many positive elements which you can help them bring out. They might be very clever. And recently there is this idea in fashion that it might be because of their DNAs {that they are marginalised and excluded}. I can't rule this out. It is possible, of course... we all have some cells, some DNAs. But, we can't build our life on the idea that says 'Well. That's how his mum was. That's how his grandmother or his grandfather was.' Because, like this, we will divide society. 'His father was clever and that's why he came out clever.' Many people believe in this, nowadays. Especially today, they believe in this atavism, in this inheritance, in the DNA. Especially today, with the social conditions that prevail. And many times, I have argued with many friends of mine on this. I have clashed with them a lot. {They argue that} nothing can be done, {because} we carry everything within us. And all these things {that we inherit} come out somehow. Many people believe in this nowadays. Even some of those who want to be called 'progressive' people believe that we carry the DNA and everything comes out somehow. I can't rule out anything but we shouldn't start from there and write off people. We need to help the people, as we all come from somewhere. Many people believe in the DNA nowadays. It is racist to think in this way. Does this way of thinking suit {them}? I don't know. But, it exists and it suits {them}.

E: OK. Should we stop now?

Stella: Yes. We should.

E: Thank you.

Greek Interview No 3:

Petros

(22 / 12 / 1998)

Petros is a white man in his fifties and teaches at a Lyceum (Upper Secondary School) in a neighbourhood of Athens. He was rather reluctant to give this interview, on the one hand, because he had not done this before and was not sure about what was expected of him, and on the other hand, because he feels better with the teaching of Classics than with literature.³⁸ Despite his initial reservations, he gave the interview and did not object to its being recorded. Our discussion took place at his place and there was no interruption.

E: Well. First of all, what I do is that we start from childhood memories. So, what do you remember about the teaching of literature at school, when you were a child? If you can remember anything, of course.

Petros: I can't remember many things. At any rate, I remember the books at primary school... That was in the 50s. I remember that the texts referred to the industrialisation of the country, the coming of electricity, construction projects... I remember the lake... what was its name?... the lake that was turned into a field, arable land, at Boetia.³⁹ These... nothing special. These were the kind of texts you had in textbooks back then. This was, I remember, at Years 5 and 6 of primary school.

E: Were these literary texts?

Petros: They were... The textbook that was used at primary school in those times was called *Primer*. Nowadays, they call it *Language*. And this memory of mine is from Years 5 and 6. I also remember that in Year 4 of primary school we did a book that was written in strict katharevousa,⁴⁰ in a very hard and awkward language, incomprehensible katharevousa. I also remember history texts on Alexander the Great, fables with animals... And of course, the textbook for Year 1 {of primary school}, which I came to love a lot and, when it was reprinted two or three years ago, I bought it and read it again... 'Anna, throw the ball. Elli, pass me the...' I don't remember, something about a duck...⁴¹ These {are the things I remember} from primary school. At Gymnasium... I still have my textbooks from Gymnasium... {but} I don't remember anything from any Greek teacher. Nobody made an impression on me in literature teaching.

E: Do you remember what you would do in class?

Petros: There was a list that we would follow strictly in every lesson. That is, {we would talk about} the main idea, characterisations, the figures of speech... I'm not sure {what else was there}. I don't remember very clearly. There were a lot of things in that list, which we followed closely. So, the teacher would start saying 'What is the main idea?' Straightaway, without {making} any other questions that would lead to this main idea. Straightaway {he would ask} what the main idea is. And then, I don't remember well, {there were questions about} the secondary ideas... I can't remember... {In any case}, there was a list that we had to write down. Myself, I was sometimes bored to write down all these things, because they were pages upon pages. I don't remember now the {exact} content of the list, just the things that I mentioned. I told you, there wasn't anything that made an impression upon me, or a literature teacher {that was particularly good}. However, in Classics I had very good teachers. In literature I didn't have any good teachers. It was a subject that I found boring, the same as everybody else in the class.

E: But why was that? Was it maybe because it was so standardized?

Petros: Maybe. This might be the reason. Maybe because the teacher would not put any spirit in lessons. And thus, all of us... we weren't sleeping of course, but in any case, it was an indifferent subject.

E: So, when he asked you about the main idea, would you find it?

Petros: Well. Now...

E: If there was no preparation...?

Petros: Yes. You're right. Of course, there was no preparation. We wouldn't do the texts in order, and so, nobody knew which text would come next.⁴² However, they were texts that were not particularly difficult. {They were} generally easy. Well, the texts in Years 1 and 2 of primary school were based on the nationalist philosophy of the Right. And, in all years of Gymnasium, that was more or less the philosophy of the texts. That was the climate. Not directly, of course, but indirectly, education was based {on these

³⁸ Greek teachers have to teach a whole array of subjects, like Modern Greek language and literature, Classics (Ancient Greek and Latin), History and Philosophy.

³⁹ Boetia is a county on the north of Attica. Attica is the county where Athens is.

⁴⁰ For katharevousa and demotiki, see footnote no.1.

⁴¹ These are phrases from the *Primer* that was used in primary schools in older times.

⁴² Obviously there was a misunderstanding at that point. I meant whether they could find the main idea since there was no preparatory discussion in class and he talked about them not being able to prepare texts at home before a lesson.

ideas}: our country, the family and religion. These were the three ideals, let us say. All texts were based on these.

E: And was this philosophy manifest?

Petros: Yes, it was. Of course, I wasn't impressed by it, because I came from a family that was both right wing and religious, and so I regarded it as something normal. I wasn't particularly impressed by it. It was only later that I saw it as I see it now.

E: And then, you thought over it, criticised it and saw everything in a different light?

Petros: Yes. I did. But that was later.

E: Did you read literature in your spare time?

Petros: No. Literature was something unknown. {I came from} a poor family and my parents were farmers; such was my family environment. But, throughout Gymnasium, the surrounding environment was intellectually very low as well. So, throughout Gymnasium I would read the *Young Hero*, I don't know if you've heard of it.⁴³ {I would read} hundreds of issues of the *Young Hero*, with Giorgos Thalassis, Spitha, and Katerina, and also loads of books by Jules Verne. {I read} all novels by Jules Verne; that was at Gymnasium. Nothing else. Even though I had a bent for reading... I had a bent for reading. I would read anything that would fall in my hands. But I didn't have anything to read, really. I couldn't find anything to read.

E: I see. Later on, how did you decide to become a Greek teacher? What was it that made you want to become a Greek teacher?

Petros: It was because I liked Classics. I liked {first} Classics and, secondly, history. And that's why I took the exams. I didn't like rural life and to stay at my village. And so, I had two options. I would either become a sailor, like many other members of my family, of my extended family and of the island in general, or I would become a Greek teacher. Finally, I succeeded in the entry exams to the School of Philosophy and so I didn't become a sailor.

E: I see. How many years is it that you've been working in schools?

Petros: Twenty-four.

E: And have you been teaching Greek literature all these years?

Petros: Yes. Nearly all the years {I've taught literature}.

E: In general, how do you teach a lesson? Of course, I am aware that it is impossible for anyone to say 'I follow this method in every single lesson', but approximately...

Petros: Well. I usually teach {literature} at Year 1 of Lyceum. Most of the years {I teach} at Year 1 of Lyceum. In the textbook there is a selection of texts that date back to the beginnings of the history of {Greek} literature up until 1830. So, it is mainly demotic songs until 1830, and of course, the Cretan literature, poetry of the 1930s generation, Seferis, Elytis etc. I work with continuous questions.

E: What kind of questions?

Petros: I start with questions on the content, which clarify the content, and at the same time with questions on the form. Types of aesthetics, ways of expression etc. And that's how I work from the beginning to the end of the poem, if it is a poem. But I also do the same thing with prose. And finally, we draw conclusions, i.e. we get what I said earlier, the main idea... even though I don't like it at all, precisely because I have bad memories... {We also discuss} other ideas, we discuss the characters, we look at the text – depending on the text, of course – in conjunction with the present. {We see} to what extent the ideas, which are found in a text, have any currency in other eras or whether they belong only to a certain era. I try to give to students... I try to make students feel the text, enjoy the text. And as I told you, there are many demotic songs {in the textbooks}⁴⁴ and I like demotic poetry, so I try to make them get pleasure from the very ideas that are found in the simple and concise language of the demotic songs... anything that can be found in these songs.

E: When you say that you want them to feel the text, what do you mean? How can they feel it?

Petros: This thing 'to feel it'... that's why I said afterwards 'to enjoy', 'to get pleasure.' So that they won't see it just as a school subject... as a text on which they will be examined. That's what I mean. I make clear to them that I myself 'feel' the text. That is, I give myself to it, because I love what I do. That's why, first of all, I choose texts that I like. And I try to convey this to children.

E: I see.

Petros: So that {students} won't see the text as something {they need to do} for time to pass by. At least most students {feel and enjoy the texts}. Because there are always the indifferent students as well. But, anyway, I prompt these ones to say something as well.

E: You said that you choose texts according to your personal taste. That's your basic criterion. Are there any other criteria that you apply?

⁴³ The *Young Hero* was a popular comics magazine for children, created by Giorgos Anemodouras and published from the early 1950s until the mid 1960s. The main characters were Giorgos Thalassis and his friends Spithas and Katerina. The stories were put in the period of the German Occupation of Greece and were about various acts of resistance organised by these three friends against the Germans.

⁴⁴ For demotic songs, see footnote no.27.

Petros: Other criteria...

E: I know there is a constraint {on you} and that you have to use the school textbook...

Petros: That's right. Of course. We can't do anything else. This is taken for granted. Other than that,⁴⁵ one could say that {another criterion is the fact that I do} certain texts that I have already prepared for a couple of years. It is convenient to teach the same texts, so as not to delay and waste my time {preparing new texts}. I don't always do this. But, in any case, ninety per cent of the texts I do are the same every year.

E: Is it maybe because you like them more and, as a result, you prefer them?

Petros: Exactly. And also because I have already worked with these texts and know how a class will respond to my teaching... {I know} if students like a text... Because I always ask them 'Did you like the text?' I make this question and, of course, most of the answers... most of the times the answers are positive. {They say} that they liked the text. Of course, I don't know if they really mean it... but I think that they tell the truth. {I think} that they really feel it, that they have got something out of the text, and that they like it. Even the texts by the 1930s generation, which are maybe more difficult than the demotic songs, they enjoy these as well.⁴⁶ {They even like} Seferis, and Ritsos, and Eggonopoulos... If you work on a text and you bring what you should out of it, I think that students will respond positively and say 'I like this text.'

E: You said that towards the end of a lesson, after the discussion, you try to reach some conclusions regarding the main idea, the characterisations, the style etc.

Petros: Yes, of course. Style as well. And I also said that {we discuss} whether the ideas we've found in a text have still got any value today.

E: Yes, whether they live through time. Do you believe that these ideas are defined in a specific way, that there are specific ideas in every text?

Petros: Well, it depends... Seferis says that 'I will be glad if you understand a text... if each person understands a text in his own way.' So he says that there shouldn't be any guided conclusions. In other words, he says that 'You, tutor, or you, publisher, you shouldn't bring out a manual on this text. Because you will look at the text in a certain way and you will make everybody else look at it in the same way, whereas there might well be loads of other views on the same text.'⁴⁷

E: Yes, there is this view. But, you, in your class, how do you deal with it?

Petros: Undoubtedly, I start from my personal view, but I accept {other views as well}. And there are students who come up with ideas, which I hadn't thought of. And I admit it straightaway. I might say to the students 'that's right. This is also valid. Let us discuss it.' It depends. I do not think there is only one idea. But according to my mental ability, this is what I put forward, and if there is another view, then this is acceptable as well.⁴⁸

E: That everyone has his/her own view...

Petros: When I say {that I accept} any other point of view, I mean in class. The fact that there are many different ideas going around in the world is delightful. Because it shows the polysemy of texts.

E: I see. Something else. What are the targets you have for the subject of literature? How would you present them? What are these? Of course, one aim that comes out from what you've already said is that you want them to feel and to enjoy the text. Are there any other aims?

Petros: Yes. The ideas could be another aim; {to see} whether the ideas that come out of a text are useful to an individual and his life. When I say to his life, I mean {that these ideas should make him} see the world differently, see things in a different way from the way he would see them until yesterday. Another aim, which I don't know whether I have reached, is to make children read literature by themselves. At this point, I don't think I've managed a lot. Or at least, that's what I think. Children don't read.

E: Why?

Petros: I don't know. Could it be that their time is limited? Some days ago, there was a girl at the occupation of schools⁴⁹ and a journalist asked about her time and how she manages it. So, she said 'During the day I study for the frontistirio and in the evening I study for school.' And their motto {that students have nowadays} is 'you don't let us fall in love, you don't let us...' I don't remember what the other thing is, something in the plural {because it rhymes}. I don't know. Adolescents do not read. That's my view. And as we said, the main reason for this is that their time is limited. And I speak about students who would read

⁴⁵ I.e. apart from the fact that I teach those texts that I like.

⁴⁶ The 1930s generation was a group of poets and authors who brought some kind of revival in Greek literature of the times. They all used the demotic language (instead of the katharevousa), searched for new ways of expression and introduced symbolism to modern Greek literature. Elytis, Seferis, Myrivilis, Venezis were among them.

⁴⁷ Seferis (1900-1971), a Greek poet, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1963. Here, the interviewee calls upon the authority of an established poet in order to support the view he puts forward.

⁴⁸ I.e. I put forward what I think of the text but I also accept any other view that comes from students.

⁴⁹ In reaction against the educational reform that was first implemented in September 1998, students occupied the school buildings throughout Greece. In some schools the occupation lasted for two months, while in others for less.

{if they had the time}. I'm not talking about students who do neither. That is, {I'm not talking} about students who study neither for school nor for the frontistirio, and who just attend a frontistirio because they have to and because they think it will help them get a pass so as to move on to the next year.

E: What do you do to promote this habit?

Petros: Well, I guess I don't do many things. I don't.

E: What could you possibly do?

Petros: For example, now, during the holidays and on the occasion of some extract from a text, let's say *Noumero* by Venezis, I could tell them 'read the whole book and by the end of January, for example, bring me {a work on} the structure of the text, what you've understood from the text' etc. So, this is something that I don't do. I don't do it because I don't know how willing they will be. However, I don't know... it is a weak spot, I suppose.

*E: Well, as the students are under so much pressure and have so much work, it is only rational to be reluctant to burden them with more work.*⁵⁰

Petros: That's right. Yes. The point is that there is not only me. It's everybody. Nowadays, all teachers push students very hard. They all ask for many things. So, if I give them two exercises on literature, two exercises on ancient Greek, then the physics teachers will put some more exercises for homework, the maths teacher as well... and so, a student ends up working another six or seven hours {at home} and is finally exhausted. Consequently, if we burden them with extra-curricular work, well...

E: Yes. I see. It might be pointless if it ends up being like that.

Petros: Yes. They only have a Saturday free, and they say 'I could as well go to the cafeteria', or 'to play basketball.' I mentioned the holidays. During holidays, that's when this could be done.⁵¹ And as we talk about presents {during the Christmas holidays}, instead of other things it could be 'buy a book, give a book as a gift.'⁵² In such a climate, a further effort could be made for teenagers to start reading.

E: I see. Let me take you back a bit. You said that one of your aims is for students to see if the ideas presented in a text could be useful to them, to help them acquire a different perspective of the world. What do you mean with that?

Petros: Well. OK. This is a very ambitious view. And I think I corrected it afterwards saying that a student could see a point of view that will be different from what he had before, for his environment and for things in general. When I say 'a different perspective of the world', I don't mean what should be done. But when we talk about peace or the exploitation of people, or the powerful people's hypocrisy, all these can come out of a text. These are useful in order to see how Clinton behaves and how he puts forward his personal... or rather how he acts in one field so as to cover up for his private matters.

E: And how could this be shown in a text?

Petros: How this could be shown in a text? Well, something... you could find somewhere the opportunity {to bring in these points as well}, you could find a starting point. You can't just mention it in a class. When you speak about hypocrisy and you say... myself I say it all the time... For example, when I do *Eleni* by Seferis, it isn't possible that I won't talk about Cyprus today and what the powerful of the Earth do. I always criticise hypocrisy and exploitation, as well as the currency that values like love, brotherhood, friendship and solidarity have in our lives. Well, these...

E: So, if I understand it well, you find associations with our times, with contemporary issues?

Petros: Well, yes. Whenever I can. Which means that, whenever I have the opportunity, I will always speak about today's world.

E: I see. Or is it that you will prompt students to speak?

Petros: Yes, of course. Because, as I said, a lesson is not a monologue. Instead, it has continuous questions, discussion with the students, from what they hear, because they don't read newspapers either... they just hear things... even though I see that they don't know things about today and what is happening today. Students at school ignore history and they even ignore contemporary issues.

E: I've seen that a lot in England as well. Once I had a student for tuition lessons in Greek and I asked her what she knew about the Second World War... What was the reason I made this question? Oh yes, now I remember, because we were to do something on the 28th October, and so, I asked her what she knew about

⁵⁰ It is true that nowadays children in Greece are under extreme pressure. Not only do they have to attend school and do homework for school but they also have to attend a frontistirio, which means that they have double teaching hours. Frontistiria are private institutions that try to attract more student-customers. The competition between frontistiria is very fierce and they try to establish a good reputation by pushing students harder and harder. The result is that students, especially at Lyceum, have no holidays or spare time, having to attend lessons on Sundays, during their holidays etc. The whole system is a vicious circle with adverse results. Students have to attend so many lessons that, in the end, they don't really have time to study seriously, let alone to rest.

⁵¹ I.e. it would be possible to encourage reading in the holidays.

⁵² This phrase has been a motto from an advertising campaign aimed at the promotion of reading.

the Second World War. And she more or less told me that she didn't know anything, she didn't even know which countries were involved...

Petros: Not even who started the war?

E: No, not even that. I asked her 'do you know roughly when this happened? She replied in 1920.⁵³ Well, what could one say? Something else now. Your aims, your criteria for choosing a text, your teaching practice, what has determined all these? Is it your personal views that have determined these? Is it the MNER?⁵⁴ Is it discussions you have with other Greek teachers at school? Is it books that circulate in the market and which you buy? What is it of all these that determines... ?

Petros: Well, we've said that the textbook is prescribed as well as the texts we have to do. As I've said, from those texts I choose the ones that I like. Or, sometimes {I choose} texts that I might have done in the past and have them ready. Well, yes. There are discussions with other colleagues who teach the same Year. We teach the same texts roughly so as to have common texts for the end-of-year exams. {And that is so} because, with few exceptions, we are obliged to set the same paper for all classes of the Year. So, we all try to teach the same texts. And this year, because the MNER asked us to do it, for the first time we did some planning at the beginning of the year. Of course, this planning was similar to what we would do every year, the only difference being that now we had to keep a formal record of the texts. So, I see that all my colleagues do more or less the same things as I do. That is, they teach more or less the same texts.

E: And what about the aims?

Petros: Now the aims...

E: Or, your teaching practice?

Petros: Well, this one no. There has been no discussion {with the other Greek teachers} on that {i.e. on the teaching practice}. Each of us has his own practice. There is no specific direction from some... there haven't ever been any seminars. We haven't seen anybody teaching a text of Modern Greek literature. These notorious advisers who are in position since 1982 or, I think, 1984.⁵⁵ Well, there is no official directive, and so each of us follows his own course depending on his personal knowledge, his intuition and his own world of emotions.

E: Do you mean that you don't have anything from the MNER, any documents, with anything specific?

Petros: Well, you see... Certainly there is... for every subject the MNER has set some targets, which, of course, I once read, but now I don't remember them. In general, {these targets include that} students should become free persons, should acquire the feelings that are proper for a real human, things like that, if I remember well. This is also what we try to do in class: that we bring out good citizens and good people.

E: What do you mean when you say 'good citizens' and 'good people'?

Petros: Good citizens. Who is {a good citizen}? It is the citizen who cares for the common affairs, for example. This is a good citizen.

E: And good people?

Petros: Good people... It is another thing to be a good person and to be a good Christian. Right? A good person, as we said, is that person who loves his fellow people and who will help them... What else could we say about a good person? {Someone who is} honest and cooperative. The honest person.

E: And do you think that literature can... ?

Petros: Yes. I think so. Irrespective of what is happening or what the outcome is, still literature {has the potential to form such persons}. In any case, these two targets that I mentioned, becoming a good citizen and a good person, cannot be achieved only through literature. Physics and maths can also help, provided that the maths teacher or the physics teacher want to do such a thing, i.e. to promote these ideas.

E: So, you mean that there isn't something special about literature?

Petros: Well, literature gives you such opportunities all the time. There are always opportunities to speak about this matter.

E: I see. Which part of a lesson do you regard as the most interesting or the most successful?

⁵³ This incident is real and took place that year (1999). The student attended a London public school with good reputation and was 15 and a half years old at the time. She was about to finish her compulsory education, ignoring such events as the two world wars. It should be noted that her grades in all school subjects were very good, A-C.

⁵⁴ MNER stands for Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, which is the Greek Department for Education.

⁵⁵ The advisers' duty is to observe teachers in their teaching and to give them guidance. One of the advisers' responsibilities is to do 'model teaching sessions' that other teachers observe so as to get ideas and a sense of direction for their own teaching. However, this was never put into practice. In older times these people were called 'inspectors' and had a very big say on teachers' careers, giving them a mark and writing reports on them. When the Socialists came to power for the first time in 1981 they abolished this institution, as it was considered reactionary and aimed at controlling and disciplining teachers. Then, they were called 'advisers' and their role was mainly advisory. Recently, again with the Socialist government in power, 'inspectors' have been reintroduced, on the pretext that teachers don't work hard enough.

Petros: I didn't understand the question.

E: You do a lesson. You get in a class and you teach.

Petros: Yes.

E: You read a text, don't you? You analyse it, you discuss it, you reach some conclusions etc. In general, which part of a lesson do you think is the most successful or the most interesting?

Petros: Most interesting, and not most successful... most interesting is the end, when the conclusions are drawn. Which is what I want to stay with the students in their mind and in their heart. Anyway, it isn't possible for anyone to remember all the rest – I'm talking about the students. It isn't possible that they remember everything that was said in the one or two hours that a lesson might have lasted. The point is for them to remember what is said at the end. And as we've said, that's when students must feel satisfied with the lesson. Both with the text and with the lesson.

E: Do you think that the existing exams system affects the teaching of literature?

Petros: It sure does.

E: In what ways?

Petros: Let me give you an example. The new system is very demanding as far as the exams are concerned. For example, {up to now} we didn't pay much attention to style. {Now} the study of stylistic features is in the examination syllabus, to which we didn't {pay much attention until now}. I am talking in general now, and not about individual teachers. Myself, I've always paid attention to figures of speech, because I look at figures of speech in conjunction with ideas. It is not possible that... For example, why was this particular figure of speech used here? It is because, by using a metaphor, let us say, the author wanted to say something more than if he had used a phrase with a literal meaning.

E: Whereas now...?

Petros: So, now we have to pay attention to some things, which we had... to which we didn't pay as much attention as we should have done.

E: Is this good?

Petros: Good. Yes. Of course, it's good.

E: So, do you approve of the changes?

Petros: Yes, I approve of them, even though...

E: We are talking about literature, right?

Petros: Yes. I'm talking about literature. I agree {with the changes} because teachers are made to study more and to tell more things {to students}. And as for students... Well, it is definitely tiring for a teacher. I don't stick any more to the questions that are {found in the textbooks}. In the textbooks all texts are followed by certain questions. Until today I... For example, both last year and this year, I haven't given them {for homework} any questions from the book, because they can find the answers ready in the 'answer books' published by Patakis and I don't know which other publishing house.⁵⁶ I always set my own questions depending on what we have discussed {in class} or questions on other things where a student needs to search into the text to find {the answer}. Or, {the questions might be on something} that we will discuss at length in the next lesson.

E: In what respect are these questions different from those of the textbook?

Petros: I can't say that they are radically different. There are, of course, questions on the content. But, they are different from those of the textbook, so that students won't find a ready answer {in the answer books}, as we've said. In addition, now there are questions on style and the figures of speech.

E: So, you have to prepare your own questions?

Petros: Yes. Moreover, now, in the new spirit, there are also questions where they need to fill in gaps, to link the relevant points etc.⁵⁷ I don't know if you are familiar with these?

E: Yes.

Petros: And so, we work on these as well. Of course, I do not quite agree with this kind of questions, at least as far as literature is concerned.

E: Why?

Petros: Or at least, we shouldn't pay too much attention to this kind of questions. Because, like that, a text.... If a student does not see a text as a whole, but only looks at some words, then, I don't think he can enjoy it.

E: So, how should it be?

Petros: Well. It's not that I want to diverge radically from this kind of questions. I simply think that they could be used as complementary questions, complementary to the type of questions that we had until now.

E: Yes. I see. And {they shouldn't be} the main ones?

⁵⁶ For 'answer books' see footnote no.15. 'Patakis' is the name of a publishing house that has made many publications of such 'answer books'.

⁵⁷ In the context of the Education Reform, a new examination system has been established. In an attempt to quantify the testing of literature, policy makers have even introduced multiple choice questions. Needless to say, that these new types of questions for literature are to a great extent ridiculous.

Petros: Yes. They shouldn't be the main ones. Exactly. Of course, the new syllabus does not prevent us from using the other type of questions. Or, we can even use this kind of questions, the old type. However, because I prepare the students of Year 1 of Lyceum so as to become familiar with the philosophy of the examinations of... I don't know how they're called now... of the exams for Years 2 and 3 of Lyceum, that's why these questions need to be in our lessons.⁵⁸ We don't use {this new type of questions} every day, but often. And they are questions that need preparation. Yes, at the end of the day they need preparation.

E: *By teachers or by students?*

Petros: By teachers. By teachers. And by students because... Of course, it depends on the question as well, because there are questions with very difficult answers, in the sense that there could be many answers. However, the MNER says that only one of these many answers is the correct one. And this one which is 'the correct of the correct', if we can use this phrase, is the only acceptable answer. And students complain because they give an answer and I tell them 'no, that's not the right answer.' And still, seen in a general context, their answer is correct as well. But finally, it is not the answer. Because {when I prepare questions} where the answers are given and students need to choose one of them,⁵⁹ I try, and of course this is the MNER guideline, I try to make them in such a way that it isn't obvious which answer is the correct one.

E: *Do you mean that the aim is to trick or confuse students?*

Petros: Finally, yes. Finally, it is to trick them. Because these questions get a small percentage of the total mark, compared with the other questions, and that's why they have to be a bit... tricky.

E: *I see. Some while ago, when I asked you about the main idea and if there is only one, you said that obviously you have some ideas in your mind and an interpretation of your own, but that children often come up with different readings of the text under study. And you also said that you discuss these ideas and accept them.*

Petros: Yes. It's not that I accept them. No. I say 'well. OK. There is this point of view as well. I don't accept it, or it can't be the main idea of the text.' It could be another idea, a secondary idea, perhaps, but this is not exactly what the poet, or generally the author, wanted to say.

E: *But now, don't you have to change this a bit, if the MNER says that there is only one correct answer that children should...?*

Petros: No. No. {There is only one} correct answer in these types of questions, the disjunctive or the multiple choice ones. {It has to do with} these types of questions and not with the way in which someone will read a text. No, the MNER has not set any guidelines on that. No. Everybody may read a text in their own way.

E: *Because sometimes these questions are on the main idea or...?*

Petros: Yes, you're right. They might be about the central idea that is discussed {in class}. {But} at least we don't have the MNER coming in our classes at Year 1 of Lyceum {to tell us exactly what to do}, which means that the questions are not set by the MNER but are set by us.⁶⁰ Usually the central idea is the one that has already been discussed in class. This is what we ask from the students to tell us {i.e. to write in the final exam}. And they either write this down or not. This means that they don't give us any other ideas. No. This is the purpose of the exams. In any case, {they need to write certain things} since the exams are common to all classes of the same Year and we, the teachers, we all see these texts in the same light. This {i.e. this common approach} is from informal discussions... you asked me if we discuss and I said no. In any case, before {the exams} or rather when we set the papers, we have a meeting and we agree on a common approach to the text. So, we say 'this is what we want from the students {to write}.' That's how we know how to mark. So, {we agree on} what we expect from students so as to have a common marking scheme.

E: *Yes. I see. Let me ask you something that has to do with your students. In general, students come from different environments, social, in terms of class, cultural etc. Do you think these differences affect the way they read and interpret literature? Have you seen anything like that? From your experience, have you noticed any influence?*

Petros: I don't know. I don't know the students' environment. Usually at [...], it is middle-class or lower middle-class. It is very rare to have children who belong to the upper class, I mean financially. Or even intellectually. {It is very rare to have students} whose parents might be professors at the University etc. I don't see {students' environment} affecting their viewpoint. That is, I don't see viewpoints that might

⁵⁸ The new pan-Hellenic examinations take place at the end of Years 2 and 3 of Lyceum. It is in these exams that students need to write literature papers with the new type of questions (multiple choice, filling in gaps, linking etc.). This interviewee teaches at Year 1 of Lyceum. This means that he is not obliged to use this new type of questions in his teaching. However, he says that he uses them so as to prepare the students for what they will have to face in the following years.

⁵⁹ I.e. when I prepare a multiple choice question for literature.

⁶⁰ There are still end-of-year exams for Year 1 of Lyceum but they are not pan-Hellenic. So, the papers are set by the teachers teaching the class. Of course, as he has already said, all teachers teaching classes of the same year need to agree on the examination papers.

reveal to me that 'look, this student is left-wing' or that he might come from a left-wing family.⁶¹ In class I haven't noticed any differentiation in terms of class or social position. Apart from the intellectual background, nothing else is obvious in class.

E: Have you taught in schools in other areas?

Petros: No. I have taught in schools in the country, that is, children whose parents might have been workers or teachers. I've taught in one more area of Athens, but that area was similar to [...] as well, of the same level, that is. So...

E: So, you haven't seen any differences between the different schools where you've taught?

Petros: The areas, where I've taught, belong roughly to the same social or economic class. And I haven't seen any differences. {This means that} I haven't taught at Philothei or Ekali, for example, so as to have experience of a different kind of students.⁶² When I say different, I don't mean intellectually. I mean socially different students. Even though I am never interested in my students' social status, I don't look at it. I never look at this thing, unless the father or the mother are professors at the University, especially of my own specialisation. As I check students' records, I might notice this and have it in my mind. Nothing more than that, though. Just to see if this student, whose family background is considered to be intellectual, to see if he really comes up to what I would expect of him. Other than that, whether a student is a taxi driver's son or if his father has a shop that sells... if he is a grocer etc., well... I don't look at these things, so as to know whether there is a reason for him to have a different way of looking at things. {I haven't noticed} a student who is from the working class seeing things differently from another one who the son of a teacher. I don't see this in class.

E: Are there any differences between boys and girls?

Petros: I don't know. You mean generally, in the same light, the social, right? I don't think so. I don't think so. Some... Well, if we see some feminist ideas {in a text} and we discuss them, there might be a bit of laughter. And of course, I, the teacher, say 'there shouldn't be any hard feelings among the boys or the girls', depending on the ideas we discuss. There is mutual understanding. Today, I think students see each other differently, depending on their sex.

E: I see. These were more or less the things I wanted to ask. Is there anything you wished to be different in the teaching of literature? Is there anything that has preoccupied you through all these years?

Petros: I wish there weren't any exams.

E: Why?

Petros: At least for teachers. In what sense {do I say this}? So that he won't have to teach specific texts and a specific number of texts. So that nobody will be entitled to tell him 'you did only five texts, whereas you should have done fifteen.' I don't know, of course, whether in this case.... if this case is right. That is, {I don't know if it is right} to stay at a few texts {for longer} instead of doing more. Because the more you do...

[A small part of the interview was lost because I had to change the tape.]

...without being under pressure and without saying 'I have to finish. Oh, no. I spend another hour on that text. I need to finish with it and move on to the next one.' {I'm not sure} whether we help students more if we do a smaller number of texts. I think that the more texts you do and the more ideas a student sees, the more you benefit him. Because, staying at a single text for too long has its negative aspects as well. That is, you scrutinise it but at some stage it might become boring. In any case, it is not a lesson by University standards so as to cover all aspects, anything that can be said {about it}. You should look at the main aspects, the most important ones. And then, you should move on to another text for something else.

E: So, you mean that if there weren't any exams...

Petros: If there weren't any exams, I think teachers would have a much easier task. And... Or, there could be exams but on an unseen text. We always speak about Modern Greek literature, right? It could be an unseen text that is of the students' intellectual level. Through this text one could ask students for all these things they have been taught in class {throughout the year}. Which means that students should be ready to read a text without their teacher's guidance.

E: Anything else?

Petros: Nothing else. I told you over the phone that I don't like this school subject a lot.

E: But, why is that?

Petros: I don't know. I don't like teaching it. I like teaching ancient Greek. Ancient Greek and history. I like history a lot. And I don't like Modern Greek literature.

E: Do you read literature?

Petros: I do read literature. I read it for myself. That is, I don't want to teach it. Even though, as I've told you, I enjoy the lessons, because, in the end, I do it with love. I might not like it but I do it with love and

⁶¹ It seems that he confuses sociocultural background with political ideology.

⁶² The areas that he mentions, i.e. Philothei and Ekali, are upper class neighbourhoods of Athens.

care and passion. Like this. And that's what I want to get over to students. But I don't like the subject, even though I read. I read literature all the time. It might be true that I didn't read a lot while I was at secondary education or at the University. I started reading when I was appointed as a teacher. In a hurry. So as to manage to read everything I hadn't read. For example, I read Lountemis when I was already appointed as a teacher, whereas someone reads Lountemis in Year 1 or Year 2 of Gymnasium. {However,} I read Lountemis when I became twenty-six years old.

E: I see. I'm simply thinking whether your dislike for the subject has to do, up to a point, with the existing situation in schools and its position as a school subject...

Petros: No. I don't think so.

E: That is, in relation to the practice, the methodology, the specific texts, or maybe the fact that there are exams...

Petros: No. I don't know. Of course, I said a few things. For example, I said that I like the demotic poetry, I like them a lot. And most of the poems in Year 1 of Lyceum are demotic songs. No. I teach the subject with love. It is simply that I would prefer not to do it. I can't give you the reasons. I don't know. Even though I myself read. OK?

E: You simply prefer the other subjects.

Petros: Yes. Of course. I prefer them. I prefer doing Ancient Greek all the time. Or, doing Latin. I don't know. It's my love. Whereas the other subject {i.e. Modern Greek literature} is not my love. Despite the fact that I do it with love.

E: OK. That would be all. Thank you very much.

Greek Interview No 4:

Anna

(23 / 12 / 1998)

Anna is a white woman in her early fifties and works at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. She was very helpful and eager to talk about her practice. The interview took place at her place and was recorded, like the rest of the Greek set. There was no interruption and no time pressure.

E: Well. I am mainly interested in how you see literature as a school subject, and not all subjects that a Greek teacher does. What we usually do {in these interviews} is that we start from childhood and the memories that you might have from reading literature at that age, in school and outside school - if you remember anything, of course.

Anna: Is there something specific that you want to know or anything I remember?

E: In general, what memories you have of reading literature at childhood.

Anna: I liked literature a lot. Of course, I didn't have any teachers who would be very... with substance, full. Despite that, an effort was made on my part to approach literature as much as possible. For example, I remember that at school they would ask us to make analyses of prose and of poetry, and I liked making these analyses a lot. And, in class, most of the time teachers would ask me to read out my work. Of course, I started reading literature when I was very young, because I have four elder sisters and they used to read a lot, especially foreign literature. I started from foreign literature. Imagine that! Russian... Of course, at University, I engaged more in Greek literature than in foreign. But, I remember that during the holidays, at Christmas, Easter, summer, and in the weekends, I would read books, even voluminous ones like, for example, *Notre Dame*. This is not a Russian book, but I remember reading it. I was twelve years old when I read it. Or, from Russian literature {I remember reading} *The Karamazof Brothers*. Again I was at that age. It was something mythical; something imaginary...⁶³ I grew up in a small village, in a close community. There were no other interests {we could pursue}, and reading literature was some kind of escape.

E: Where would you find books?

Anna: We borrowed from each other. Children from the neighbouring villages would come to our village and everyone brought whatever they had.⁶⁴ Of course, it was very difficult to buy books. There was no affluence. We did what we could. But, it was mainly through exchange {that we would get books to read}.

E: In the beginning you said that teachers were lacking in substance and were not full. What do you mean by that?

Anna: They would just read the lesson aloud. For example, if it were a poem, they would read it aloud once. And after that, {they would only look at} the meaning making a summary. They didn't insist a lot.⁶⁵ In other words, they themselves hadn't read enough to be able to give something more {to us}. We simply had a very poor approach to a text.

E: And what about the analyses that you used to make?

Anna: These analyses were some sort of an essay. A lot of theory. We would have a poem, let us say *Ithaca*,⁶⁶ and we would start writing a rather lengthy text on it, analysing it word by word. So, we treated it like an essay topic and made the analysis on our own. And, the more we could say the better it was for the class as well. Or at least, that's what it seemed.

E: How would you compare your reading of literature in school with that outside school?

Anna: At that time?

E: Yes. At that time.

Anna: There was a big difference. The difference was big. First of all, in class they would give us only a few short texts. Outside school you could go further than that. That is, I would get hold of a book and within a day I would 'drink in' the whole book.

E: Was this the main difference?

Anna: That's the difference I could see.

E: Later on, how did you decide to become a Greek teacher?

⁶³ She means that it was something that gave her access to the world of myths and of the imagination.

⁶⁴ In older times, in the Greek countryside, a school in a big, central village would also serve the needs of all smaller villages in the area. Thus, children from the neighbouring villages had to travel to go to school every day. Going to and from school was rather difficult, as the roads network was not so good. This is still happening in some places, even though things are much easier due to an improved road network.

⁶⁵ They wouldn't go in depth.

⁶⁶ *Ithaca* is a poem by Constantine Cavafy. It wouldn't be an exaggeration if I said that everyone in Greece knows this poems. It is, in a way, a point of reference.

Anna: In the village, the role models that we had were not that many. There was the doctor and the teacher. Up until the Third Year of Lyceum, the Christmas holidays of my final year, I wanted to become a Maths teacher and to follow the exact sciences. However, for some reasons... because of a Maths teacher who gave me some trouble, I suddenly reacted and slipped and went to study Philology. So, the swing was very sudden.

E: *Yes. Indeed, from Mathematics to Philology...*

Anna: Yes. Indeed. Up until Christmas of the Third Year of Lyceum I was studying for mathematics. And then, after that, I changed and started studying Latin, which I hadn't been taught before, {studying it} on my own. And in five months I sat the exams {i.e. the University entry exams}. And fortunately... In any case I like the job.

E: *So, you haven't regretted it?*

Anna: No, no. Not at all.

E: *How many years is it that you've been teaching?*

Anna: It's been twenty-five years. I am going towards my twenty-sixth year. Twenty-five continuous years. Twenty-five.

E: *OK. In what kind of schools have you worked?*

Anna: Are you interested in the areas?

E: *Yes.*

Anna: Well. I taught for three years in the countryside, at Karditsa.⁶⁷ For five years at St. Ierotheos, at Peristeri, and the rest of the years at the [...] Lyceum of Zographou.⁶⁸

E: *I see. {I'd like to ask you} something different now regarding your teaching practice. In broad terms, how would you describe your methodology, your practice?*

Anna: Do you want...?

E: *More or less, what do you do in a lesson, in class? Bearing, of course, in mind the fact that lessons are never exactly the same...*

Anna: Definitely not. And every time you need to have a special method. Well. In the beginning I present the text, either poetry or prose. This is the first... And I prefer it that students haven't read the text at home. I don't prepare students. Like that, so that they are surprised and enjoy it. And so that I see students' first surprise. We make a pause so as for them to enjoy it a bit and take pleasure from it. And then, we move on to the difficulties regarding the language and the content, if they have any difficulties, of course. But students usually find... have difficulties. Even though the language in some texts might seem very simple to us, the grown-ups, students always encounter difficulties. So, we smooth out any problems that might arise. And then, we move on to see what students have understood from the poem or the prose text. That is, the content or a summary. And so that I hear their speech; students speaking. Afterwards, we try to find... If it is a poem we read a stanza, a whole stanza, or even the whole poem once more, if it is a small one, so that they manage to find the thematic parts. After they identify these parts, we take each thematic part and either we read it again or each of them talks about its content. In the end, we want to find a title {for each part}, the main idea. Further to that, we analyse the short text word by word, line by line, so as to find the topics, first of all, and the ideas. Of course, we discuss the ideas separately. We try to see whether these ideas can stand up to time {i.e. whether they are timeless} or if they express only the writer's era. And after we exhaust that, we move on to the form {of the text}. The poet's expression, his style, the stylistic devices that he uses, and the metre... Of course, we might look at the metre at the end, looking at the whole poem. Then, we go on to the next stanza, to the next part, and we carry on in the same way... and so on and so forth. Finally, at the end, we come up with a general impression of the whole text. Students put together the message, the moral. We also try to look at the ideological extensions, as far as possible.

E: *What do you mean when you say 'ideological extensions'?*

Anna: Starting from the ideas that we get from the text, {we try} to find some other relevant, similar ideas, so as to enrich, let us say, the topic.

E: *You said that after the analysis of the themes and of the form... you said 'we find the main idea'.*

Anna: Yes. The idea. The main idea.

E: *Well. The main idea. When you say 'we find', who is this 'we'?*

Anna: First of all, the students. We ask them, they raise their hand and each of them says his opinion.⁶⁹ And, of course, at the end we finish up with the most correct, the most succinct one. Finally, of course, students receive help from the teacher as well. But every student has got something to say. And, you must know that yourself, students need to talk because speech stimulates thought as well. This is the aim: students should always say something, even if it is wrong.

⁶⁷ Karditsa is a town in a big plain in the Greek mainland. It is a rural area.

⁶⁸ Peristeri is a working-class neighbourhood in the west part of Athens. Zographou is a neighbourhood in the east part of Athens, which is lower middle-class.

⁶⁹ It is interesting to note her use of the first person plural. It seems that she refers to Greek teachers as a group, having a common practice.

E: And once students express their different views on the piece, how is the most correct one to be found? Do you tell them? Do you point out which view is the most correct?

Anna: Well, we said that many students talk. Even {when they are left} on their own, they can compare and find the right one. Of course, at some point I intervene as well. And I forgot to say that, before all these, some kind of reference is made to the time, the era, in which the poet or the writer lived. {Moreover, a reference is made} to what he occupied himself with.

E: Does this take place in the beginning together with the {initial} presentation of the text?

Anna: Yes. Together with the presentation of the text. Or rather, before the text is presented. And we read the relevant introductory note to them. Apart from this I also give them some extra information in order for them to know in which era the poet lived and so to understand the text better.

E: Obviously texts are from the textbooks of the MNER⁷⁰...

Anna: Certainly.

E: According to what criteria do you choose the texts you teach?

Anna: You know... Should I address you in the singular or in the plural?⁷¹ I don't know...

E: In the singular.

Anna: Well. You know that in the three years of Lyceum {texts in these textbooks} are sorted out in terms of the era. You know that, don't you?

E: Yes.

Anna: So, in the First Year of Lyceum we have the demotic songs. It {i.e. the anthology} starts from the tenth century. Then, we go to the literature... let us say Vilara... Then, we move on to modern poetry, with poetry written between the two World Wars. In the Second Year of Lyceum, we have Kalvos, we have Solomos, that is, the Eptanisian School, and we have Palamas. And, in the Third Year of Lyceum, we have treatises, foreign literature as well as prose. Well, in the First Year of Lyceum where I teach this year, we take pieces representative of each era, of each period. For example, from the first period we choose one or two *akritika* songs. Not scholarly ones but *akritika*, that is, folk songs... From the demotic songs we pick up *paraloges*, *kleftika*, one piece from *paraloges*, one piece from *kleftika*.⁷² Then, we move on to the Cretan literature, and we choose two pieces from there as well. For example, an extract from *Erofili* or from *Erotokritos*. In other words, we try to... we pick up texts which are representative and about which students have heard something somewhere.

E: When you say that 'we pick up representative texts', this 'we' again, you know, the subject, who is it?

Anna: They {i.e. the chosen texts} are representative... Up to now it was personal. Every teacher would choose the pieces he wanted to teach. Of course, there was also a discussion with the colleagues who taught the other classes of the same year, but this was not binding.⁷³ It was simply so that we could have a common paper for the end-of-year exams. It was not compulsory {that we do exactly the same texts}. It was not a binding discussion. Now, with the new system, the selection of texts comes from the MNER, especially in the Second Year of Lyceum. In the First Year of Lyceum {such a selection} hasn't come {yet from the MNER}, but in the Second Year of Lyceum, where students will have to take exams, they oblige teachers to teach those texts, which have been selected by the MNER.⁷⁴

E: Until recently, when choice was a personal matter, how would you choose?

⁷⁰ MNER stands for Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs.

⁷¹ In Greek, when you talk to a person, you can use either the second person singular or the second person plural, the same as in French. You use the second person singular when you talk to friends or persons who are younger than you in an informal setting. You use the second person plural when you talk to older persons, people you do not know well or in a formal setting. In all interviews with teachers older than me, I would use the second person plural and interviewees would use the second person singular, mainly due to the age difference.

⁷² All these, *akritika*, *kleftika*, *paraloges*, are various types of folk songs from the 10th century onwards. *Akritika* were the songs that referred to those Greeks who lived on the borders of the Byzantine empire and who defended the country against the various attackers from the East. *Kleftika* were the folk songs referring to the Greeks who fought against the Turks when the Greeks were subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, *paraloges* are folk songs that tell a story; many versions exist of each of them. See also note no.27.

⁷³ What happens is that teachers who teach different classes of the same year are obliged by law to set the same papers at the end-of-year examinations as a matter of comparability. These teachers often end up teaching the same texts in the course of the year. For a different perspective of this practice, it is interesting to read the interview with Margarita, who has a completely different view on the issue.

⁷⁴ Under the recent educational reform students attending the Second and Third Year of Lyceum will have to sit pan-Hellenic examinations at the end of the year. Their grades will count for their entry into the University. The fact that these examinations are pan-Hellenic means that all candidates need to cover the same syllabus, and thus, to read the same texts in literature. The first pan-Hellenic examinations for the Second Year of Lyceum are in June 1999.

Anna: {I would select} what I liked most. For example, from modern poetry I liked Seferis. I chose... I would do all poems by Seferis. There are two to three {poems in the textbook}; I would do all of them. However, from another {poet}, who doesn't express me so much, I would pick up one, if I could, or even none {of his poems}.

E: *Are you happy with these anthologies or do you think that things should be different?*

Anna: There is a big variety {of texts in these anthologies}, but it could have {texts} from other writers as well. Not always... It has been all these years that I teach the same writers. The textbooks never change. And even now, with all these changes that have been made, the textbooks for Modern Greek literature have stayed the same.⁷⁵

E: *So, it would be nice if...*

Anna: It would be nice if they included some new, modern writers as well.

E: *Yes. I see. Let me ask you something else. You have talked to me about the methodology, the practice, and the criteria that you use. What aims do you have in this subject? To put it more simply, what do you want to bring about...?*

Anna: First of all, I want students to enjoy, above all, to take satisfaction from it. And also, to give them an incentive for ensuing life so as to find refuge {in literature}. Because I consider literature to be a refuge from the trivial everyday life. That is, literature makes life beautiful. It makes you forget the rather dull things of daily life. And I prefer prose to poetry. Prose suits me more than poetry.

E: *Is there anything else that you want {to achieve}? I mean, apart from students acquiring the habit of reading and enjoying...?*

Anna: I also want them to become more sensitive, to develop their sensitivity, their feeling.

E: *More sensitive to what?*

Anna: Emotionally.

E: *And how will this help them?*

Anna: Life is not just matter, is it? How can explain this? I think that what I just said expresses my views: that it is a refuge. It will help them relax and forget their problems in life. They become sensitive; they take some ideas that possibly wouldn't ever cross their mind. Literature brings all people close to each other.

E: *OK. Good. Is there anything else with regard to the aims?*

Anna: At this moment {I can't think of anything else.} It's a bit...

E: *That's OK. What has determined all these things that you've talked about? I mean the criteria you apply, the aims you have for the subject, the methodology, are all these more or less a matter of your personal decision? Is it the MNER that has determined all these? Is it books that you've read? Is it seminars? Or what else?*

Anna: Look. It's been a combination of all these. I told you that I don't think I got many things from school. It's got more to do with the University, because I had very good teachers {there}. I remember of Sachines, Savvides, very good ones. I mean enlightened {teachers}. As I was going on {in life}, I would say it had more to do with my personal efforts, such as reading whatever they gave us from the MNER – which are scant no doubt – as well as books on the subject. That is, Karantonis, Xatzifotis, Paganos, writers who have dealt with the criticism of literary texts.

E: *Have you ever been to any seminars, which were helpful?*

Anna: I attended SELME for a year.⁷⁶ That was something as well. {I have also been to} some seminars from time to time, but not many. I would say that in those twenty-five years I have been to ten seminars in total. Not more than that.

E: *How did all these help you?*

Anna: Each of these things, each of these people would add a small stone. And yet, I think that each of us experiments with the subject of Modern Greek literature. And one is never completely satisfied. Every time he adds something more. For example, I teach a poem for the first time, the second time I put in something more, the third time I give something more, and so on and so forth. I think it is experience that helps you become satisfied with yourself at some point. And of course, in literature teaching at some moments you might be unsatisfied. You might walk into a class, you might be in the right vein, might be fully prepared, and still come out and say 'What have I done today?' Because it also depends on the mood of the class. It depends on the level of the class but also on the mood. {The success of} a lesson in literature depends on the students' mood; and, on the relationship between students and the teacher. If students don't want to give, then they won't give anything. So you talk on your own all the time, and in the end, you walk out and think 'What am I doing? What have I done?' This has happened many times. And at other times, you come out flying {because} you are so satisfied with yourself. That's how it is in literature. This doesn't happen in

⁷⁵ In the 1997 Education Reform, the form of assessment for literature was changed but not the textbooks used.

⁷⁶ SELME is in-service training. It consists of seminars and classroom observations, which last for a year. Teachers who attend SELME do not have to work in school during that year.

the other subjects, because the object there is more specific. In literature it depends on you as well as on the class.

E: So, from what I understood, when you end up talking on your own all the time, when it is just you who does the talking, you consider this to be a failure?

Anna: Yes. Disappointment. I consider this to be a failure. A big one.

E: But, when students talk, what do they achieve then?

Anna: First of all, they enjoy it more. A student wants to listen to another person of the same age. They don't want to listen to the teacher all the time. And I think that in this subject they listen to their classmates more than they listen to their teacher.

E: Why?

Anna: Because children give original {views}... They are spontaneous. Their mind is still fresh. They often express views which might be strange, and with humour. And, in a way, students want to see a lesson from its pleasant side.

E: I see. And obviously, you also get greater satisfaction when different ideas are expressed?

Anna: Of course. Of course. In general, {I feel more satisfied} when students participate. This is the aim, participation. Even if they say weird things at some points, with guidance they will finally get to the right {idea}.

E: I see. What do you do when you finish a lesson? Do you ask them to do some work at home? Some while ago you said that you conclude with a message, with a main idea, some ideological extensions, some ideas, etc...

Anna: I think it is necessary {to put them some homework}, because no matter how many things you might say in class they are still not enough for a literary text. A student needs to go home and read the text again when he is on his own, so as to ponder on it more. And like this... How can I say this? So that he makes, he gives, he has a complete image, a better image of the text. So, I give them some questions, both ideological and on the form.⁷⁷

E: What do you mean when you say 'ideological questions'?

Anna: For example, {if} we have a verse {the question could be:} 'Develop the content of this verse. What ideas are there in this extract? Develop an idea.' So, the student...

E: And when they come back to school and they have written...?

Anna: Of course. We always read students' work {in class}. Sometimes, I address someone and ask him to read, or I say 'Who wants to read?' However, most of the time, I ask a student to read, because I can't check {all of them} and I can't go to all desks to police them and see if they have done their homework. So, in this way the lazy student is caught. And there is fear somewhere. Thus, the next time they will all write. Of course, we never stop at one student, because the result isn't always perfect. One, two, or even three students read the same exercise, the answer to each exercise. And we also add a few things, so as to see what the right {approach} is, in order for the students to understand how they should go around whenever they have a similar question.

E: So, is there every time a discussion on the answers they have given?

Anna: Yes. Definitely. And, in this way, another part might be covered which was probably not covered with the analysis, when it was done in class through the questions. That is, we fill in some gaps.

E: OK. I'd like to ask something that has to do with the students. Students come from different backgrounds, social, cultural etc. Regarding their gender, there are boys, girls. Do you think that these differences influence the way in which they read and interpret literature?

Anna: Certainly.

E: What have you seen from your experience?

Anna: At this age, in adolescence, I think that girls are closer to literature {than boys}. They love literature more. They take part more and are more effective than boys. My conclusion is that girls start reading literature earlier, from childhood. Boys don't read. There are only a few of them who do this.

E: Have you ever wondered why?

Anna: I think that since childhood boys are more interested in anything related to engines, toy-cars, or group games. {They are more interested in} going out. Moreover, parents are a little bit more lax with boys than they are with girls. At a young age, girls... and this is... girls read more when they are at school. Of course, as they grow up things are reversed, things change.

E: And where can this difference be seen?

Anna: Yes. It can be seen. Girls are richer, in their contribution, their speech, their thinking, in the answers they give, both orally and in writing. Boys are more dry. They want to be brief.

E: And in literature one needs this...

Anna: Yes. Of course, a rich expression is needed.

⁷⁷ She talks about questions that are 'ideological' instead of questions on the content. This was something I noticed in most interviews. Teachers would talk about the 'ideological' aspects of a text but what they really meant would be aspects related to the content.

E: OK. I see. Are there any other obvious differences?

Anna: Yes. There are. For example, the origin. We have some students who come from an environment that is culturally downgraded. And you can see that as soon as you enter a class, after just five to ten days. And when you ask them 'Where were you last year?', you are sure that they will answer to you that they came from this or that village. There is a difference. Moreover, the situation in the family, the family environment {makes a difference as well.} If the parents are cultivated, this is apparent.

E: You said 'and if you ask them, most of the times, they answer that they came from some village.' So, what is happening? Are the children who come from a village...?

Anna: Yes. They don't have many opportunities to come into contact with texts. Everything they do is what they do in school. It seems that at home they don't open a book, at least not a literature book. They limit themselves to the schoolbooks. Whereas in a city, someone might give them a gift, parents might be reading at home, there are public libraries, teachers exhort them. It is easy for them to find {books}. In a village, however, things are difficult on that matter.

E: So, the big difference is...

Anna: It is from the environment. It depends on the environment.

E: It depends on the environment and it also has to do with the fact that they haven't had many opportunities?

Anna: Opportunities, of course. Lack of opportunities.

E: And can this be seen in the way they analyse texts?

Anna: Definitely. {It can be seen} in the way they analyse, in the way they talk.

E: In general, do students come up to your expectations?

Anna: Generally, they like the subject. They like it. They consider it to be easier, compared with the other subjects. Of course, in the end, especially when it comes to the exams, they understand that literature is the most difficult subject. Because the worse mark they get is in literature.

E: Why is that?

Anna: They think that, because texts are from Modern Greek literature, they think that it isn't something difficult. However, they have difficulties when they answer in writing. In class things are not so difficult. Or, at least, they don't seem difficult. However, in the end, there is difficulty in the writing.

E: I see. Let me take you back a bit, because I was left with an open question, back to your practice. You said that students express many different views, that many of these are original etc. At the end, you conclude to the most correct one. And, either they come to it on their own or, if it is necessary...

Anna: ... with my help.

E: .. with your help. And you, how do you find this view, this interpretation which is the most correct one? How can we know which one it is?

Anna: Yes. I'll tell you. I will go back a bit to my University years and remember Vrettakos.⁷⁸ He came in to listen to the analysis of one of his poems. We were a big group of twenty students and, after we made many different readings {of his poem}, in the end, he said 'Well, did I say all these things? All these things that you said, did I say all these?' And he carried on 'While I was writing the poem, not even one percent of all these things crossed my mind; not even one percent of all these things that you just said and which are all correct.' Well. {In my readings} I try not to go beyond what is reasonable. That is, I study the poem, I have taught it so many times, I have grasped the poet's message, what he wants to give, and I try not to move out of this frame. So this is the reason why I intervene in order to bring them where I must. And this 'must' is my own conclusion, the result of all the study that I've done.

E: So, your personal reading has played a role in the viewpoint where you have concluded? And the reading of various critics?

Anna: Yes. Definitely. Definitely yes.

E: And these criticisms, do you find them with your personal research?

Anna: Look. The bibliography is very big. I try to have a variety of criticisms. Yes. All {these factors} together {influence my reading}. And, of course, at some point in the end, it ends up being personal. I choose anything that gives something, which is essential for me. Because often they send us some books from the MNER, some... Well, I might read it once, and then, I might reject it. So, I go back to my own source; from where I think I can take out more things, more convincing things.

E: Yes. I see. And do you have this room? Are you allowed to have this room {for differing}?

Anna: Yes. Of course. For sure.

E: By the MNER as well?

Anna: Yes. There is freedom in the subject of literature. Moreover, nobody wants to take the responsibility. For example, at SELME⁷⁹, tutors would teach us different texts every time, {and yet} none of them would take the responsibility to propose a very specific methodology in literature teaching. It's because the subject is not something very specific. As a result, there is room for the personal factor to play a part. And this is

⁷⁸ Vrettakos' work (born 1912) belongs to modern poetry and is characterised by a particular lyricism.

⁷⁹ See note no.76.

why we say that there are teachers who are charismatic in teaching literature and others who are not. No matter how much you might read, I've already told you that there is also your mood {which is important} and... Your mood plays a very big part. Even if you have read a lot of things about a text on the previous day, you might not give anything, if you are not in a good mood when you enter a class.

E: How would you describe a charismatic teacher of literature?

Anna: {I would expect him to be} rich in terms of substance, to have read too many things, to be able to draw a parallel between different texts, to compare; when he teaches a specific text to be able to find... to bring in class other poets' viewpoints or other authors' opinions on the same topic. He needs to have rich speech and good speech. Moreover, he needs to present texts well. This is also something. I would say that the first contact with a text is the most important. With the presentation of a text you either win or lose a student.

E: When you say 'presentation' {what do you mean}?

Anna: The reading, reading aloud. It has big significance.

E: Usually, is it you who read a text?

Anna: Yes. And I avoid asking a pupil to read it, because they destroy it. {The other} pupils start making remarks about it, criticising, there is some sort of a fuss. On the contrary, when a teacher reads it, I think that the class is riveted. Because he knows how to give, how to colour his voice, so as for pupils to understand certain things straightaway. When a pupil reads, then they don't understand a thing. Even with a simple text. Because he doesn't know the way in which to give it, or else, how to stress some points.

E: Is there anything else that has made you think on the teaching of literature?

Anna: I have thought a lot on this and you must have realised this from what I've already said. Because it is something so abstract... especially poetry. In prose you can... you have more specific things to get hold of, to move around. In poetry, if you always follow the same line, the same practice – that is, reading the poem, talking about what it is, etc. – then, at some point, you get tired and you think 'Is this the best way to make pupils understand?' Many times I have thought of it. Even though I like literature, teaching literature, still I have felt puzzled many times.

E: Have you thought on what else could be...?

Anna: {Yes. I have thought} on what else could be done.

E: Do you discuss these thoughts of yours with the other teachers at all, or...?

Anna: Many times {we have discussed these matters}, when we have time. Because there is not enough time at school. Time is short. We discuss and I see that most of them have the same worries.

E: Yes. I see. Is there anything that you would like to be different? Of course, you have already said that you would like the anthologies to change, to be renewed more often.

Anna: Yes. They should change more often. And pupils should get to know more writers. Modern writers as well. Because in their life they might meet someone on their way. And they have no idea. They won't have any idea. Why {do we need to spend our time} only on the Eptanisian School? Why {do we need to spend our time} only on the New Athenian School?

E: Is there anything else apart from these?

Anna: I would also like to have available in class another book with parallel texts, apart from the textbook that we teach. That is, the state {MNER} shouldn't leave me like this to search for parallel texts.⁸⁰ It should help me. So as for pupils to compare, to have more opportunities to approach a theme.

E: Do you think that exams affect the teaching of literature?

Anna: Do you mean exams as they are being conducted now or under the new system? As they are being conducted now they do not have an effect on teaching. Because a teacher, who teaches a class, makes sure that the questions he sets for the final exam are similar to those he would set to the class throughout the year. So, a pupil does not find it hard. However, now with the new syllabus, things definitely change. The state {MNER} obliges you to teach in a specific way, because the questions {at the final exam} will be whatever the state wants.⁸¹

E: And how do you see that?

Anna: A bit binding. It is a bit binding for the teacher.

E: And would you prefer things to be different or are you happy with this?

Anna: It has its positive aspects. Why I am saying that it has its positive aspects? Because, under the new syllabus, there is a variety of question types. And it also helps the teacher so that he won't put his very personal element in it {i.e. in literature teaching}. As a result, all Greek pupils get the same things. Because, until now, I saw that some pupils were more lucky than others. Some had better teachers, and so they were more lucky than others were, who would have less able teachers. So, now there will be more equality of opportunities.

E: And what about the negative aspects?

⁸⁰ The new guidelines issues after the 1997 Reform say that teachers should teach texts by other authors and with the same theme as the text under study. They call them 'parallel' texts.

⁸¹ She means that the papers for the end-of-year examinations are set by the MNER and are pan-Hellenic.

Anna: Without doubt the text is hacked into pieces. Especially with the big number of questions and the type of questions {that we have now}. And this doesn't let you do what I said earlier on, the ideological extension; it doesn't let you say a word further than the text with the pupils. Because pupils want to link the theme of a poem with the modern era. {They want} to see whether what the poet says is true and could hold good nowadays and always.

E: *OK. I think that's it. Thank you very much.*

Greek Interview No 5:

Sofia

(23 / 12 / 1998)

Sofia is in her early fifties and works at a Gymnasium in a neighbourhood of Athens. The interview took place at my place and she did not mind my recording it. She spoke eagerly and assertively about her teaching practice.

E: What I usually do in these interviews is that we start from childhood and the memories that you might have from reading literature at that age, when you were a child. So, could you talk to me about that? If you remember anything, of course...

Sofia: Look. I come from a large family. There were eight children in my family and I was the last one. Why am I saying this? Because I lived in this big family, and my father was a merchant, and there weren't any books in my house, any literature. I remember that my elder siblings used to read these {magazines}, *The Mask*, *The Young Hero*⁸² etc. However, from all these I had a preference for *The Illustrated Classics*, which were classical texts, in an illustrated {edition}, of course. I remember *The Man who laughs*, I remember works by Victor Hugo, *Notre Dame*, and I had... I liked them. In other words, I wanted to read, I wanted to have books. At the same time, we had an uncle, who worked as a Greek teacher at Yiannena. I grew up in Arta.⁸³ From time to time, he used to send us some books. And I remember that he sent us *Trelantonis* by Penelope Delta, which I read about twenty times. Or maybe more than that. In other words, I saw this book as an oasis, I was enthralled by it, I liked it a lot. We had no books at home. There was no literature at home. Other than that, some friends {would give us books}. So, wherever I could find a book {I would read it}. I remember *Tom Sawyer*, books like that. One summer I went to this uncle of mine in Yiannena. I went to stay with him for around twenty days. Well, in those twenty days I read all books by Penelope Delta, to say the least. In other words, reading literature appealed to me a lot.

E: Why?

Sofia: Why? I don't know whether it was that I identified with the characters but I was fascinated by the way these things were written as well as by the new horizons they opened up for me. I could see some {new} things {in the books}... because I told you it was a small town and the only opportunity we had of new experiences was from some films at the cinema {where we would} occasionally {go} on Sundays. No theatre at all. At some point I came to Athens and went to a puppet theatre. I liked that as well a lot. To put it in simple words, I took great delight from that {i.e. from reading literature}. I can't remember any more details about the language and all these, but in general I liked it. I would read literature books for hours on end.

E: So far as you could find books...

Sofia: Yes.

E: Did you do literature at school?

Sofia: Yes. We did literature at school, at those times.

E: Do you remember anything from that?

Sofia: I remember one time when we were doing a demotic song...⁸⁴ I can't remember the title {of the song} but... even though I was not a particularly good pupil... Well, a good pupil... I was a moderate pupil according to the standards of that time. I wouldn't study too hard for school. I would study, though; I would do my duty. However, I remember a demotic song, whose title I don't know. {The teacher} had asked us to make an analysis at home and I did it very well. That is, the teacher liked it a lot and she asked me to read it in class. That was in the Second Year of Gymnasium. I don't remember {much more}, though... I found it tiring, I didn't like the practice {of those times}: 'find the stylistic features, find this...' I liked the content. In other words, I liked the stimuli that a text would give to me; it gave me some sort of satisfaction. That's it. Then, I went to Thessaloniki as a student.⁸⁵ I went to Thessaloniki for the last two years. In those days, we again had the Lyceum.⁸⁶ {So, I went there for} the Second and the Third Year of Lyceum. {It was} not that things changed much, but over there, in Thessaloniki, students were more aware than the students in Arta. They would read Cavafy outside school lessons. However, I remember that, at the time when I was in

⁸² See note no.43 for information on *The Young Hero*.

⁸³ Yiannena is a city in the north west part of Greece, close to the border with Albania. Arta is in the west part of Greece, south of Yiannena.

⁸⁴ See notes nos.27 and 72 for information on the demotic songs.

⁸⁵ Thessaloniki is the second biggest city of Greece. It is in Macedonia, in the north part of Greece.

⁸⁶ In older times, secondary education consisted of Gymnasium (6 years), which was not compulsory. In the 70s, it was divided into Gymnasium (3 years) and Lyceum (3 years). Gymnasium is part of compulsory education, whereas Lyceum is not compulsory.

Thessaloniki, the author who really fascinated me was Papadiamantis. This is what I remember, at least. {My other classmates were fascinated} with Cavafy, because they came from middle-class families of Thessaloniki and maybe they had different incitements. And amidst these friends {who were more informed and interested in literature}, I found some company, some satisfaction in him {i.e. Papadiamantis}. And yet... I don't know whether I can talk all the time or whether you want to ask me some more questions?

E: No. You can talk as much as you want.

Sofia: When I finished school, I had to decide what I would do. I didn't want to become a teacher, not at all, because I didn't like teachers, especially women teachers. I would see them being ugly, old and old-fashioned. I was in Thessaloniki.⁸⁷ You know this played a very important role then. {They were} very old, without any flame, very commonplace things. And finally, when the time came for me to decide, I wanted to go to Law School. However, my family couldn't afford that.⁸⁸ Well, they could and they couldn't afford it... But, because the School for Languages had been founded in Yiannena, they {i.e. my parents} told me 'You should sit the entry exams to the School for Languages at Yiannena, you will become a teacher, and thus, you will be able to make your living.' So, I sat the entry exams. I had no choice.

E: Let me take you back a bit. You said that you were enthralled by Papadiamantis. Did you get to know Papadiamantis through literature lessons at school or...?

Sofia: At school. That's where the incentive was from. Yes. From school. Irrespective of the way it was taught, the text itself captivated me.

E: So, after that, you carried on and read more of his stories?

Sofia: Yes. {I read} more of his stories at home. I would borrow them. Always I had to borrow them. There were no books at home.

E: Have you ever thought why it was Papadiamantis that moved you rather than some other writer?

Sofia: I think I liked his language as well. Of course, we were familiar with katharevousa, as a language and as a style of writing.⁸⁹ His characters moved me as well. I still remember from those days 'The Wheat-collector' and 'The Lazy man's Christmas', 'Children's Easter', of which they taught us only half; because, at school they would show us only the good side {of the story}, even though – I don't know, you must have read it – there is a tragedy behind this {good side}.... Well. When I went to University {at Yiannena}, where I started in 1965, it was a School that was a branch of the School for Languages of Thessaloniki. The prevalent attitude was relatively different from that of the School for Languages at Athens, which was considered more old-fashioned and sterile. Modern Greek Literature was at a better place {than at the University of Athens}. However, dictatorship started and things stopped, even there.⁹⁰ That is, the School was deprived of all its good teachers. And it was then that I found refuge in the Library of the Department for Modern Greek, where I read literature. {I read} all the classics, Vizyinos, Papadiamantis, of course, Karkavitsas, Theotokis, Zacharias Papantoniou, and poetry. {I would read} poetry less. It was only later that I got to like poetry, as I was growing up. So, when I was appointed to a school, I think the fact that I would teach literature was my justification as a teacher.

E: In what sense?

Sofia: In the sense that this thing that I had received, this charm... And I would say that it was not just a matter of charm, because it started having an effect on me; it was a way for me to be humanized. Because, as I've already told you, I was the last child in a family of eight children, and I was pampered and a bit spoilt as well. Yes. But, I could see that through this contact {with literary texts} I was becoming softer, I was being humanized, and some sort of solidarity was being built between my fellow human beings and me.

⁸⁷ It is more difficult for young teachers to find a post in big cities. As a result, it is usually older teachers who work in such schools.

⁸⁸ There were many things needed for someone to pursue a career as a lawyer. First of all, candidates had to go to a frontistirio so as to get extra help for the entry exams and they would have to pay fees there. Secondly, it was difficult for someone to work as a lawyer unless she was from a family of lawyers with an established firm etc. So, it was difficult, even though not impossible.

⁸⁹ Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851-1911) was a Greek writer who mainly wrote short stories. He used the katharevousa, albeit an idiosyncratic form of it, and this is why students find his writings difficult nowadays. See note no. 1 on *katharevousa* and the demotic language. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of Modern Greek authors have used the demotic language and not *katharevousa*.

⁹⁰ The coup d'etat took place in April 1967 and the dictators were in power until 1974, in a regime that was encouraged and supported by the USA. During that period, left-wing people could not work in education or the civil sector. In fact, everyone who wanted to work in the civil sector, including education, had to present a paper certifying his compliant political beliefs upon appointment. They could get this paper from the police, who would not give it to anyone with a left-wing background. Things became a little bit more open in 1970, and thus, some people were allowed to work at schools. Still, there were people who could not work in education until the end of the junta in 1974. Even the teachers, who were allowed to work, were denied any freedom of speech.

In other words, I believe that it had a great effect on my character and on my quality as a person. I think it has made me a better {person}.

E: And, did this happen while you were at the University?

Sofia: Yes. At University I read a lot, too much. {I read} foreign literature as well, but mostly Greek literature. And later, as a teacher {I've read a lot}. So, I think that reading is not only an oasis in your life but also a way out that solves problems for you. It is not only a relief or an entertainment, {in the sense that} you spend your time reading because there is nothing else for you to do. More than that, {I think} that this kind of reading has an effect on you, it shapes you.

E: What do you mean when you say that it 'solves problems'?

Sofia: It doesn't solve practical, everyday problems, but it solves problems of your own; that is, {problems} in your relationships with other people, with your inner self. It makes you more frugal with regard to many things. It gives you an attitude to life. That's what I mean.

E: OK. And then, you became a Greek teacher?

Sofia: Yes.

E: How many years has it been that you work as a Greek teacher?

Sofia: It's been twenty-seven years.

E: Twenty-seven years. And, in what schools have you worked? Has it always been here in Athens?

Sofia: No. I started at Patras.⁹¹ I've always been in urban areas, big cities. I started off at Patras, at a school, which was then called 'the Economics {School}'. There used to be these schools called 'Economics', where pupils would be taught, apart from the general education subjects, some elementary economics, mathematics, accountancy, and things like that. That's where I was appointed in my first year.⁹² The school was unified, starting from the First Year of Gymnasium and moving up to the Sixth Year of Gymnasium.⁹³ And I always sought to teach literature. I liked it.

E: And after Patras?

Sofia: After Patras I came to Athens. First, {I worked} in West Attica, at Peristeri, and then here in Vironas, and lately in Zographou.⁹⁴

E: Could you talk to me about your practice of teaching literature? I know that it is not possible to say 'I do this first and then that...' but it depends on the text...

Sofia: Yes. Of course. Definitely. However, there are still certain axes. The way textbooks are organised now, at least in the first two years of Gymnasium... textbooks are organised in topic areas. And, every topic area is preceded by a drawing, let us say, a picture with a comment. I always start... That is, I start each unit either from an incentive that will be given to me, or from the national days.⁹⁵ In other words, the start of the unit is not loose {i.e. without a reason, without a linking point}. Further than that...

{The interview was interrupted for a few minutes.}

E: We were talking about where you start from. It is either an incentive or a national day...

⁹¹ Patras is a city in the north part of the Peloponnese. It is about two hundred kilometres to the west of Athens.

⁹² If one wanted to work in state education, one had to register in a list of graduates. There was a separate list for teachers of each specialisation. There was a list for Greek teachers, a list for Maths teachers etc. Every year the MNER appointed a certain number of teachers depending on the needs of the schools as well as on its budget. Teachers who were appointed were those at the top of those lists. Once appointed, teachers became civil servants with permanent contracts. Even though graduates on the list indicated their preferred areas, they could not really choose the school they would be appointed to. Moreover, if they want to move to another school at a later stage, again they have to make an application to the MNER. This system of appointment has been changed in the 1997 Education Reform and teachers are now selected through national examinations for teachers. One of the reasons for this reform was that the lists have more or less blocked and one could wait for ten or fifteen years and still not be appointed. The new system has many flaws and has not been particularly welcomed by Teachers' Associations.

⁹³ In Greece, secondary education consists of Gymnasium (First to Third Year), which is compulsory, and then, Lyceum (First to Third Year), which is optional. The institution where the interviewee was working had a unified Gymnasium and Lyceum.

⁹⁴ Attica is the prefecture where Athens belongs. Peristeri is a neighbourhood in west Athens, whereas Vironas and Zographou are in east Athens. The first is a working-class area, whereas the last two are lower middle-class areas.

⁹⁵ On national days, symbolic events from the Greek history are commemorated. Such days are the 25th March, marking the start of the War for Independence in 1821, the 28th October, marking the start of the Greek resistance against the Italians in World War II, the 17th November, marking the students' uprising against the Colonels' junta in 1973 and so on. Literary texts referring to these events are included in all school anthologies.

Sofia: And I always comment on the picture, which is illustrative of the unit. Of course, {this is done} with questions to the pupils. So that the comment comes out of the pupils. {I make use of} the motto which is underneath the picture, why etc. Then, we move on to the specific text that we have to work on. I always start from the title, the writer. Regarding the writer, I don't insist a lot on the biographical details, apart from those details that have been decisive in his life. For example, if I am to do *Bitterness* by Palamas, I will definitely make a reference to his childhood, to his childhood experiences, which were really very traumatic, a child who lost both his parents at the age of seven. {I refer to} all this information, which we call 'realia' and which help in our understanding of the text... And of course, I place the writer in context {in his era}. And if his biographical note, which is contained in the textbook, has any significant elements, then I refer the pupils to that. We note these down and keep them in mind as useful material that might help us in the analysis of the text. The title is always written on the board. If the title... I think that a title is always half.⁹⁶ In other words, it is decisive and prepares the pupils. For example, if it says *A Bitterness*... I don't know if I can refer to specific texts? It is in order to give an example... [To this question I nodded that 'yes, she can give specific examples.'] The title is indicative; I expect to see something. So that pupils will have an inkling that we will see something relevant. So, it plays a part. The title is always written on the board, and then, with the pupils' help, we identify the thematic units, if there are any that are apparent and can be distinguished. And after that, there is the analysis of the text. {We} always {look at} the form and the content together. In other words, {we don't do} first the analysis of the content and then, what they used to do in the past, to find the figurative, ideological features.⁹⁷ We do these simultaneously. Yes. And the whole effort is made so that pupils communicate with the text, so that they feel and experience the text; and not so that we reach certain conclusions. {We try} to arrive at certain, more general, conclusions, but a text shouldn't just be the occasion for us to say various other things. It is always a text that will travel a child... with the text.

E: *Where?*

Sofia: Where? Wherever a text takes each child. And this is why I think that, at the same time, other neighbouring, accessory texts should be given, if it is possible, if time allows. {This should be done} so as for a pupil to feel the text, to experience the text, and also for this text to provide him with the incentive to travel with other texts in his own time. In other words, so as for him to get to love what we call 'literature'.

E: *Do you use other texts in class? Do you read other texts as well?*

Sofia: Yes.

E: *Where do you find these texts?*

Sofia: I find them in other... It could either have the same theme or it could be another poem or short story or extract from another work by the same writer. I photocopy them, give them to pupils and I read them. For example, now I have to do the 'Mother' by Kazantzakis. So, I might give the extract 'My father' so as for pupils to see the difference. Or, it might be 'My grandfather', which has a very nice... where the difference between the two characters can be seen. Yes. I believe a lot in the {use of} parallel texts. Parallel texts, accessory texts, you can call them what you want.

E: *OK. And then, what happens in class after that? You said that you start from a stimulus, a discussion of the title, of the biographical note...*

Sofia: Yes. We said {a discussion} of certain things that lead there {i.e. to the text}. We've said that. And afterwards, the analysis of the text is made, looking at form and content simultaneously. {This is done} by making the appropriate questions to the pupils, always with the use of dialogue. It is practically a guided dialogue, especially in the First Year {of Gymnasium}. So as to decode certain things from within the text. And I insist on that: that a pupil comes into contact with what we call a work of 'words', with the art of 'words'; that he enjoys the language; that he enjoys the content. {So that he enjoys} the language, all these elements that {a writer} uses, that he feels the metaphorical language. And, one of the aims that I have in my work on literature is for pupils, starting from the stimuli they have at school, to acquire a love for reading and for books; for them to have a positive attitude towards books, towards literature.

E: *Do you think you succeed in that?*

Sofia: From my experience and from discussions that I have with pupils, after we start getting along, I think that it is being achieved, up to a degree. Not to a great degree, though. However, I've met pupils who told me that they liked Kariotakis a lot, because I like Kariotakis as well. It is a coincidence. In other words, I believe that you can get across {to pupils} whatever you love, and of course, selection is made according to your criteria. Of course, this can be achieved only to a certain degree, depending also on the nature of the class. In any case, I think it can be achieved.

E: *Let me take you back a bit. Earlier on you talked about some kind of 'de-codification of certain elements'. How do you mean that?*

⁹⁶ It is not clear whether she means that the title is half of the lesson or half of the text.

⁹⁷ Like many other interviewees, Sofia uses the word 'ideological' meaning something that 'relates to the content' and not with 'ideology' in her mind.

Sofia: Well... When I say {de-codification}, this might be of features that are of the form, as I've said, but also of the content. That is, there are some things, which a pupil cannot discern at the first reading and cannot bring them out... {he cannot do} what we call 'decoding'. When we work on a text, an effort is made so that all features come out, both those of the form and those of the content. Lately, we did *Vasilis Arvanitis*. As we progressed with our work on the extract, I tried to bring out the idea that this young man was distinguished in that small community and became someone special. This. In other words, there is an aim. The title of the extract says 'Vasilis and the snake'. Of course, this is a title which makes you think what Vasilis did. That is, {we aim} at this feeling of surprise at the fact that he played {i.e. he fought} with a snake. Our whole course leads us back to the title...⁹⁸ Under the title there is always a comment... and there it says that Vasilis was distinguished.⁹⁹ So, by looking at the whole course and the progress of the event, it is proved that, indeed, his feat was so great that it made him distinguish. In other words, when a pupil leaves {a lesson} he should have reached a certain conclusion. Discussion shouldn't be general and vague.

E: I see. And as you've said that this dialogue is guided...

Sofia: Yes. {It is guided} with the younger pupils, in Year 1 of Gymnasium.

E: Which means that you already have something in your mind...?

Sofia: Of course.

E: And you want pupils to bring this out?

Sofia: Of course. Yes. Of course, this doesn't come out entirely, because even these young ones might surprise you. In any case, I always have the course {of the lesson planned and ready}. And most of the times, I have it noted down.

E: Has it ever happened that a lesson follows a different course?

Sofia: That it will sidetrack? Yes, it has. But this happens mainly in Year 3 of Gymnasium, where the texts are also... Yes. It has sidetracked. Absolutely.

E: In what way?

Sofia: With some question from the pupils, with some answer of theirs. Or, with something that came into my mind at the time; which means that I have gone off my course as well.

E: And, has it ever happened for you to end up at something different?

Sofia: At something different? Yes. But not many times. It happens, though. I remember from my experience when I was teaching at Lyceum... Of course, it's been many years since I taught at Lyceum. It's been seventeen years and I miss the meanings of those texts at Lyceum. There {i.e. at Lyceum} students have a different level of maturity; they might have their own readings as well. Young pupils {at Gymnasium} might be more virginal, but they don't have questionings {of their own}.

E: I see. And afterwards?

Sofia: After we finish, always hoping that we will complete the text... I am trying to... I discuss this matter with other colleagues as well... I believe that a text should be completed in a teaching period, even if this is at the expense of a more deep and wide study. In other words, I believe that, when the teaching period finishes, a class, a pupil should have completed certain things within him with regard to that text.¹⁰⁰ That is, breaking a text in four or five teaching periods {is not good}, as I see it and I don't think I will change my opinion on that...¹⁰¹ Yes. It is a benefit for pupils {if a text is completed within one teaching period.} It is a profit. Because when you come back to a text... Of course, when a text is too long, you might assign it for homework, for pupils to read the content at home.¹⁰² And then {in class}, you should only have to elaborate

⁹⁸ The extract she refers to is from Stratis Myrivilis' novel *Vasilis Arvanitis*, where the author narrates the main character's life, which was full of heroic acts. This extract is the third chapter, out of a total of fifteen chapters, and it presents the main character's fight with a snake at the top of a roof. Interestingly enough, the author has only numbered the chapters and has put no titles to them at all. So, the title 'Vasilis and the snake' has been added to the extract by the compilers of the anthology. And yet, we see that the interviewee considers the title to have a crucial significance in pupils' understanding of the text. So, we see that such a use of extracts results in the creation of 'new texts', whose reading is very different from that of the original.

⁹⁹ The introductory notes, which precede each extract in the anthologies, have been written by the compilers and express their reading of the texts. So, we see that the compilers' reading guides and determines the pupils' reading of the texts.

¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to note the way she talks about a pupil completing certain things 'within him'. The process is seen functioning at an individual level and the aim is for the reading to be internalised by pupils.

¹⁰¹ From reading all the interviews one sees that there is a debate going on between Greek teachers on whether a text should be taught in one or more teaching periods. The MNER guidelines say that only one period should be devoted to each text.

¹⁰² This is a word for word translation of what she says. It is interesting to note that she wants pupils to read 'the content', as if this is ever possible. Earlier on, though, she talked about form and content being inextricably linked together.

on it, based on some questions that you have prepared and some questions that might be raised by pupils. During this work, there should always be constant references to the text under study, and I insist on that. {Comments should be made with reference to} the text, and they shouldn't be generalities of my own or of the pupils. Yes. {It is important} that a text is completed within a period because, otherwise, it leaves. This magic leaves, which {you feel} after you've read it. But {when you come back to it} after a week, then, it is cut into pieces...¹⁰³ Or, {when you say generalities, without making constant references to the text, we have} what people say: that you say what you want and, {in the meanwhile,} the text has flown out of the window and has left.

E: And then, what do you ask them to do for homework?

Sofia: It's always some questions either for expansion or... It will be either on an accessory, neighbouring text that I might give them, as I've told you, or some relevant questions or a question for them to expand on what we've already discussed {in class}. This means that pupils do not need to get help from elsewhere, if they have followed the lesson. It's not about details that they need to find in an encyclopaedia etc. It's always for them to go back to what we've worked on {in class}, to gather together all those things and also to give their own {opinion}. It might be {a question} about a character and how they saw him. Or, it might be about a text, asking them to make a comparison {between the text under study and the accessory text}. There are texts... On the occasion of Polytechnio,¹⁰⁴ we did Ritsos' poem *Epitymvio*, which says 'the youth who fell with his head up'. So, I gave them one more text that shows man's upright attitude, to see if they can identify it in the other text as well. And also, {I asked them:} what does 'I stand up' mean? Is it only in a war that I stand up? I might be 'standing up' every day in my life. Not to bend over. There. {I do this so as} to see if they have understood all these things; so as for them to see it in another text as well; so as for them to say their own {opinion}. Where else can we see a man's duty? Duty is not only in a war. Every day in our life we have a duty, to ourselves, to our family, to our friends.

E: And then, when you come back to class, do you take their exercise books in or do you read them {in class}?

Sofia: Yes. They read them. On and off, I take their work in, {but} always after I've given them a notice. I might give them an assignment and say 'This one, I will take this in', in a slightly threatening way, in order for them to do a more meticulous work. {In those cases} I take their work home and mark it. Otherwise, we read two or three indicative answers in class, and then, we move on to the next text.

E: OK. I know that the next question has been covered up to a point, but still... Could you talk to me about the criteria you apply in order to choose which texts you will teach?

Sofia: We've already said that textbooks, especially those for Years 1 and 2 of Gymnasium, are organised in thematic units. A selection has already been made by some people. As a result, we are forced to... From that point...

E: Let me interrupt you for a minute. How do you see this? {i.e. How do you see the fact that there are anthologies?}

Sofia: Well, yes. This is a problem. They have made a selection using their own criteria. However, how else could a school textbook be made? Personal criteria have to get in.¹⁰⁵ And then, my own personal criterion has to get in. For a few times I have also done the following. In the beginning of the year, I say to pupils 'Have a look at the whole book and write down which texts you would like us to do.' So, I get the pupils' answers, I index them and find which of them get more points. So, {sometimes} I choose texts according to that. However, there might be some texts which I deem should be taught and pupils might not have noted them down. In that case, I do those texts {which I consider worth doing.} Yes.

E: So, one criterion has to do with which texts pupils want to do...

Sofia: Yes. And me.

E: And you. {Are there} any other criteria?

Sofia: I haven't got any other criteria.

E: Earlier on, you said that it often depends on the nature of a class.¹⁰⁶

Sofia: No. {That's not what I said.} What I said was that the nature of a class determines the degree to which I will be able to get this across to the class.¹⁰⁷ Yes. And the aims I set for pupils depend on the nature of a class.

¹⁰³ It is not clear whether it is the text or the magic that is cut into pieces.

¹⁰⁴ In 1973, while the 1967-1974 dictatorship was still in power, there was an uprising in the centre of Athens organised by the students. Many people gathered in and around 'Polytechnio' (i.e. School of Science and Technology, University of Athens) to protest against the oppressive regime. The protest ended in bloodshed, as the army opened fire on the unarmed protestors. The 17th November is the national day in memory of the students' act of resistance.

¹⁰⁵ What she means is that the application of personal criteria is unavoidable in any selection of texts.

¹⁰⁶ In all the discussion with Sofia the Greek word 'ποιόν' is being used, which means the character, the nature of a person. So, I guess that in English it should be translated into 'the nature', 'the quality', 'the level' of a class.

E: So, {the nature of a class} does not determine what texts you choose?

Sofia: No. I don't think so. It doesn't affect me, at all. I think that the nature of a class might be what it is... And in any case, this is literature. It is not a subject like mathematics, where we will carry on with easier exercises if the nature of a class is {not so able}. I believe that pupils... And, anyway, these extracts are easy. They {i.e. pupils} can be guided {through them}. Moreover, I strongly believe that if the level of a class is there, it can always be pushed a bit further.

E: I see. OK. {I'd like to ask you} another question, which again has been covered up to a point. What are your aims for the subject? In other words, what do you expect pupils to gain from this subject? What are you trying to achieve with this subject?

Sofia: I've already told you, and I repeat it, that really the aim of the whole subject is for a pupil to come into contact with the works of literature, and thus, to become sensitive to them, to become better, to feel more sympathy for his fellow human beings, to find solace for himself through reading, to learn how to appreciate certain things that he has and which other children might not have. For example, I remember now of *Vankas* by Tchekov. And {in general}, in accordance with what we say about humanistic subjects, {the aim is} for him to become a better human being – as simple as that.

E: What do you mean when you say 'a better human being'?

Sofia: What do I mean when I say 'a better human being'? In a few words I would say this. For him to be a person who is not indifferent to life as it is going on around him, who is not indifferent to his other fellow human beings, who is not shut up in himself, who does not believe that life is only about material goods and other needs like that... And for him to believe that his psychological... that his 'ψυχαγωγία'¹⁰⁸, i.e. the education of his soul, goes through literature. That's where we should aim. Of course, we give pupils the incentives for them to love books. For them to believe that a good book should become, should be their companion, their way of living. Many times I tell them that they should read, even if it is just five pages a day. Often they say 'I am very busy' etc. and I say to them 'Look. When you go to bed, instead of watching TV, you should read, even if it is only five pages. You should have your book next to you, at your bedside table.'

E: I see. And do you think that the subject helps in this?

Sofia: Yes. That's what I think.

E: If pupils read literature irrespective of the lessons, would it have the same influence on them? {Would literature have the same influence on them} no matter what?

Sofia: Definitely. Definitely yes. I absolutely believe that.

E: OK.

Sofia: Because you do not bestow teachings on pupils, that is, moralistic teachings. The text itself presents a pupil with these things and it guides him to arrive at these conclusions on his own. In other words, it is not a matter of an order given to them and asking them to become... I don't know what; it is not a matter of a command like 'you should not steal'...¹⁰⁹

E: I see. All these things that you've talked about, regarding the aims, the criteria that you apply, the teaching practice that you have etc. Are all these your own, personal decisions? Or, have they been determined by the MNER, by discussions you've had with colleagues, by books you've read...? How has this attitude of yours been shaped?

Sofia: Yes. I like your question, because my daughter, who is in Year 1 of Gymnasium, has asked me the same thing. She said, 'Mum, how come and you make a lesson like this? Why is it?' Listen. Of course, there are always some syllabuses, which we might or might not read. However, someone ends up to his way {of teaching}, or at least, I ended up to my way of teaching, through my own efforts and my personal 'fight' with the texts; through discussions I've had with colleagues; through various seminars, which are organised by PEF, the Panhellenic Institute of Greek Teachers; through my experience at SELME, where I was given the opportunity to observe other teachers in their teaching.¹¹⁰ And all these have helped me a lot. {Moreover, my attitude has been formed} through various books, which I've read, books that talk about different approaches to texts, {that is,} how one can approach a text; and, through various other seminars, which take place and which are not strictly about education. For example, recently I've been attending some seminars given by Stefanos Rozanis at Aerides, where he has chosen some texts {to analyse}. All these things help me a lot.

E: Have you done all these out of your own personal interest?

¹⁰⁷ I guess that, when she says 'this', she means the meanings of a text that she has in mind.

¹⁰⁸ Nowadays, the word 'ψυχαγωγία' means entertainment. However, she does not use it in this sense. It is a compound word, which includes the words 'ψυχή', i.e. soul, and 'αγωγή', i.e. education. So, the interviewee uses it in the sense of 'education of the soul'.

¹⁰⁹ She means that texts have a formative influence upon pupils' souls but they do not that in an openly didactic way.

¹¹⁰ See note no.76 for information on SELME.

Sofia: Yes. Out of my own personal interest. Apart from SELME, which was in the context of in-service training. School advisers have also given us some seminars, but they have been only a few, very few. All the rest have been my personal...

E: Both {your attendance to the seminars organised by} PEF and the others you go by Rozanis...?

Sofia: Yes. Both this series where I go now by Rozanis and all the others. Occasionally, I have gone to {some seminars organised by} the Writers' Association, or some others that have taken place. However, it has always been my own personal choice.

E: Let me ask you something that has to do with pupils as readers. Pupils come from different environments, cultural, social, etc. They are also of a different sex, boys and girls. Do you think that these differences affect the way they interpret literature?

Sofia: Yes. Definitely.

E: From your experience have you seen pupils interpreting {literature} in different ways, reading differently, arriving at different conclusions, etc.? Or not?

Sofia: First of all, I have noticed that those pupils who come from an environment where people read, pupils who have already read {literature at home}, these pupils can definitely decode a text more easily, can understand a text {more easily}. Further than that, the experiences that a child has undoubtedly influence him, with regard to how and what messages he gets from a text. That is, {his background determines} which things will draw his attention more.

E: Could you give an example of that? If it is easy, of course.

Sofia: Yes. It is easy. I have a recent example, when we did {Ritsos' poem} *Epitymvio*, as I've already told you... because after the 17th November there has been an occupation at our school {and so we haven't had any lessons after that.}¹¹¹ So, we did the poem *Epitymvio*, which we read with reference to the national day of Polytechnio.¹¹² Those pupils who come from families with political awareness where they discuss these matters, could easily {understand and interpret the poem}. Because I asked them 'Why are we doing this text?' There were other pupils who did not have a clue. Or, I am now planning to do *Vanka* by Tchekov. I haven't done it yet but I remember from other times in the past. Well, {when we read this text}, some pupils and the young Albanian children etc that we now have {in our country} have a different attitude towards it.

E: In what ways is their attitude different?

Sofia: With regard to what they comment on. They are moved by this child's bad living conditions more than others, who are unfamiliar with all these things and are not directly concerned with these.

E: Have you seen any differences between boys and girls or not?

Sofia: Yes. Yes. I've noticed that girls are more sensitive and read literature more.

E: OK. In general, would you say that pupils come up to your expectations of them?

Sofia: During the lessons, I'd say that they respond a lot. I mean that they are moved by texts. It doesn't matter whether its content is touching or not. Right? They are moved. There is communion with texts. And when at the end of the first term we go around to the library, they borrow books and they read.¹¹³ Now, further than that, I can't know whether this will continue and will become a way of life. However, in class, I am in the happy position to say that they are touched and they contribute.

E: ... to the discussion?

Sofia: {They contribute} to the discussion and the text itself moves them.

E: Is there anything else that you have thought about with regard to the subject, which I might not have covered with my questions? Something that you might have wanted to be different? Something you would like to be there but is not? Or, something from what is already there that you consider particularly good? If there is anything...

Sofia: Yes. Of course, it's always the case that we would like to have more hours for the subject that we love most. However, all teachers for all subjects would say the same thing. But... What else could I say? I think that, in order for a child to get to love reading, for this {to be achieved} we shouldn't rely only on the two hours that I might do in class, or on a child's family background. Instead, there should be a campaign organised by the state, through the mass media. Not the occasional {slogan}, 'Read a book' etc.¹¹⁴ {I am talking about} a promotion of literature through television, through the radio, with readings of literary texts by actors, where a child would listen to an actor and... Otherwise, what else could we do in class within the two teaching periods per week that we have? Sometimes, we put some tapes on as well. Of course, there are not always the appropriate facilities at school. The sockets might be broken, for example. You might go to

¹¹¹ In protest against the 1997 Education Reform, students occupied most school buildings for nearly two months, from November 1998 up to January 1999. No lessons would be held in the occupied schools in that period.

¹¹² See note no.104 for information on the national day of Polytechnio.

¹¹³ She does not make it clear whether they visit the school library or the Borough library. In Greece school libraries do not operate in the same way as in England and are not so much part of a student's life as a learner.

¹¹⁴ This is a slogan that is heard on TV and the radio at certain times of the year, such as Christmas.

school with the tape-recorder and the socket might not work. You might want to put on a poem set to music by Theodorakis. Sometimes, I ask them to sing these songs. And you should see pupils of Year 3 of Gymnasium singing *Tis dikaiosinis ilie noite*.¹¹⁵ Yes. In other words, I think that if you succeed in making a pupil feel, really feel what it says {i.e. what a text says}, then he {i.e. the pupil} comes out and is not shy, in the sense that he might sing it as well. It has got into him... these things have got into him.

E: OK. Thank you very much.

Sofia: You're welcome.

¹¹⁵ This is a poem by Odysseas Elytis (one of the two Greek poets who have been awarded the Nobel prize) and comes from his long synthesis *To axion esti*. It has been set to music by the composer Mikis Theodorakis and is very well known among Greek people.

Greek Interview No 6:

Kostas

(24 / 12 / 1998)

Kostas is in his early sixties and works at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. He was eager to talk to me about his views on literature teaching as it gave him the opportunity to voice his concerns. The interview took place at my home, without any interruption, and was recorded. Kostas was particularly interested in literature teaching in England and asked me about it once the interview was over.

E: What I usually do in these interviews is to start from any childhood memories of literature. That is, of course, if you remember anything from the reading of literature in your childhood.

Kostas: Like [...], I grew up in a very turbulent period. Literature was difficult to get hold of, not to say impossible. Books were scarce and the incentives even less. I could sense something. I could suspect something. I liked poetry. As a pupil I was a bit sensitive, romantic, shy. At my high school years I would look for literature books. I am talking about the 50s, right? Of course, at school it was only in the final year of Lyceum, which was then called Gymnasium,¹¹⁶ that I had a teacher, called [...], who brought us the light and revealed the value of literature. {By saying this} I don't want to underestimate my other teachers. Times were difficult and they did their best. Well, the subject was not taught in a systematic way. And, I am afraid that nowadays it is still not taught {in a systematic way}. For me, literature was some kind of refuge. It was... I tried to discover my self {in literature}, to discover the world. To mould my sensitivity, my feelings. To find an expression.

E: Of what?

Kostas: Of the uncertainties of puberty. Of the secret loves, the timid, the very timid loves of that age. It was also salvation. Refuge, salvation.

E: You said that your teacher [...] helped you discover, or rather, that he revealed to you the value of literature. What do you mean by that?

Kostas: What did he do? I don't remember what he did in terms of methodology. But, because he was young, a rounded and thorough person, full of knowledge, as well as a writer and a researcher in many fields, because of all these he managed to transmit to us part of his inspiration as well as part of his personal value. He could teach literature while creating literature, at the same time. That is, his teaching fascinated you, charmed you. And, of course, he revealed to you the value and the secrets of the texts studied. He made them fascinating, beautiful.

E: Later on, why did you decide to become a Greek teacher? Why did you finally become a Greek teacher?

Kostas: There were many factors that contributed to it. We, the poor children, the country children, did not have many other options apart from studying.¹¹⁷ There was neither any property nor any inheritance {for us}. My father was a primary school teacher. Since I had to study, the most close and beloved field of study was philology. Of course, we had... I had this teacher [...] as my ideal, my idol and model.

E: So, you wanted to become something like him?

Kostas: Yes. Of course, there is also the element of a financial setting up. We had to do something {i.e. we had to make our living in some way} through our studies.

E: How many years is it that you have been working in schools?

Kostas: In schools and frontistiria, or...?

E: How many years have you been teaching?

Kostas: How many years I have been teaching... Let me see. {It's been since} '68. It's been thirty-one years.

E: And, have you taught literature all these years?

Kostas: You don't count essay writing, do you?

E: No.

Kostas: {Then, it's been} since 1970, approximately. Because, before that I taught essay writing at a frontistirio. {In that period before 1970} it was only in the first semester of '68 {that I worked in a school}, when I made my first steps there. I worked at a private school and my first experiences in teaching were invaluable.

E: And, in what kind of schools have you taught? I mean, what kind of areas were the schools in?

Kostas: I started {my teaching career} at a private school in Sitia, Crete. Then, there was a period when I was not allowed to work due to my political beliefs. In 1968 as well, I could not be appointed due to my beliefs. However, I managed to teach {at that private school in Sitia} for a semester before they found out

¹¹⁶ See note no.86.

¹¹⁷ In those times pursuing a degree in higher education was the only way lower-class people had so as to improve their status in society and make a better living.

that I did not have all the appropriate papers.¹¹⁸ Then, when I was appointed, I worked in Farsala for three years, from '70 to '73. In Kapandriti, Attica from '73 to '76. In Piraeus from '76 to '78, in two different schools.¹¹⁹ Do you want their names?

E: No.

Kostas: In Piraeus. In Kesariani, for three years until 1981. And since then, I have been working at the schools of Zographou.¹²⁰ At the [...] Lyceum for a year, at the [...] Lyceum, and at the [...] Lyceum.

E: Let me ask you something with regard to the teaching of the subject. I know that it is obviously impossible to cast all literature lessons in the same mould. However, what is the basic sequence that you follow in a lesson? Generally speaking, how would you describe the sequence, the process, the method that you follow in a lesson?

Kostas: I give students a guide so that they know what to do. But, each text requires its own treatment.¹²¹ As a result, every lesson is different, every text needs... imposes – because it doesn't just need – a different attitude and approach from us. Of course, the students' and teacher's psychological state is important as well. That is, what kind of mood I'm in. OK? So that it doesn't end up being a monotonous and boring transaction, imposed by duty. And, of course, I try not to be the same every time. Obviously, some general principles are kept and we set targets. We have to set targets. {We discuss} whether we liked it or not, and why we liked it. Where does the beauty lie? I try to play the role of the guide, exciting the sensitivity and insight of pupils, their receptivity, their critical disposition. Most of all, though, I try not to destroy what the text has inspired in them by using technical methods. Sometimes, we read a text, it is beautiful, and in our effort to analyse and to approach it, we might distort it, we might destroy the text.

E: So, in this case... How do you mean this? What form does this take? Is it that you might leave the analysis out?

Kostas: No. I try to be very subtle in the exploration of a text. {I try so} that the procedures and the attitude are not technocratic. To have an approach {to the text} which is gentle, discrete and considerate. Especially when students like a text, when their first impressions... the effect of a text on their soul is very positive, {then,} it is very risky to try to pinpoint the elements that make a text attractive, beautiful, well-received. That's why there needs to be a gentle and subtle approach, like when we approach something sensitive, which is really what a text is. I try to get in the role of the guide... when we might see a statue that we like... {I get in the role} of a guide in a museum... and why we like it. So as to reveal the particular elements that make up an attractive whole.

E: Do you point out these elements to them?

Kostas: Either... I try so that the students find them themselves, with my help, by posing the right questions. {This happens} especially with regard to the form.

E: Do you think they need help in order to identify these {elements}?

Kostas: Yes. Many times they do. It is what they call 'άνευ εννοίας ευαρέσκεια'. That is, we like something without knowing why. And so, you have the opportunity to reveal the art, literature and its value. {You have the opportunity to see} how a writer can transform everyday life into a very attractive aesthetic creation. What does Solomos use? Common words. And yet, he has a rare lyricism. Everyday words which all of us still use, even today... And he achieves...

E: I'd like to ask a few things about all these that you've already said. You said that in the beginning you give them a guide. Then, you went on to say that each text dictates a different approach, a different attitude etc. But, what exactly do you mean when you say 'guide'?

Kostas: Well, I give them an improvised guide, a personal guide, so as for them to know what they can do, mainly from a practical point of view. That is, what the language is like, the style, biographical information about the writer, which era he belongs to, the ideas, the characters portrayed in the text, the conflicts, the plot... These are included in the guide. Of course, the guide needs to be adapted {to every new text we study}. We should rather not apply the guide to a text. In other words, we shouldn't fit the text to the guide, but instead, we should fit the guide to the text. And there should be room for divergences, many divergences, or even for cancellation of the guide, when this is considered necessary. {A case where we need to dispense with the use of the guide is} when we discuss a poem. {In this case} what plot should students look for in the poem? {Instead} it is the rhythm, the lyricism that emerges from the verse. And if you try to apply the elements of the guide {very closely}, {then} there might be what I was telling you in the beginning, you might destroy it, you might destroy the text.

¹¹⁸ See note no.90 for information on working conditions in the period of the Colonels' Junta (1967-74).

¹¹⁹ Farsala is a small town with a population of around 10.000, which is in a big plain in central Greece. It is a rural area. Kapandriti is a village close to Athens, suburban area. Pireus is the port of Athens, an urban area.

¹²⁰ Kesariani is a neighbourhood of Athens. Many refugees from Asia Minor lived in that area, who had come after the Disaster of Asia Minor (1922). Until recently it was a very working-class neighbourhood. Zographou is another neighbourhood of Athens. Its population is mainly lower-middle class people.

¹²¹ I.e. you need to treat each text differently.

E: So, does {the guide} have the form of questions or the form of certain features...?

Kostas: Features that could be {used for guidance}. Based on it {i.e. on this guide} students know what to do. Because often I tell them 'Prepare this text.' {I ask them} to prepare it themselves.

E: At home?

Kostas: At home. And, {this guide works} as an aid {in this preparation}, so that they keep in mind certain things they should look for {in a text}.

E: {I would like to ask} something else from what you have already said. At a stage, you said that you are interested in developing students' critical attitude. What do you mean when you say 'critical disposition'? {To be critical} of what? And how? How do you mean that exactly?

Kostas: So that their eye and their mind is trained at discovering, identifying, discovering and enjoying what is beautiful. This is in combination with the aesthetic development. In my opinion, one of the main aims of the subject is good taste, the aesthetic development. They say that a man of good taste does not do anything bad. Through what is beautiful, through good taste... good behaviour is formed as well.

E: And is this something that can be learned?

Kostas: I would say that it is developed, maybe. School develops, can develop it. Up to a point, because nowadays school is not the only factor {that determines students'} upbringing. The family, of course, has always been {one of the determinant factors}. However, nowadays the mass media of communication have got a big part {in children's upbringing}... The mass media of communication or information... How do you call them in English?

E: Mass media. Media.

Kostas: Media. What does mass media mean?

E: 'Mass' means 'μαζικά'.

Kostas: Is it from the Greek word 'μάζα'?

E: Yes. Very often people just call them 'the media'. So, they say neither 'of information' nor 'of communication'.¹²²

Kostas: OK. Because... Exactly. They are not 'mass media of information', because they do not offer only information... Communication... it certainly isn't communication, because they always act as transmitters and we are always the receivers.

E: Let me ask you something. You talked about 'good taste', about the fact that a man becomes good through what is beautiful. These notions, 'beautiful', or 'good', 'the beautiful'...

Kostas: The beautiful. It is also subjective. It is also subjective. And this can be seen in the appreciation of a work of art. I might like this painting of yours [he pointed to a painting on the wall], {while} somebody else might not. Of course, it also depends on the degree to which someone is cultured, is in touch with art and is also of good taste... to which degree he might be. Because something nice is not always beautiful. {Beauty is not always to be found} in something that might seem to us... Beauty may be in something that does not seem attractive at first sight. I try so that they discover beauty and enjoy it... And {I try so} that they love literature. So as to have it as a companion through life and as a refuge. And, a piece of advice that I give them, something 'they could use through time', in inverted commas of course, is that... In other words, what I would like them to keep for their lives after they leave school is to seek refuge in poetry, in literature, especially in poetry, so that their souls do not dry up, which is something highly probable and dangerous in our times.

E: What do you mean when you say 'so that their souls do not dry up'?

Kostas: So that they won't be assimilated to all the negative elements of our times. Consumerism, technocracy, the pursuit of money, alienation...

E: This takes us on to something else which I wanted to ask you regarding the targets you set for the subject. You have already...

Kostas: They have already been mentioned, they have been mentioned.

E: To take refuge in literature, to take refuge in poetry...

Kostas: To regard literature as a place that is invaluable to them, that can revitalise them, can express them, can make them think.

E: In what sense would it make them think?

Kostas: By means of the attitude, the viewpoints, the ideas, the conflict between characters who are presented in a text, by means of the characters who are portrayed either in a positive or in a negative way. Through the charm of expression, the literary form of expression. No... forget what I just said. There is no need to say 'literary' form. This goes without saying, since this is all about literature. {What I wanted to say is that it will make them think} through a very unusual as well as very attractive form of expression. Of course, it is still an open question when a text should be regarded as literary and when not. OK? And, a question which is hard to answer. What somebody likes... we go back to what we have already said... the subjective element in the appreciation of a work of art.

¹²² At this point, I made an error. I didn't think of the phrase 'mass media of communication' and so I told him that they are just called 'media'.

E: When you say the subjective element... and you mentioned that before as well with regard to the beautiful. Is this personal? Does this depend on an individual, on a person? How do you define the subjective?

Kostas: When somebody is on one's own, then, it depends on his culture, on his training, how much and in what way he will appreciate a work of art and, subsequently, a piece of literature. At school, however, texts have supposedly been selected by the appropriate criteria and all of them have supposedly something to offer to a student of a particular age. So a teacher needs to put himself in the position of the anthology compilers for a while, to guess the motives of the people who selected the texts, to guess their motives and justify the choice of texts. And, of course, he himself needs to accept it {i.e. the choice}. {He needs} to master it, to taste it and to convey it to students. {He needs} to convey it not in the way he teaches history... which is still possible, isn't it? There are other issues and other targets associated with that {i.e. with the subject of history}. {Instead, he needs} to make literature... to get across the message that literature is an accessible, a profitable – metaphorically speaking – and precious good for all of us. Nobody has ever missed from reading literature.

E: You talked about the selection of texts, which is made in school with the appropriate criteria. From my understanding, a first selection is made by those who have compiled the anthologies. And I guess that teachers themselves make a second one when they choose the texts they will teach. This poses two questions. First, what are the criteria you apply in order to choose the texts you teach from the given anthologies? And, second, what do you think of the fact that there are these anthologies {which you are obliged to use}?

Kostas: Let me start from the second question. Anthologies are unavoidable, aren't they? The compilation of an anthology is unavoidable.

E: Why?

Kostas: Because the plethora of literary texts renders an overall study impossible. Even if you wanted to study Palamas' work only and nothing else, all years of secondary education put together would not suffice. As a result, is it not necessary...? Aren't we inevitably led to a selection, to the compilation of an anthology? The second reason is that it is necessary for us all to realise that it is possible for the beautiful to be expressed in different ways. And, in this case, {i.e. in the case of literature} the beautiful can be expressed using different words. Palamas' writing is different from Sikelianos' writing and so on. And, people might like both of them equally well and both of them might be attractive and fascinating. Then, another factor is that we can follow social changes through literature.

E: Which means?

Kostas: Which means that works written in the 1920s are very different from those of the 1940s. Literature of the Resistance has its own characteristics. And yet, it is still literature. So are the writings of the 1920s, the 1900s, and so on and so forth. In other words, this is yet another target. Literature is the mirror of an era. {I.e. literature reflects an era.} It is not by chance that, in the previous century, we had the movement of romanticism with its use of *katharevousa*.

E: Regarding the other question? How do you make a selection from the texts that are already there?

Kostas: Yes. It has to do with personal preference in combination with the suitability of a text. How suitable a text is for use in class so as for students to benefit from it. So that they will benefit...

E: Which texts are suitable? Which are the texts that you find suitable?

Kostas: I would say that all texts are suitable if we treat them in the right way. Even a text that might not speak or appeal to students, can be taught precisely for this reason: in order for us to see that this text hasn't got many things to say to us today because times have changed. What might have been widely accepted in its own time, today, it might be only slightly accepted or even not accepted at all. And this is precisely because we live in a different society, with a different set of values, with different ways of expression, different ideals, a different philosophy of life and different perceptions of an individual's position in society.

E: Earlier on you said 'even texts that might not appeal to students'. What exactly do you mean when you say that a text appeals to a student? And which are the texts that you think have an appeal to students?

Kostas: When a good teacher mediates in a correct and effective way, every text will finally appeal to students. And this {appeal} is confirmed if we read the text for a second time after our first approach to it, that is, after the analysis. Analysis... well, if we want to use this established term... the analysis, the approach, the anatomy, I would say. However, even before a teacher intervenes, every text has its own appeal. It attracts students less or more, or not at all, or very much. {A text} on its own {has an appeal on students}, without any intervention {on behalf of the teacher}. It is this {appeal} that makes students feel something through a text. Excitement, disappointment, interest, concentration, participation, identification with the heroes, with the characters, suspense for what will happen next, sympathy, students might feel sympathy...

E: And which are the texts that you have seen touching students?

Kostas: At this point, the reading out of a text plays a {significant} role... I should better call it the performance of a text by a teacher. There may be a text that puts you off at first sight, it might not speak to students, it might not touch them, if they read it by themselves. However, if a teacher reads it putting the

right emphasis, he might rivet students' attention. {For example,} Papdiamantis is not attractive to students at first sight because of his idiosyncratic language. I would say that sometimes his writings might even repel students. However, if a teacher reads Papdiamantis to students {with the right tone}, he rivets their attention. They concentrate and follow {the reading}, even if they might not understand some words, which the teacher does not explain while he is reading in order not to spoil the atmosphere. And, of course, a typical case of texts, which repel {students}, is Kalvos' *Odes*, Kalvos' writings, due to his idiosyncratic style. It is at this point that a teacher's role is most vital, where he needs to transform students' negative attitude to a warm acceptance of the text. At this point, students' feel of language comes in, how rich their vocabulary is, so as for them to comprehend and enjoy the content of the notions. Papdiamantis charms me because I don't have a problem with the vocabulary he uses. When students don't understand many of his words, then, there are gaps in them {i.e. in their understanding}. Of course, Papdiamantis' charm lies in the atmosphere he creates, his evocativeness.

E: Let me ask something else. Students come... and you've been in many schools, which is why I made this question before... students come from different environments, social, cultural etc. They are also of a different sex, boys, girls. From your experience, have you seen these differences playing an important role in the way they interpret, read, understand, analyse, and in general, approach a text?

Kostas: The social background is not different. It is the same.¹²³ The family background differs. I would say they are of lower middle-class or of middle middle-class origin.

E: Was this the case in all schools you have been to?

Kostas: Yes. Almost in all of them. The family differences are obvious. They are obvious, but one has to do research in these matters. I can't support anything with certainty.

E: So, you haven't noticed any differences between the students?

Kostas: In schematic groups... no, I haven't. That is, {I haven't noticed that} these students come from this background, behave like this, react like this, and conceive things in this way. And, those students {come from that background, behave like that, react like that, and conceive things in that way}. No. Of course, I also try to disregard this element, because it may give rise to prejudice.

E: What do you mean?

Kostas: {It may create prejudice} in the teacher. I don't care where my child, my pupil comes from.¹²⁴ For me, it is a precious world. I ought to respect it and cultivate it as much as I can. To push it forward. Most importantly, not to mar the students' psychic world. And, there are many traps. Not to spoil it, not to violate it. Not to make students... If I am not able to initiate them into the beauty of a literary work, I shouldn't force them into acceptance {of its beauty}. Do they have to like Papdiamantis just because we regard him as a greater writer? {No.} The aim is for a student to understand, to be convinced and to feel {a text}; and not {for a student} to understand and to feel that, indeed, Solomos, Palamas, or Cavafy were great writers, poets. {It shouldn't be done} in the name of teacherly prejudice and evaluation.

E: Something else. There are the examinations and they play an important role, especially in Lyceum. How far does the fact that there are examinations at the end affect the way you teach, the criteria you apply for the selection of texts, and in general, your teaching practice?

Kostas: Personally, I am not much preoccupied with them. Exams do not subdue me. I do not conform to the expediency of exams. I mean that my teaching practice does not have as an aim, at least not a primary one, to prepare students for the exams. I guess... I try to prepare them so that they are ready to deal with any text. And, I would prefer exam questions to be beyond the set limits. So that a child would be able to give something of his own world, of his soul... Of course, this doesn't happen. What I've been talking about are thoughts of my own, which might not be directly applicable. Right? The circumstances do not allow... The school conditions and, sometimes, even the psychological state of a teacher might cancel the intentions, they might quash his theoretical perspective of the subject. And, this is one of the... It is a teacher's small drama: not to be able to approach what he would really like to be and to do.

E: Have you ever felt that way?

Kostas: Yes. Yes. Many times. And it makes you feel guilty towards literature and the writers, because you may be betraying them. And, of course, you cause students to have a negative attitude towards the subject, which should have been special, different...

E: What do you mean?

Kostas: It is the only subject which deals exclusively with an art, literature.

E: And since its object is an art... ?

Kostas: An art... A teacher should be deeply initiated into this art and should leave aside all knowledge. Or rather, he should summon up all that knowledge which would enable him to transmit to students his own

¹²³ He talks about the areas where he has worked.

¹²⁴ It can be said that in past times people in Greece used to have prejudices against others depending on the political background they came from. This attitude was a result of the turbulent times that Greece has gone through. I guess that what he says here is a reaction to this attitude of categorising people and using stereotypes.

wealth, which he needs to have. Also, and most importantly, he should reveal the wonderful world of art. And, this subject gives the greatest number of opportunities and possibilities to make students love art in general. Through literature you may also convey to them the love for theatre, for painting, for music. It also plays this role. A teacher should play this role as well. So, we should follow special courses in order to teach literature, and not just be teachers of the school subject. We should be initiated into art and follow the movements, the trends. A continuous searching should be our characteristic.

E: You mentioned that maybe there should be special courses for literature teachers. From all your experiences as a literature teacher, what was it that made you have this attitude towards the teaching of literature?

Kostas: {Do you mean} which factors have determined my attitude towards the subject?

E: Yes.

Kostas: The external factors have been very few. It has more to do with my love for literature, my sense of responsibility towards my students, my wish to convey to them my personal love for literature. One of my secondary aims has been at least not to create any negative prejudices, especially for those cases when I don't manage to make them love a specific text and art in general. And, sometimes, I tell them 'Wouldn't it be better if we didn't talk directly about the text we liked so much at our first reading?' And then, we discuss around the edges of the text or even very generally, taking care not to spoil and not to destroy the beauty that was created by the reading.

E: Could you give me an example of this? Which text could function in this way? And, what do you mean when you say that you discuss around the edges of a text?

Kostas: I mean {that I might not} look into the elements of a certain literary text. Because there is always the fear of destroying the beautiful which has already instigated {pleasant feelings, and of destroying} the pleasure that the reading has given. When I say reading, I mean the performance, the nice rendering of a text. And, if you start looking at all the side elements of a text in a very practical way and mood, then you might spoil what the writer created in a very direct and straight way, just with the mediation of the teacher or of a student who reads well.

E: And, this discussion 'around the edges of the text', what does that mean?

Kostas: It might be about art in general, how a writer can... why writers can move us so much, what was special and distinct about this text, why we liked it so much... All these are discussed at a very general level, without getting into detailed commentaries.

E: How do students generally react to the subject and do they come up to your expectations?

Kostas: As in all other subjects, and even more so in literature, you get back what you put in, as people say. If you are in a good mood and if you yourself are good, then, students will definitely respond. If you just perform a tiresome duty, a teaching duty, then, they {i.e. students} will be recipients of a typical teaching. If you do not mobilise in them some elements of their psyche, of their soul and not just knowledge, then, it will be just one more teaching period in their timetable. However, if you are good, then, they will look forward to the lesson with different feelings and also, by the end of a lesson, something different and new will have been left inside them. {It is the same with} the way you feel after a good theatre performance. You might walk in feeling neutral and indifferent and then come out feeling transformed.

E: I see. These were more or less the things I wanted to ask you. Is there anything else you have thought about the subject? Or, about the way things stand now? Anything you would like to be different and which we have not already covered in our discussion?

Kostas: I'm afraid the subject is not taught at school as it should be. And this is mainly the reason why it does not attract children. We do not manage to get across to students the value of the subject. In other cases, students reveal abilities and sensitivities, which might even be unexpected, if texts come up to this. If you teach Cavafy, you see their participation being unexpectedly high, their participation in... Moreover, students are not always well and properly predisposed for the lesson. They might have a test in the following period and this might be worrying them. They might be tired. Many other distractions might be involved and these prevent their substantial participation and, most importantly, their will to be transferred to the world of the text.

E: So, these distracting elements shouldn't be there?

Kostas: For sure. It is a very subtle process. Very subtle. And, as a result, a very vulnerable {process as well}. It is also very rewarding if the appropriate conditions are met: a good teacher, receptive students, and a nice text.

E: Are these the essentials?

Kostas: The basic ones, I would say.

E: OK. Thank you very much.

Greek Interview No 7:

Margarita

(2 / 1 / 1999)

Margarita is in her mid thirties and teaches at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. The interview took place at her home and there was no interruption. She did not mind my recording our discussion. She was very eager to talk and I hardly needed to prompt her.

E: Well. The whole interview is about literature teaching at school and how you see it. I usually start from the interviewee's childhood memories and what they remember of the reading of literature in their childhood...

Margarita: I see that you have given a psychoanalytical dimension to the topic.

E: ... memories that might have to do with the reading of literature at school or outside school...

Margarita: When we were kids we used to read literature a lot.¹²⁵ What I remember is that our mother had pressed it upon us, because every time we had a holiday she would borrow many books from her school and would bring them home.¹²⁶ And so, we could choose. In other words, there was not *one* book that was forced upon us. Moreover, in our house there were many literature books, and we could choose from those as well. In this sense, it was not particularly traumatic {having to read literature books}. And so, I would read literature texts from a very young age. What I also remember is something that happened at Year 3 of primary school, when I changed school and went to a model school.¹²⁷ Our teacher {there} brought us into contact for the first time with Ritsos' *Epitaphios*, which I still think is an extremely difficult text for a young eight-year-old child. This shocked us all in a positive way but it also scared us a bit. At that moment we understood that we could also read poetry and difficult texts – those which are for older people, let us say.

E: How do you remember reading literature at school?

Margarita: At school. Mainly from secondary education, right? Because I don't remember many things from primary school. I remember that from time to time we had various inspired teachers, who would give us a different dimension and would skip the questions at the end of the text¹²⁸ or the most conventional things {of the analysis}. So, the few things that I remember are from those few teachers, who, I could say, opened a way to us, a pretty open way.

E: What do you mean when you say that 'they opened a way to us'?

Margarita: So that we wouldn't stick to a text in a strict way, doing all those things that were expected of you then, such as making summaries, finding the figures of speech, finding the meaning, answering specific questions. They would make us think on life, on very important matters of life.

E: Like what?

Margarita: For example, I remember a woman teacher who talked to us for the first time about love between a man and a woman through a relatively slight text. That was in Year 2 of Lyceum. But {she talked to us} in such a way that is not very common in schools. Moreover, I remember, because I attended an Italian school and we would also do Italian literature, I remember it was mostly in the Italian lessons that we got in touch with surrealistic texts. We didn't get in touch {with such texts} in the Greek lessons. And this {contact} surprised and shocked us in a positive way. I mean that we read and got in touch with something that was different from what we were used to.

E: So, in general, literature at school was a positive... ?

Margarita: Yes. Positive. I remember it as one of my favourite subjects. And it also happened that I had good teachers, or at least, I liked them.

E: How would you compare the reading of literature at school with your reading of literature in your spare time?

Margarita: I think I found it very different. When I was young, I held the view that we shouldn't scrutinize a text a lot, trying to detect all the side elements. I remember that once I put this question to a woman teacher of mine. That is, should we 'destroy' a text – 'destroy' in inverted commas – through its literary analysis? That was again while I was at Lyceum, in Year 3 of Lyceum, I think, in the last year. I don't remember her giving an answer that would seem satisfying to me.

¹²⁵ The 'we' that she uses refers to her and her younger brother.

¹²⁶ Her mother has also been a Greek teacher.

¹²⁷ In Greece there are a few 'model' schools like Marasleio, Varvakeio, Peiramatiko etc. These are state schools but pupils are selected either through an entry examination or by lot.

¹²⁸ She refers to the school anthologies where all texts are followed by a set of questions. It should be mentioned that the use of these anthologies is compulsory but the questions included are only suggestions and teachers are not obliged to cover them.

E: Do you still hold this view?

Margarita: I am not sure, because now I am in a totally different position. I am in the position of a teacher, where I think that the more I search for information about the era, about the author... In general, I think that the context is very important. The social framework, the study of an author's personality etc {are very important}... so far as it is possible to study these in the context of a school class. I think that all these shed light on the text. And I think that students are also more satisfied when a text becomes easier to understand, {which is what happens} when you try to put it in context. Whether this has to do with the author himself, whether it has to do with the era, with the social issues, the politics of the era, etc.

E: Let me take you back a bit. Why did you decide to become a Greek teacher? How did you decide to become a Greek teacher?

Margarita: I think it was for a number of reasons. I hadn't linked it with some sort of professional setting up. In other words, I didn't have a fancy where I saw myself as a Greek teacher. Instead, I would say that I liked pretty much all the areas of study of a Greek teacher. That was back then, at the age of 16, 17, 18, when I took this decision. Or at any rate, I liked them more than other things. Today, that young people have access to more options and more scientific fields, I would probably choose something different.

E: OK. Could we now move on to your recent practice? First of all, how many years is it that you have been working in schools, that you have been teaching literature?

Margarita: This is my fourth year.

E: And, in what kind of schools have you taught?

Margarita: I have taught at a Gymnasium, at a General Lyceum, and at a Vocational Lyceum.

E: In what kind of areas?

Margarita: I have worked in urban as well as in suburban areas. That is, {I have worked at schools} in Athens, in Rafina¹²⁹, and a small town in the countryside, with a population of five thousand.

E: OK. Could you describe a lesson on literature? Of course, we take into account that your practice is not always the same. But still, which axes would you say that you follow and apply {in your teaching}?

Margarita: First of all, I should say that there are many common points but also many differences in the way I have taught literature in these three different settings.¹³⁰ In other words, you say different things to a young student {of Gymnasium}; and of course, {you say} rather different things to an older student, like those of Lyceum, who, I think, are more interested in social issues, aesthetic matters etc; and {you talk} in a rather different way to students of vocational schools, who, in theory at least, are not interested in linguistic subjects. They {i.e. the last ones} have gone to this school so as to learn a craft. And, we see that this {view} is confirmed {by practice}. To put it in a very general way {that would apply to all three different settings}, every time I say what I think that a particular class can stand. And, what do I mean when I say 'they can stand'? What they will be able to comprehend, or even, to understand – even if they won't manage to comprehend it at the first go. Because I think that you start from a literature lesson, and then, you can talk about many issues which are not directly related to the subject of literature. And this has to do with the endurance of each class.

E: For example?

Margarita: For example, you can go on to talk about issues of history. And when I say historical matters, I do not mean historical events as such. For example, if you do a lament on the fall of Constantinople¹³¹ and you try to depict that era, students will often ask you questions of the sort 'what were the differences between the Greeks and the Ottomans?' And so, students will suddenly bring you back from that era to our modern era, since we know that relationships between the two states are tense.¹³² So, they will ask you to make a social comment or to express your personal opinion on what is happening today with regard to, let us say, Greco-Turkish relationships. Or, you might go on to talk about matters of psychology, which have to do with very serious issues, related to human psychology. For example, an issue that preoccupies children a lot – in fact it troubles people of all ages but adolescents even more – is the issue of death. In literary texts we see very often the issue of death, especially in many of the Modern Greek texts that we teach. This may be because the experiences of the Greek people have been very tough. So, we often see the theme of death, the theme of lament, the theme of loss, whether it is at a national or at a personal level. Another issue that troubles youngsters has to do with the relationships between people and, in particular, with love. This is a very important issue that preoccupies adolescents, right? And I would say that {they are less preoccupied

¹²⁹ This is a suburban area, a village that is an hour's drive from Athens.

¹³⁰ She refers to the three different schools where she has worked, i.e. in Athens, in Rafina and in the small town.

¹³¹ Constantinople was the capital of the Byzantine Empire. It fell to the Ottoman Turks on 29 May 1453. Many folk songs exist referring to that event, which have the form of a lament. See notes nos.27 and 72 for information on the folk, demotic songs. The Greeks had to live under Turkish occupation for nearly 400 years. During that time they revolted many times but without success. Finally, the revolution that started in March 1821 was successful and a Greek independent state was established.

¹³² She refers to Greece and Turkey.

with} social issues, such as the class differences. We could say that, at this age, in their search for personal identity, adolescents want to deal with matters that are more individual, more deep and more personal. And maybe when they finish Lyceum they are preoccupied with matters that are social, political and of that sort. What I'm trying to say is that in a lesson you can touch upon all these issues through literature.

E: How?

Margarita: How? As I put it earlier on, {in a lesson} I say whatever a class can 'stand', 'stand' in inverted commas. And at the same time, I think that there are certain things that a teacher can stand {to say}. We don't all have the same strength of opening up ourselves and of opening up our personality to the students. Many of us are afraid that we might expose ourselves. I think that, apart from his knowledge, a teacher lays open his personality {in a lesson}. So, it depends on how many things he can bear to lay open each time. This happens in all subjects and does not have to do only with the teacher of literature. However, the subject of literature gives us such an opportunity {to a greater extent}.

E: I see. If I asked you to describe a lesson roughly, what would you say?

Margarita: First of all, you need to put the text under study into context and talk about the era, the literary movement etc. This is something that is also imposed by the curriculum. This means that {in the anthologies} a literary text is preceded by a theoretical text that talks about the era and puts the text in a literary movement and its era. I might not do this at the very beginning. So, what I might do in the beginning is to read the text. As I said earlier, every time my aim is to shock students in a positive way. In other words, I try to bring them in contact with the text itself. {I want} to shock them, to see mainly the feelings that a text will evoke in them. They will like it, they won't like it, they will be yawning, they will be bored, they will be looking at me, they will be talking with the person sitting next to them etc. So, in this sense, the theoretical text might or might not have preceded. However, it must necessarily be there. Well, it is always me who reads a text, because I think that the way in which you read a text contains half its analysis. I never let a student read a text for the first time. We have the opportunity... So, I read the text aloud, and after that, at some point, I also read out some information about the author. This might not be straight after the reading. My aim is not for students to learn and take away with them specific information about the author. Instead, {I do this} for us to work together and try to trace the reasons for which the text has been written. I always put this question to students: 'Let us see. Could we possibly make out why a person like this author wrote such a text at such a time?' So, {we look at} the era together with the author's personal experiences. How do I choose a text? In all years, we can choose any texts we want, provided that we teach some representative texts from the various literary movements etc, given in the textbook.¹³³ But, they do not force us to teach specific texts.¹³⁴ At a practical level, this {freedom to choose the texts we want from school anthologies} very often comes up against objective difficulties, especially when there are different teachers teaching classes of the same year, because these teachers might have different personalities and experiences. {The problem arises} at the end of the year because we are all obliged to set the same exam papers as a matter of comparability. And that's where we face many difficulties at schools.¹³⁵ Very often we see the timidity that some teachers, especially older teachers, have in teaching certain texts. I would say that many of the texts included in the school textbooks nowadays are very avant-garde. And it is precisely these avant-garde texts that some colleagues have difficulty in teaching. And as they have more years of service {than you do}¹³⁶ they might, in a way, force you to teach the same texts with them. There are texts that scare teachers off, texts that they are unable to teach. This, at least, is my personal opinion. I feel much better when I do not teach the subject together with colleagues,¹³⁷ because then, I am in the position to choose {freely the texts I want to teach}.

E: When you have the chance of choosing {the texts you want to teach}, what criteria do you use?

Margarita: First of all, that I like the text. That's the first criterion. I find it almost impossible to teach a text that I don't like, that doesn't satisfy me aesthetically, that doesn't evoke specific feelings and emotions in me, etc.

E: Are there any other criteria? Of course, we've already said that they need to be representative {texts}, that you are obliged to do {representative texts}...

¹³³ The texts that she teaches have to be from the selection included in the school anthologies. The interviewee takes for granted that we know how the system works and the restrictions imposed upon teachers.

¹³⁴ This freedom of choice changed after the 1997 Education Reform and now Lyceum teachers have to teach specific texts from the school anthology.

¹³⁵ What she is saying is that teachers who teach different classes of the same year have to set the same papers for the end-of-year examination. Other interviewees, like Anna, see this practice differently and do not mind it.

¹³⁶ In the Greek education system, the longer one has been in the service the more authority one has in the decision-making processes of the school unit - of course, within the strict limits imposed by the MNER.

¹³⁷ I.e. she prefers it when there are no other Greek teachers teaching classes of the same year.

Margarita: Yes. There are some other criteria that are, more or less, imposed upon us by the curriculum. That we take... That a certain number of texts is covered. That we teach texts from poetry as well as from prose... All these {criteria} are, more or less, enforced {by the school curriculum}. Further than that, I think that the text a teacher will pick up to teach from, let us say, Cretan literature, has to do with the teacher's likes and dislikes. Of course, there are many teachers whose only criterion in what they teach is what they were taught better at University. OK? I don't use this criterion. In other words, my main criterion is that a text satisfies me aesthetically. And I could also say that I have a liking for modern texts. I have a very strong liking for post-war literature. Because, in a way, this period is the neglected child of literature at school.

E: Let me take you back a bit. You said that some older teachers have some kind of timidity in teaching some texts, maybe because they scare them off. Why? How do you mean that exactly?

Margarita: Well. First of all, there is this very simple thing that I've already said. Unfortunately, at this moment, there are colleagues in our schools, who have been teaching for twenty-five or thirty years, and whose knowledge has stopped at what they were taught at the Schools for Languages in Greek Universities thirty years ago. And mainly at the Schools for Languages of the Athenian University, which has always been the most conservative one compared with all other Greek Universities, at least with regard to the Schools for Languages. The most progressive University in Greece is the University of Thessaloniki, whose rationale and philosophy was followed by the most recently established Universities. A very important issue arises regarding the policy of the Ministry of Education on teachers' training. OK? These people... a very big percentage of these people haven't got any further training. As a result, texts like the ones I mentioned earlier from post-war prose, poetry, etc, or texts that were written in the period between the two world wars, surrealistic etc, scare them off. This is because they do not know the way and do not have the keys to teach them. And how could they {know}, since nobody has ever taught these {way and keys} to them? OK? Of course, there are many of them who occupy themselves with these on their own initiative. They search, research, and want to move forwards. However, I think it is necessary for these people to receive further training. Of course, this is a constant claim that all teachers in secondary education have, including Greek teachers. I think there are also some other reasons why some of us cannot teach certain texts. And these do not have to do with our age. For example, I met a colleague, younger than me, who said 'I have many difficulties teaching texts that are about loss', losses like the ones I mentioned earlier, the theme of death and other themes like that. {And, she went on to say:} 'Because how can I face a child... For example, how can I teach such a text that might be talking about the death of a beloved person, when I was faced {once} with a student whose father had committed suicide some while ago and who had gone through this traumatic experience?' I have exactly the opposite view. {In my opinion,} literature helps us manage our feelings, and in particular, those feelings that we find most difficult to manage and deal with, that is, the heavy feelings. So, one of the main aims of literature is to help children come to terms with these feelings. If only we think of the incredibly beneficial way in which fairy-tales act upon very young children, bringing them into contact with these fearful and scary feelings. I think that literature can work on older children in a similar way, especially on adolescents that we've been talking about now.

E: OK. Let us now go back a bit. You said that you read a text and you give students some information on the era and the author's life. You also look into why the text was written. And then?

Margarita: Then, we try to analyse the text. Again, there are very specific instructions in the curriculum on what we must do. And, at the end of each text included in the textbooks, there are specific questions that students need to answer, on the form as well as on the content. For example, with regard to the form, students are always asked to study the evolution of language. And indeed, the texts included in the school textbooks help us understand this, because we know that the question of language was a social and political issue as well. And many more things were associated with this issue. Moreover, nowadays children find it difficult to understand texts written in an older form of Greek and, without doubt, this subject helps them realise that language is single and unified, and is constantly in progress. With regard to the content, I really think that this is where a literature teacher will lay open his personality, irrespective of the questions that the textbooks want us to answer and to teach. That is, how he will... where he will rely on, what he will let... And when I say 'his personality', {I mean that} this is where his political and social ideas will be exposed, his inclination to go deep into the heroes' psychology... the 'heroes'... I mean the characters' and not only the heroes'... And of course, as soon as I finish reading a text, I always ask them 'how did you like it?' I always try to explain to them 'don't say good or bad, or something that might sound pleasing to my ears.' Instead, {I want} them to talk a bit more about what the text made them feel. I try to make the students talk. And from that you can see the differences between Gymnasium and Lyceum as well as {the differences between the students of General Education} and of Vocational Education, who are more scared to talk about such matters. Very often, students identify with the main characters of a text, and then, you really see them reacting in a very strong way, moving on to their own personal experiences, talking about their own mother or father. That's where you need to put it under control. Because even though we want these identifications to take place – and I talked earlier about the very important role that literary texts have – we still need to keep it at the level of a school class. The aim of the subject is for students to come into contact

with literature, and for us to try to take them to other areas, to give rise to feelings, to make them question. But still, a literature lesson is still a lesson that takes place in the context of a school class.

E: What does that mean?

Margarita: It means that we can't let a child... Of course, we won't cut it out sharply. That's where we need to handle it in the right way. She might start crying for her father that was lost, because it is very natural that {she starts crying} suddenly... I refer to the previous example of the student, whose father had committed suicide a month before the lesson... who... Very often you might have to deal with a student crying in a class. Or, a student might want to extract {personal information} from you. Students always have a very voyeuristic attitude towards teachers. They want to find out details about their personal life, and that's more true for literature lessons. And language subjects allow more room for this than mathematics or physics or I don't know what. So, students want to find out more about their Greek teacher, things like his political beliefs. For example, earlier on I talked about the *Lament on the Fall of Constantinople*, and the question that was raised {by students} 'And finally, what happened? Are the Ottomans so evil?' etc. 'And you, Ms, what do you think? Should we believe in the Great Idea?'¹³⁸ Well, at this point you need to take control of it and you need to manage it, because these matters are very very dangerous.

E: In what sense are they dangerous?

Margarita: Dangerous. I believe that one shouldn't say 'Yes. I believe in the Great Idea.' Or, 'I believe that the Turks are good.' Or, 'I believe they are bad.' In other words, {I think it is dangerous} to talk in such an absolute way to students. I think that a literature lesson constantly helps us – and it helps both us and the students – to learn a very basic principle, a principle that all teachers must teach students. And this {principle} is that everything can be illuminated and can be interpreted from many and different angles. This is the somewhat standard comment that we make on discursive essays 'don't be so absolute', which is a very basic feature of adolescence. An adolescent is at the age when he talks in terms of black and white, good and evil, following this manicheistic logic.¹³⁹ I think literature lessons help us teach adolescents that things are not black and white, but instead, that there can be many different interpretations. For example, I might make a question: 'And you, what do you think about this?' And then, one of them might say one thing, another one might say something else, and a third one might say something else. And then, a fourth one might ask me 'And you, Ms, what do you think?' And I might say something different. {And they say} 'Well then, this must be the right answer!' {And I come in saying} 'No, this is not the right answer. This is what I think.' And I remember how much they were shocked once when I answered 'I don't know.' And they told me 'So, teachers don't know either?' 'Of course, teachers as well might not know some things.' Or at least, they don't want {to give an answer}... This doesn't mean that they haven't thought on this but it shows that they haven't reached a conclusion.

E: OK. And after this discussion of... Is this discussion guided? Tightly structured? Or, do you leave it open? Because you said earlier that there is some kind of analysis of the form and of the content. But then, you said that after reading you ask them what they thought of it and a discussion starts, which...

Margarita: It is pretty much structured. In my mind at least there is a framework but, of course, I don't follow this in a forced way. You can't do that in a class.¹⁴⁰ I think that anyone who is supposed to do that is a failure as a teacher. In general, I don't know who can achieve something like that. And I also think that, in a lesson, if you are not open, then you have lost the students. This means that undoubtedly you have something planned in your mind, but it doesn't matter if something is lost from the plan. There is always the next time as well.¹⁴¹ I want to talk about another issue, which is also very important and has to do with how long you linger on a text. I should say that I have disagreed with colleagues on this issue many times. I think that, depending on the text under study, sometimes you need to stay on one text for longer. Especially at Gymnasium, they ask us... the curriculum wants us to spend only one or one and a half teaching periods on each text. I think that it is very important... {I think} that you lose it¹⁴² unless you read and approach it

¹³⁸ The 'Great Idea' was a 'dream' that the Greeks had in the beginning of this century, in which they would restore Greece to its former size and would free all Greek people who lived under the Ottoman rule. This dream died out after the First World War and the Asia Minor disaster (summer – autumn 1922). The result of the Asia Minor disaster was that 700.000 Greeks were killed and there were a million and a half of refugees, who had to flee from Asia Minor to Greece and Cyprus. Nowadays, Greeks do not have an expansionist attitude and are happy with the borders as they are. This is the view of all Greeks across the whole political spectrum, with the exception of a very small nationalist right-wing minority.

¹³⁹ Manicheistic (adj.) refers to someone who sees the world in term of binary oppositions. Manicheism was a religion founded in the 3rd century A.D. by the Persian Mani or Manenta, who linked Christianity with paganism. According to this religion, there are two powers in the world, light and darkness, good and evil, God and mater, and they are in constant fight. The angels, the prophets and men take part in this fight.

¹⁴⁰ I.e. you can't follow a lesson plan or structure very narrowly.

¹⁴¹ I.e. you can always go back to it in the next lesson.

¹⁴² It is not clear whether she means that you lose students or texts. See Sofia's interview for an entirely different approach to this.

in class for the first time, and unless students go home and work on it on their own, and then, you all come back and look at the text again. Unfortunately, especially at Gymnasium, we are very often obliged to spend only one teaching period on a text. I wouldn't ever do that. I have been very lucky that an Adviser hasn't come {to inspect me},¹⁴³ because then he would really tell me off. In other words, I think that, after the first encounter, students need to be given the opportunity to work on a text at home.

E: When you say that they should work on a text at home, what do you mean? How?

Margarita: Even if it means just to read it again. This is the least they can do, which is still very very important.

E: Do you ask them to do anything else for homework?

Margarita: I also put them some written work, of course. Many times... most of the times, it is not from within the textbooks because, unfortunately, very often students resort to the well known 'answer books' in order to find the answers, and as a result, what they write is not their own work.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, at this point I should say that from the very first day I point out to them that there is no stupid answer. 'I will accept anything you say, so long as it is yours.' Another thing that I do is to stress out to them that 'no matter how many lessons we might have on grammar, syntax, literary texts in Modern Greek, in Ancient Greek etc, it is never enough.' I try to encourage them to read other books as well. And because no student will ever listen to you if you say 'read a book', very often I take books {to them}, many books, in a sack. At this age, students want to be able to see the size, the colours of the front cover, the author, how big or how small the letters are, {they want you} to explain the plot a little bit, to tell them whether it is an adventure or not... And I ask from all students, depending on their interests and without forcing them, {I ask them} to make a two-page presentation of a book they've read during the year, any book they want, so long as they like it. And of course, {I don't ask them} to describe what it was about... but mainly to make their own criticism, what they liked and what they didn't like, and why.

E: Do you do this every year?

Margarita: Yes.

E: And do they read out this presentation to the rest of the class or do they simply give it to you?

Margarita: They read it out to the rest of the class. From the beginning {of the year}, I say to them 'Listen all of you. Who has read...?' Usually most children read something over the summer, and so, many of them have {read} a {book} recently. So, we start from the very next time. Someone presents a text to us {in every lesson}. And almost every time we have a literature lesson, we spend for that ten minutes, five minutes, or as long as it might take, without of course expanding too much on this because we don't have the time. The issue of time is very important. I simply ask students to bring the book in {class}. So as for them to become familiar with publishing houses and what that means... {I ask them} to show the book they've read, the book itself, and then, simply to read out a two-side, or maximum three-side, handwritten text.

E: Earlier on, you said that the questions you set them are not the ones from the textbooks.

Margarita: They might be and they might not be.

E: But, are they similar to the ones in the textbooks?

Margarita: They might be and they might not be. Several {of them} are similar and the only reason that I do them¹⁴⁵ is precisely so that they won't use the 'answer books'. However, many times they are completely different {from those of the textbooks}. And this is because in the texts we study we see that there are so many other dimensions, which have not been tackled by the textbooks' editors.

E: Like what?

Margarita: It depends on the text. Many things they might consider {inappropriate} for their age, etc. So, very often there are questions that do not relate to... They are not the same every time. It has to do with each text.

E: But again, do these questions have to do with the analysis of a text? That is, {do they have to do} with its form, its content, its themes, etc.? Or maybe not?

Margarita: Sometimes {they have to do with all these} very loosely. Sometimes very loosely. Since you've mentioned this, another thing that I try to do is to show them the value of an interdisciplinary approach. I try to explain to them that there is not one 'science', like literature, which is within strict boundaries. Literature relates not only to history, sociology, social anthropology, folklore studies etc etc, but it might also relate to... let us say, physics. In other words, I try to use, to give them some examples from other sciences as well. And students like this. That you should constantly bring them into contact... that you should show them there is some kind of interaction between the various sciences. For example, we might read the word 'inertia' {in a text}, 'out of inertia he did this', so a question set for homework could

¹⁴³ See notes nos.17 and 55 for information on *advisers* and their role.

¹⁴⁴ Because school anthologies have remained unchanged for a number of years, there are many books with textual analyses and answers to the textbook questions. Students find these 'answer books' in the market and all of them have at least one.

¹⁴⁵ I.e. the only reason that I give them similar questions but not the very ones of the textbooks.

be 'Tell me. What is the law of inertia? What would someone ask you...?' I know that this is among the things that they've been taught. Some of them know, some of them don't know. But they like it. They like it. The students who like these {questions} are mainly those, who don't like literature but like mathematics, physics, chemistry etc.

E: So, you set them some questions or something to do for homework. When you come back to class, what do you do then? Do you read them out? Do you take them home and read them {on your own}? What do you do?

Margarita: Each time it depends on... Usually, the textual analysis carries on over the next time. As I've already said, I think that the first time is never enough. Especially if you think that a teaching period is always divided between the examination of the previous lesson, and then, there is the delivery of the next one. So, it {i.e. the analysis of the text} will be carried on. Sometimes, there might be a third time as well,¹⁴⁶ especially in literature lessons at Lyceum. Some works {by students} will be read out. But not all. This can't ever be. It would also be very tiring. I try to prompt those students to read out, who have many weaknesses and who are shy of reading out. Unfortunately, there are many colleagues who think that it is better for these children not to read their work out in class because they are so shy. {Instead,} what they do is to take their work home to mark. Very rarely do I take their work home to mark. However, each time I want to examine all students, if possible. This might be one question, a written work, anything. This means that I never examine {only} three or four children in a lesson.¹⁴⁷

E: But more?

Margarita: Almost all of them. Even if it is only with half a question, one question, anything.

E: When you say that you 'examine' them, what do you mean? That you listen to their work?

Margarita: That they talk, that I listen to them. Yes. That I listen to them.

E: Do you discuss their written work afterwards?

Margarita: We discuss it. And I ask the rest of the class, the other students, 'What do you think about what you've just heard?' I do this mainly in discursive essay writing but also in work {on literature}. And I tell them 'Be careful. I don't want to hear anyone saying 'good' or 'bad'. 'Good' or 'bad' means nothing. I want you to be more specific.' And this is also a way for you to keep their attention, the students' attention, because very often you see that, while you examine someone else, their mind wanders off. They think 'Well. It is not my turn.' And I tell them 'No. It is your turn.' Moreover, the person who reads out his work, after reading it again, he might want to add a few things as well. I usually do this in discursive essay writing. After the students have talked, I say my opinion as well.

E: I see. Let me ask you something else. About the aims that you have for the subject... What do you expect students to get out of the lessons? Of course, you have already said many things {with regard to that}. For example, {you've said that you want} students to question things, to understand that there are usually many angles from which a text can be illuminated. I have also written that you want to foster the habit of reading as well as to point out some interdisciplinary...

Margarita: dimensions.

E: ... dimensions. Is there any other aim that you have for this subject?

Margarita: Yes. That they talk. That I listen to them talking. Nowadays, students do not talk a lot in a class. They talk only when it is necessary for them to talk. I want them to cast aside their fear {of talking}. And especially those children that I referred to earlier, the students of the Vocational schools, which are the most downgraded schools, and also the children of the countryside, where you are really faced with a very big linguistic deficiency. {One of my aims is} to teach them that they need to talk differently depending on the context. They shouldn't ever write in a discursive essay or in a literature essay 'my mum and my father'. Moreover, some children from the country might be using a dialect, some words that are from the dialect of the local community. {They must learn} that they shouldn't write such words in formal texts, because at some point they will have to take exams and they will have to compete other candidates from all parts of Greece, and the examiner marking their script might not understand their idioms.¹⁴⁸

E: You said that you aim at making children talk. Why is it necessary that they talk?

Margarita: First of all, it's what I told you earlier, it is connected to language acquisition itself. And second, a literature lesson is an excellent opportunity for them to talk and share things with their classmates,

¹⁴⁶ She means that she might spend three teaching periods on a single text.

¹⁴⁷ I guess what she is trying to say is that she always asks more than four students to talk in a lesson.

Interestingly enough, she uses the verb 'to examine', even though she really means 'to listen', or 'to ask students to talk or read out their work'. She explains this further in her answers to the next two questions.

¹⁴⁸ In Greece the most important examinations in a student's life are conducted at a pan-Hellenic level. For example, regarding the University entry examinations candidates from all over Greece sit the same papers at exactly the same time. The candidates' names are covered to ensure anonymity and sent to examination centres where they are marked by two examiners. Regarding the use of dialect, there hasn't been a debate on the issue – so far as I know, at least. The common attitude though is that the use of dialect is not acceptable in a formal text, such as an examination script.

with their teacher, etc. Very often extremely interesting conversations might start. And that's where you can see whether students have thought hard... what we said earlier on... have pondered on various issues. Usually you see that students have thought hard on issues, but often they haven't learnt to discuss these issues.

E: OK. {Among your aims are} that they talk for the acquisition of language, so as to share views with others, so as to discuss their questionings... OK. Is there any other aim that hasn't been covered or mentioned?

Margarita: Apart from the aims that we've been discussing there are also the aims set by the National Curriculum, that they've got to know as many texts as possible, for example. And at this point I would like to say something that is very important. Even though I think that the texts included in the school textbooks both for Gymnasium and for Lyceum are generally good and a teacher is pretty much in the position to choose, still, I think that they are all permeated by a strong Hellenocentrism. At the end of each textbook there are a few scattered and piecemeal texts of foreign literature of different eras, which usually nobody teaches. Colleagues look at you in a strange way if they see in your files that you have taught them.¹⁴⁹ And of course, they are so fragmentary that you have very limited options, even if you want to teach them. I remember one year, when I had a Year 3 of Gymnasium and I started with an extract from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It is an extract that refers to the author's life at school and so it was relevant to their current experiences {i.e. to the students' experiences}. It talks about the first days of a pupil's school life. And when my colleagues saw this,¹⁵⁰ they said 'what is this thing that you've done?' It was seen as being very bizarre. So, I think this is a very important issue. I believe that now... And why do I say now? Because it is only in the last years that many people have gathered in Greece, people who are immigrants, financial and political refugees, and who carry their own culture, civilization, language etc with them. This is already a very big social problem, a problem that has not been tackled by the Ministry of Education... {And I think that the MNER} has been taken unawares... Because we see now that there are too many children from immigrant families {in our schools}, mainly at primary schools. {And still,} there are no reception classes {for these children} etc. However, apart from this administrative matter – the need to have reception classes and to have teachers to teach them etc – I think there must also be texts that will bring us into contact with the culture and the civilization, not only of the countries of origin of these particular people – which are mainly the Balkan states – but also of other cultures and peoples. And {the most important reason why this should be done is} because, especially in literature, we see that many literary motifs are common and can be found in the literatures of our neighbouring countries as well as of the other European countries. And not only of Europe, but we also see thematic motifs that are common with those of very distant countries, like Asian or American countries etc. Let us not expand on that. We know that many common legends exist, and so common literature. I think this is a very important issue and the Ministry of Education needs to look into it. There are very few texts that bring us into contact with the civilization and the culture of other peoples.

E: You said that the texts are permeated by some sort of Hellenocentrism.

Margarita: What I mean by that is that they are mainly by Greek authors. Yes. Yes. Not that they deal with themes that promote nationalism etc. I don't mean that. No. Not at all. On the contrary. I think that there are too many texts that promote an internationalist dimension, regarding their content. But they are always by Greek authors.

E: Something else now that has to do with the students as readers. You have worked in various schools in different areas. You have already said that there are some differences between students. So, the starting point is that students come from different environments...

Margarita: Very big differences. Yes.

E: ...different social, cultural backgrounds etc. Do you think there are differences in the way these children... Do you think that these differences in terms of background can be seen in the way they read literature and in the way they interpret it?

Margarita: Of course it can be seen. Of course. I think this can be seen in all subjects but it is mainly in literature that you can see this more clearly. And especially, in their reading of other books apart from school books. A child who has been looked after more by his family and by his social environment, is also the child that has read more widely, the child that has more experiences, the child that might have attended a theatrical performance. Let me give you a good example of that. The rural area I talked about earlier is near the area of ancient Olympia. There is a theatre in that area, where amazing events take place every year. The town is around ten kilometres from this place and still the number of children who had attended even a single performance was extremely small. And even if they had attended a performance, it would have been the concert of a known singer. Very rarely would you see children who had attended a theatrical

¹⁴⁹ All teachers have to record the topics covered in every lesson. These entries are made in a book, which is an official document and stays at the school. An inspector can look through this book so as to make sure that a teacher follows the curriculum.

¹⁵⁰ I.e. when they saw that the first text I taught for the year was that extract.

performance or some other event. They were children of a rural area whose parents had a very low educational level. It is an area that has the biggest percentage of functional and organic illiterates in the whole of Greece. The biggest... from what I've read in a recent research... Of course the social environment and the family will encourage children to love reading, any type of reading. At this point I should say that when I was teaching Social and Political Education – this is a subject that looks at the way a democracy works – I would ask students to bring newspaper articles from their homes. There was a very big percentage of parents from small villages who wouldn't even read newspaper. Not even a newspaper would get into their house. So, how is it possible for us to ask from these children to read literature, when they haven't learnt to read not even a newspaper from their families?

E: Have you noticed any differences between boys and girls in the way they approach literature or not?

Margarita: Not really. I think that at that age students do not project so much matters that have to do with their gender differences, not in literature lessons and not from what I've seen at least. What I've seen is mainly what I said earlier: that those children who are from more educated families talk more. Of course, it might be that girls have a greater ease at analysing and talking about these deeper matters, because it is also our society that teaches them {to be} that way. In general, I think that women have a greater... are trained to have a greater ease at expressing their feelings. And so, in a question of that type, which is about a character's personality, psychology, or about conflicts, it might be that girls would talk more.

E: I see. There is something else that you said earlier. You said that there should be an expansion of the syllabus so as to include texts from other cultures. And you also said that in this way students would identify the common motifs that exist. Is there any other reason why you think there should be texts from other cultures?

Margarita: Well, of course. I think it is very important for children to get to know other cultures, other peoples. I think that, in the end, this will help them understand, on the one hand, their particularities as a nation and the very specific characteristics of the Greek course, but also at the same time, their differences from other nations, other civilizations, other cultures, and finally, how to bridge these differences. And this is very important today that we've been talking about globalisation etc, and where there is this bet or this fear – if you want to put it like this – about what will be preserved from the different national beings and what will be lost in this 'soup' of globalisation. I think this is a very subtle issue in education and does not have to do only with the subject of literature. It is very closely connected to the subject of history. And unfortunately, that's where we see this terrible Hellenocentrism at its strongest. Because the Greeks think that they have this long and brilliant past, they project it so much, forgetting at the same time to talk about what is happening today or about the contribution of other peoples and other civilizations to the world civilization.

E: I see. These were more or less the things I wanted to ask you. Is there anything else about literature at school that you have thought about and which we might not have covered? Something that you would like to be different, or something that you like as it is? Apart, of course, from all the things that we've talked about up to now.

Margarita: Yes. I should say that, unfortunately, children do not see it as a particularly important subject. They don't consider it... Maybe they think it is very easy etc etc. Maybe we ourselves should find some ways in which... We need to discuss it... And of course, the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute,¹⁵¹ all these institutions that exist, should look into these matters. How it could become a more fruitful subject and how it could be more pleasant for the students, and all those things that we've already discussed about... But finally, a very important issue that I raise, which is very important as I've seen it, because we ask... we usually ask from students... we say 'look at these students. Look how mature or how immature they are!'¹⁵² I really think that the issue of teachers' further training is very serious. Not only for older teachers – and that's where the problem becomes very acute – but for younger teachers as well. In other words, teachers need to come constantly into contact with new ways of analysing literature, with new movements, especially with the eras and the movements that they haven't ever been taught. I think that this is very important. If teachers are really trained in the right way, they will manage to give a new dimension to the subject of literature.

E: And you think that this kind of training is not there now?

Margarita: Not at all. There is some kind of training but it is at a very limited level. It is up to the Greek teachers' good will to go deeper into these matters.

E: I see. OK. Thank you.

¹⁵¹ The Pedagogical Institute is a governmental body that advises the MNER on curriculum and examination issues. It is also responsible for writing the school textbooks.

¹⁵² The last few lines are not very clear in the Greek text either.

Greek Interview No 8:

Maria

(2 / 1 / 1999)

Maria is in her early forties and teaches at a Lyceum in a neighbourhood of Athens. She was eager to talk with me about her practice and sounded very confident in the interview. Our discussion took place at her home and there was nobody else around. Like Margarita, she did not need much prompting in order to expand on the subject discussed.

E: Well, what I am mainly interested in is how you see the teaching of literature in school. In these interviews I usually start by asking interviewees about the memories they might have from the reading of literature in their childhood. In other words, what do you remember of the reading of literature at school, when you were a pupil, and outside school in your spare time? If, of course, you remember anything and if you read literature in your spare time.

Maria: When I was a child, especially when I was at primary school, literature was almost unknown {to me}, because the content of school textbooks was poor. I remember {that we did} some simple poems by Travlantonis, a little bit of Solomos, some prose by Papadiamantis. In Year 4 of Primary School, I was deeply moved, I remember, by Papadiamantis' story 'The Wheat-Collector'. It had a big effect on my emotional world, a very big effect. But I remember very few things from the age of primary school. Because the place where I lived was an environment that was not rich in intellectual incentives, and our first public library was built when I was finishing primary school. As for schoolwork, it was limited to the simple poems of the school textbooks. Nothing more than that. Karkavitsas, Travlantonis, Papadiamantis, Solomos, Malakasis, because I am a native of Messologi and the local teachers would talk to us {about him and his work}, because he came from the same area as well... and that's all. When I started secondary school, the public library, which had been completed by then, became a point of attraction, because it was something unknown for the conditions of the area. During the three years of Gymnasium, and I remember that with deep emotion, {we would go to the library} nearly every afternoon and wouldn't leave. Maybe because it was a meeting place as well. Even though we couldn't talk {in the library}, still we would gather there, because we could meet there, and then, we could leave to go for a walk. In this library I read for the first time Shakespeare, Hugo, Dostoyevski, Tolstoy. And from the Greek {writers}, {I read} Solomos, Laskaratos, and again Papadiamantis, because I like him more than any other Greek author. Because he has an admirable way of conveying the manners and customs of a society, which partly reflects the society of the province where I grew up, especially with regard to the position of women. In other words, {through his writings} he talked to me a lot about my surroundings, both the familiar and the neighbouring ones. In addition, the public library had Verne as well, Jules Verne, who fascinated us in those times. It also had a rich selection of magazines, foreign magazines – I can't remember the exact titles now – with pictures and landscapes, which were quite tempting for our age. We found it fascinating to leaf through them, to discuss, to travel with our mind. It was very nice, I remember, especially in those first three years. At school, though, the topics were very poor, because the dictatorship had started.¹⁵³ Poets and authors, whom I got to know when I entered the University in 1972, 1973, were unknown then. We hadn't heard anything about Ritsos, Varnalis, Elytis, and other less famous but progressive for that era {authors}. In particular, I read Ritsos, Varnalis, and Kazantzakis, as a student, in the years after the junta. We didn't know them before. As far as the teachers are concerned, there was only one exception in Year 3 of Gymnasium, a teacher called [...]. He had broad knowledge on the subject but most students could not understand him because he couldn't get things across to them. You had to concentrate a lot in a lesson in order to grasp the messages that he was sending, mainly with regard to the process of textual analysis. In particular, he would diverge from the classic process of textual analysis, {which consisted of} reading, {discussing} the story, {making} a summary, {finding} the main idea, some stylistic features, {making} characterisations, and nothing more. His attention would turn more to an ideological interpretation and he would try to give us messages regarding ideas and feelings.¹⁵⁴ And, he would also expand on many areas, political as well, even though he had to be very cautious. And I liked it like this a lot. This is for Gymnasium. At Lyceum, it was...

E: Why did he have to be very cautious?

Maria: Because this was during the junta. We were in 1969, 1970. At Lyceum, this subject {i.e. literature in school} was again typical, poor, {because it was} simply interpretation of a specific text. However, a

¹⁵³ She refers to the 1967-74 dictatorship. When the Colonels got into the power they burnt all anti-conformist books in public places. During the dictatorship, there was strict censorship of all texts, films and songs that would tell a different story from the official one. See also note no.90.

¹⁵⁴ Like many other interviewees, Maria as well uses the term 'ideological' to refer to 'something that relates to the content and ideas of a text'.

newly-appointed teacher arrived. He had such a wish, such zeal to convey... And, he would not use so much poems and prose as plays. And, he would put them on stage as well. It is not an exaggeration if I say that he produced two {plays} a year. In the period from September until Christmas we had the production of a play, whose content was either patriotic, {that is, about the celebration of the} 28th October¹⁵⁵, or about Christmas. However, the content of the play was not so important as the fact that we would go there in the afternoon, we would rehearse, we had the opportunity to see other works by the same author apart from the specific play, and he would talk to us about theatre, about an actor's virtues, about Ancient Greek drama. Because, after Christmas, there was a possibility for us to produce either a patriotic play, about the 25th March, or some ancient drama. And that's where our biggest joy laid, because we had to organise the chorus of the ancient drama and the protagonists were more. I won't forget a {celebration of the} 25th March,¹⁵⁶ when we produced the play *Papaflessas*,¹⁵⁷ and the protagonist was an amazing student, who is today a teacher of Mathematics at the [...] School of Athens, at [...] street. And, he rendered the role wonderfully. He was very very good and he even looked like him {i.e. the Greek hero Papaflessas} on the picture. In other words, it was a performance that was very close to the authentic.¹⁵⁸ And we even put a ticket and made enough money for our excursion. In Year 2 of Lyceum, I went on a five-day excursion with this money. We had organised a very nice trip to Northern Greece. In other words, the pioneering thing at Lyceum was these theatrical performances. In Modern Greek {literature}, the lessons were pretty much the same {as before}. In general, my school life from 1967 until 1972, while I was at Gymnasium and Lyceum, was poor, with the only exception being my personal effort or initiative to borrow those books from the public library, which I did because I wanted to satisfy my curiosity on what can be found outside school. I believe it is very important to have access to many books at that age. Especially, at the age of primary school, from Year 3 of primary school until Year 3 of Gymnasium, when a child reads books other than the school-books with more ease than at other periods {of his life}. And he becomes addicted to these. So, this is the best age for a child to be addicted to reading, if we want him to read when he has spare time, later on.

E: OK. Could you, please, expand a bit on the following? You said that at Gymnasium and at Lyceum the teaching of literature was somewhat poor, and also that there was a curiosity on your part to see what could be found outside school. So, the way you would read a text at school and your reactions to it were different from the way you would read outside school?

Maria: At school...

E: And in what sense was a literature lesson at school poor?

Maria: A teaching period at school was usually covered with reading. A student with particularly good diction would read so as to present a text. I would consider this practice positive. However, it was negative from the point of view that it would be the same student most of the time. Sometimes they would find another one. Two or three students out of a total of thirty that were in a class {would read}. Right after the reading, someone had to tell the story. I can remember very vividly how a lesson would be. Telling the story was both positive and negative. The positive aspect {of it} was that we had to concentrate during the reading so as to be able to tell the story. Because this also counted for our grade. The negative aspect was that, in this way, half the teaching period would be lost. So, there was very little time left {and in this time we would} look at the meaning of the vocabulary and would explain some difficult words. And after that, {we would look at} the figures of speech, which were limited to metaphor, simile, personification, and qualificative adjectives. In other words, figures of speech like metonym or antithesis, which were more difficult and more complex, were unknown {to us} in those times. And, above all, the ideological part was unknown.¹⁵⁹ Maybe because teachers did not want to risk, because of the general {political} climate that prevailed. At the end {of a lesson}, we would get to the discussion of characters. But, again, {we would make the characterisations} using certain adjectives, which most of the time we had memorised from previous texts. Sometimes, we didn't even know what these adjectives meant. {For example,} 'the protagonist is a daredevil.' The teacher would say 'parvenu'. In the beginning, we would possibly not understand what it meant, but still, we would memorise and use it because the word impressed us. Or, we would get to the style. I remember that for at least two years I used the word 'the style is elegant' and I didn't even know what this meant.¹⁶⁰ I would try to find {the meaning of words} on my own, because it was not as easy to communicate with teachers then as it is today. We needed to be sparing in our questions. Their way of teaching would not leave a lot of room for us to have a warm relationship with them and to be

¹⁵⁵ The 28th October is the national day celebrating the refusal to let the Italian forces enter Greece in 1940. It marks the entry of Greece in World War II on the Allies' side, as the Italians attacked.

¹⁵⁶ The 25th March is the national day celebrating the start of the 1821 revolution for the independence of the Greeks from the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁵⁷ Papaflessas was one of the Greek heroes who fought in the 1821 revolution.

¹⁵⁸ I find her use of the adjective 'authentic' very ambiguous. It is also unclear what the adjective refers to.

¹⁵⁹ See note no. 154.

¹⁶⁰ This example loses out in the translation, because the Greek word for 'elegant' that she uses is a rather rare one, which most students find very difficult to learn.

eager to communicate with them, without constantly being afraid we might make a mistake. In other words, what you said had to be correct, usually. Now, with regard to reading outside school...

E: You said that what you said had to be correct. {It should be} correct, according to whom? According to the teacher or who?

Maria: According to the teacher or to the objective viewpoint. They wouldn't easily accept a personal opinion of yours. Or, they didn't seem inclined to discuss it {i.e. your personal viewpoint} and to move on from that. {At school} there was a certain syllabus that had to be covered, whereas reading outside school was at your own will. For example, I distinctively remember that I borrowed Shakespeare's *Othello* from the library and read it at one go. I didn't stop at all. I liked the way the protagonists acted, their passions, feelings, and tensions. I could think, I could ponder on why things were happening like this. There was mainly an internal dialogue. It wouldn't have been easy to discuss these things with someone else.

E: Later on, what were the reasons that made you decide to become a Greek teacher?

Maria: The first and main reason was an inborn bent for the Arts and Humanities subjects. I can say that for sure. And particularly, {I had a bent} for Ancient Greek, when I went to Gymnasium. Indeed, an inborn bent. I loved to translate a text. I comprehended the grammatical and syntactical phenomena with great ease. This wasn't the case with the exact subjects, with the exception of Physics and Chemistry, which I had an inclination to love and to study. But not for Maths. Not mathematics. And I believe that the teacher I had in Years 1 and 2 of Gymnasium had a big share in my aversion to mathematics and my complete turn towards the Arts and Humanities subjects. His way of teaching and his behaviour did not encourage you to love this subject. But this wasn't the case with the Arts and Humanities subjects. We had amazing teachers {in these subjects}. With very good communication skills, above all.

E: How many years is it that you have been working in a school?

Maria: This is the twenty-second {year}. I am in my twenty-second {year}.

E: And in what schools have you worked? I am more interested in the areas of the schools.

Maria: The areas. The first three years I worked as a supply teacher at schools of, let's say, the high society. If we can call it thus. It was at Palaio Psychiko, Cholargos, and Kifisia. After that, {I worked} in the province for four years. Right after that, for two years {I worked} at schools in an environment that we would call deprived. That is, in the area of Kolonos. And since then, {I have been working} here in our area. At a middle-class, we could say, environment.¹⁶¹

E: Now, another question about your practice at a literature lesson. How would you describe a lesson? I know that you don't always do exactly the same thing. {However,} in broad terms, what is it that you do in a lesson?

Maria: With regard to the teaching of the subject?

E: Yes.

Maria: It is better to talk about how I teach now, and not in older times, because in this subject you can keep on renewing your methods, if you ponder seriously on the matter. Otherwise, you cannot have the effect that you need to have in different eras. In older times, it was probably enough to explain the vocabulary, make an interpretative analysis, and {look at} some viewpoints on the ideas, the feelings, or the figures of speech that an author uses. Nowadays, however, I've noticed that the first and the last thing {in a literature lesson} is the presentation, or else, the reading of a text by a teacher himself, who needs to have the required skills. {He needs to have the required} diction and colour in his voice, so as to illuminate the points that he will interpret and insist on afterwards {i.e. after the reading}. Why do I say this? For many years I have been teaching in Year 3 of Lyceum. In {the textbook of} this year, there is a series of treatises which are very difficult and, I would say, very tiring for students. If a teacher does not read them himself and instead asks from a student to do this... and there will not be only one student reading but there might be two or three of them; a single student cannot read it at one go, {because} he gets tired. And when he {i.e. the student} gets tired, then he cannot render it well. He renders it even worse than when he started. So, every time I've tried to charge a student {with the reading}, I've failed. A student would have to be particularly talented {in order to read}, and there could be only one student like this {in a whole class}, and so I would have to address the same student all the time. As a result, I prefer to read a text myself, {so that} the first presentation will be made, with the necessary modulation on the points which I have singled out beforehand that I will illuminate and interpret. After the reading, work on the text starts, in parts or in sections, with special emphasis on the ideological content.¹⁶² So, work on the vocabulary is supplementary. When you reach a point... If there is some difficult point, then you analyse it on the spot. I don't follow a typical procedure, in the sense of 'now we will explain the vocabulary. Now we will tell the story.' No. After the reading, I start the interpretation straight away and illustrate the points I have planned to stress. I

¹⁶¹ The first three areas, i.e. Palaio Psychiko, Cholargos and Kifisia, are the most aristocratic and posh neighbourhoods of Athens. On the other hand, Kolonos is a very deprived neighbourhood in the centre of Athens. When she says 'here', she means the area of Zographou, which is a lower-middle class neighbourhood of Athens.

¹⁶² See note no.154.

stick to them. And, most importantly, {I do something} which I have concluded that it is very effective. Students keep a notebook alongside texts. This notebook is not something different from what we used to say in the past 'my rough book' and my 'notebook'.¹⁶³ It is a single notebook. From the start of a lesson, we write the title of the work that we will work on, straight underneath the name of the author, and then, a few lines on the author. These few lines on the author have to do with his life and era, information that is directly relevant to the work under study and had some influence on his writings. Or, {things} that he wants to bring out through his writings. {We also write} whether it is in the time of the Second World War, or the generation from the time between the two World Wars, etc. Why I have concluded that this notebook is very very useful? First of all because, in this way, students are 'forced', in inverted commas, or they want to follow {the lesson}. They like attending the lesson in this way. They take notes from everything I say. And not only...

[There was a small interruption, as someone entered the room and asked something.]

Maria: So, they take notes from what I say. And I have found the following particularly likeable.¹⁶⁴ At some points, which are difficult, I dictate to them. I have my own notes and points, which are informative about the era or the ideological content, {and I dictate these to them}. For example {I might dictate to them}: Why was the generation between the two World Wars intellectually marginalised and did not do anything so as to avert what seemed to be approaching with nazism and fascism? Colon. I say some points of my own. And, why I do this {i.e. the dictation}? Possibly {I do this}, so as to give them some words which are good for essays¹⁶⁵, which students have not learned how to use and would like to learn. Or, phrases. They {i.e. these words and phrases} might be taken from {various} authors etc. to whom they have no access themselves. And, in order to excite their interest and make them study these {notes}, there has been on my side some sort of promise to them that this material will be for study and for examination in the final exams in June. So, everything I say, everything I dictate becomes material for learning to its biggest part, because there is also the lure that they will be examined on this. Then, after the analysis of the whole work is completed and after we stand on the characters for a while.... For example, if we do 'The God Abandons Antony'¹⁶⁶, {I will ask them}: who is Antony? Or, what does he stand for, for his era?¹⁶⁷ Some characterisations are being made. But, we insist mainly on the substance of the adjectives. Not just a listing of adjectives that will simply fill up the lines. We need approximately two teaching periods so as to complete the work on a text, or even three, if it is rather long. Questions are set exactly on the things we have said {in class}, so that students won't fret about having an extra task to do for homework. For these questions {which are set for homework} they will simply use the material {i.e. the material that has been either dictated or discussed in class} and they can add some of their own as well. They themselves wouldn't like to spread into an unknown sea {of data}. That is, {they wouldn't like to drift into} data about the life of an author which might not relate to the era or to the specific piece of work.¹⁶⁸ So, I have found this very efficient and tidy. The lesson goes by, they get some points. And in this way, we can make some very nice comparisons as well. For example, {I might ask them to think} whether an era is expressed in an essay-writer's work and in the messages he conveys. {Or}, using another text {by another author}, how do you see this other author who lived in the same era but who wants to tell us something different about the era. For example, we had the essay 'The Intellectual', I think it was by Chourmouzios, which talked about the intellectuals of the era, about their characteristic behaviour, who lived in the margins, etc. etc.¹⁶⁹ And we made a comparison with the intellectuals either of the same era or of another era, for example, of the post-war era, the post-civil-war era, who fought to convey some messages etc. And this is an era that students love a lot, this era after the civil war. Maybe because it is very revolutionary and it fits with their character. For example, I remember this poem called 'The Burning One' that we did in Year 2 of Lyceum... I think it

¹⁶³ This sentence is very confusing in the original as well. I think that she refers to a practice of older times, when students used to have two separate notebooks: one was for rough work and the other one was for neat work. In fact, this practice was more common in primary school and not in secondary. So, she says that she asks students to have only one notebook for literature.

¹⁶⁴ In the original it is not made clear who finds this practice likeable and pleasing, whether it is the students or the teacher herself. I guess she means the students.

¹⁶⁵ A more close translation of her words would be 'words which are of an essay level', possibly meaning 'advanced / abstract vocabulary'.

¹⁶⁶ This is a poem by C.P. Cavafy that is included in the anthology for Year 3 of Lyceum.

¹⁶⁷ Once more, there is strong ambiguity in her words. It is not clear whether she means the Mark Antony's era, the Cavafy's era, or our own era.

¹⁶⁸ It is not made clear how she knows what the students would or would not like to do.

¹⁶⁹ Emiliós Chourmouzios wrote the essay she refers to in 1944. In this essay the author writes about the intellectuals living in Europe in the period between the two World Wars and is included in the anthology used in Year 3 of Lyceum.

is by Sinopoulos. {I don't remember well}, because I have taught this only once. And, they liked this poem so much that at the end they told me 'Ms, we are sure that this is what you will put in the final exam.' They got to love it so much that they considered it highly probable that they would be examined on this as well. Precisely because we had paid so much attention to it.

E: Earlier on, you spoke about some points that you stress out to the students and about the whole work that you do on various aspects of the text, the linguistic, the 'ideological' etc. Do all these points come from you, or are they made by students, or are they the result of a discussion, or what?

Maria: This is an issue that is not always treated in the same way. And now that I've been talking I mainly have in my mind the syllabus for Year 3 of Lyceum, which is particularly difficult. It also includes the treatises, which have very heavy content. We need a whole teaching period just for the reading and the first presentation {of these essays}. Now, if I ask students to look for the points {made in an essay}, we might lose more time. So, in an indirect way I prepare them for what I want to lay stress on afterwards. For example, there is the essay 'Forms of Liberty' by Papanoutsos. {I might ask them:} How many forms {of liberty} can you identify in the text? So that they will search only for the title {of each form}. That is, the legal liberty, the psychological liberty, {etc.} From that point onwards, though, I will start making the analysis on my own very quickly, asking them questions at the same time. {It is mainly me who makes the analysis} because time is very pressurising. And this is not something oppressive. We shouldn't look at this practice as something which is only negative. We should look at it from another aspect as well. That is, it is not right to spend four or five teaching periods on a single author and to ignore another part of poetry or of foreign literature. OK. Let them take with them {only} some basic points from Papanoutsos, {e.g.} how many forms of liberty we have. In a literature lesson, we also have the opportunity to do the following: After we give the points from a text, students can prepare themselves to write an essay on this topic area as well.¹⁷⁰ And this is very effective on their study. So, {I might say to them} 'read everything on liberty and, when we come back, we will write an essay' I might put them something that is not in the treatise {that we've studied in the literature lesson, such as:} 'Man is born free and yet, all over the world, he is in chains. Comment.' Or, 'there are people who are free and people who are enslaved.' They can get points from the treatise {that we have studied in class}. But, because they know that they are going to write {an essay}, they go home and study. And this is very important. In other words, we shouldn't leave them... No matter how much we might say that this is directed, you can't leave a child completely free to act. He needs to be directed by the teacher. It is very good for him to go home and to know that the next day he is to write something on the topic area 'liberty'. He will search, he will find. He will find relevant essays, he will find material. What is liberty? In what forms can we find it? Why is it not exercised everywhere? Why is 'democracy' only at the surface a democracy? If you give them the points... Indeed, he {i.e. the student} will make {something out of it}. Whereas if you just say to him, as he leaves, 'come back tomorrow to write an essay', he might not touch it at all. He might think 'inspiration will come to me {on the spot}.' In other words, I work on the treatises {which are included in the literature textbook} together with the school subject of essay writing. {I use} not only the literature {textbook in conjunction with essay writing} but also the other textbook we have *Expression - Essay writing*¹⁷¹. It has amazing essays, amazing essays. But the points {are identified} with guidance from me and with a little bit of searching by the students, so that we can move on quickly.

E: I see. Something else now. In the school textbooks there is a compilation of many authors. What criteria do you apply in order to choose the texts you will teach?

Maria: Yes.

E: Because, obviously, you can't teach all of them.

Maria: No. Of course not. The first criterion is that all broader areas of literature should be represented. It also depends on the year. For example, in Year 1 of Lyceum, we do representative works from the Akritika songs, from the Cretan School, from the Eptanisian School. So, the first criterion are the broader time periods of Modern Greek literature; {I try to do} one or two representative works from each era. The second criterion is, I think, subjective, {it has to do with} what a teacher likes. This issue of what one likes is a really difficult one. Because another one might not like what I like. I think that it is a matter of general

¹⁷⁰ She is talking about Year 3 of Lyceum, which is the final year of secondary education. At the end of the year, students take entry exams for the University. Discursive essay writing is one of the four subjects that all candidates are examined on, no matter what they want to read at University. Literature is not a subject in those entry exams. So, it seems that this teacher uses literature lessons in order to enhance their skills in writing discursive essays.

¹⁷¹ In every year of Lyceum, there is a textbook called *Expression - Essay writing*, which has material on language, writing in different registers etc. This textbook is used as an aid to essay writing. Students have to write ten discursive essays per year, on topics given by the teacher. The common practice is for students to write them in class in a single or double lesson. Afterwards, teachers mark the essays at home and hand them back to the students. There is usually a discussion of the topic in class as well. At the end of all years, discursive essay writing is one of the subjects to be examined.

education, of a teacher's personal searches and interests, of further training, of what he has read and what he has seen. Let me give you a characteristic example. {Once} I travelled to Spain and became partly familiar with the culture of those people. As soon as I came back to Greece, I thought that I should do Lorca. Of course, I had thought about it before, but then I had some other experiences as well, and I thought it would be very nice to present it {to a class}. Or, {another time,} when we went to Russia and they took us to the places where Tolstoy lived etc. I got into the spirit and said 'Well, I need to do an extract {from his work}.' Of course, if a teacher's spirit is sterile, stiff, or even sometimes retrogressive, he will follow certain directions closely, {making} a typical lesson. In those cases, we talk, of course, about a complete failure. There is no need to discuss that. You can hear students saying {about such a teacher and his lessons} 'the time has come for us to sleep', or 'oh, what do we want him for?' etc. In other words, the presentation of literature is a whole performance.

E: On the teacher's side or...?

Maria: On the teacher's side. It's only like this that students will be mobilised as well. And even if they are not mobilised, even though this is considered to be antipedagogical,¹⁷² {I still think that} if it is a {good} performance staged by the teacher, then, they will follow it like a theatrical performance, participating in it with their mind. This has also happened many times: that students do not talk at all, that there is a monologue by the teacher, and still their interest is focussed, precisely because the performance is given by the teacher. Not all the time, of course. Sometimes. This is not right.¹⁷³ They want to have participation, they love it, but they also love to see the work coming to life through a teacher's words. However, most of the time, this {i.e. being able to bring a text into life} is a natural talent. It cannot be attained easily. So, if you enter a class and do not impersonate the main character, or if you do not go back to the era that you want to present, then the lesson will range from being a typical lesson to being a dead lesson. Unfortunately. Literature as a subject has this peculiarity. But this is not only in literature. {You need to do that} in the other school subjects as well. But especially literature demands it. It can become very very boring; it can become boring very very easily. In particular, I remember when we were doing the poem 'The God Abandons Antony' by Cavafy, I started talking about the poet and one of them said that Cavafy was a homosexual. And they started this laugh, this snigger that is common among children, and there was this threat that the lesson might fail, just because of this disorderly atmosphere {that had been created} with regard to whether Cavafy was a homosexual or not. Well, I won't forget it. Starting to talk about the Alexandrian era, about the fact that it is an overlooked era, with such wealth, with such ecumenism, with such globalisation, the peculiarity, the integration of {different} civilisations, Alexandria being a melting pot, and this smell of the East as well as of the West, of the ancient Greek spirit, that Cavafy tries to convey to us, himself wandering around the tap rooms and getting to know the marginalised element, which he lived, which he experienced, which he felt, and which he tries to render to us in his works... And I started {listing} titles of his works, {talking about} what a symbolist is... {And} suddenly, I saw that the climate changed and Cavafy was transformed into a creator in front of their eyes. {I told them} that he is the most widely read poet in France – sometimes, we use a bit of exaggeration, that he is 'the most' widely read poet, because it makes an impression on them. There was a switch straight away. What is Alexandria? What does Antony stand for? Dionysus. Who is Dionysus? We started {talking} about hedonism. So, Cavafy was a follower of hedonism. So, he got to know other aspects as well. They saw him under a different light. Exactly. At that moment {i.e. at students' first reaction}, if you... facing the atmosphere that had been created... because I got really irritated by this situation, to the point where I even wanted to interrupt the lesson, but I knew that {if I did this}, then the lesson would be a hundred per cent failure. {I also knew} it was up to me to change the climate. It needs a big effort {to achieve this}. Because very easily... Or... And I still remember that even in {the lesson on} Lorca, there was a tendency for the lesson to become an object of derision, because at some point {in the text} there was the word 'συκιά'.¹⁷⁴ For good or for bad, some words have acquired a certain meaning in students' perception. As soon as they heard the word 'συκιά', immediately a group {of students} tried to create a certain atmosphere. At that moment, of course, you need to shift the climate towards the creator, towards the artistic aspect. And of course, {it is good} if you manage to convince the students that we do not examine the author's personal life but his creative work. And again, another thing that they like and find very exciting is the fact that a creator, an artist is not a common person. So, they can see him as something special, an eccentric person, a *sui generis* person, whose very weaknesses can be a source of creation. In particular...

E: Do the students tend to see this or do you try to make them see this?

Maria: I try to make them see it so that, if – as we go along – we come across a weakness or peculiarity, that they see it as a source of creation. For example, I would laugh and tell them that Van Gong cut his ear.

¹⁷² I translated the Greek word 'αντιπαιδαγωγικό' into antipedagogical, i.e. something which goes against pedagogical theories.

¹⁷³ She means that it is OK for a teacher to make a performance and do all the talking in some lessons, but this shouldn't happen all the time.

¹⁷⁴ The first meaning of the word 'συκιά' is 'fig tree' but in the slang it means 'gay'.

Of course, {we might} break into laughing because a crazy man cuts his ear, but {we need to think} what circumstances such a man goes through... and, very often, under the influence of these circumstances he might create admirable works.

E: OK. Is there any other criterion that you use apart...

Maria: For the selection?

E: Yes. ... apart from the texts being representative and, of course, the subjective criterion.

Maria: Rarely, I might also discuss with students whether they like {us to do} something. Unfortunately or fortunately, the pressure of school subjects is such that they don't particularly care whether we show preference for or whether we reject a particular author. So, very few students or, sometimes, even none of them, will say to you 'Why don't we do one more story by Papadiamantis? We liked him.' But usually the criteria are these: that we talk about the era, and the subjective one.

E: Now, something else. In general, what aims would you say that you have for this subject? In other words, what do you expect your students to gain from this subject? What do you want them to take from this subject?

Maria: The first thing I can think of is familiarization with the authors. And when we say familiarization with the authors, {I don't mean} in depth. This cannot be done at school. However, it is very important for them to know that there is a certain Varnalis, a certain Ritsos, a certain Tolstoy. Because students very easily reject anything they don't know. However, if they have heard about something, {if} they have seen it, then it is very easy for them to look for it as well. For example, if they visit a bookshop and there is a bench with a big number of books and they have heard about Tolstoy, Cavafy, Papadiamantis, or someone else, their eye will fall on what is known, and then, they will search for the unknown. The second thing is addiction to the reading of literature works. Of course, we are not talking so much about poetry as about prose. Poetry is not something they will easily pick up to read, because it needs special interpretation. However, they will read a work of prose. Then, it is for them to get to know the eras. That each era represents the political and, mainly, social conditions, which are described in his work {i.e. in an author's work}. For example, {reading} *The Murderess* by Papadiamantis, they are astounded by Francoyiannou's behaviour, because they try to grasp the climate of the era, the position of women, the social conditions, the poverty, the misery, man's defense against adverse circumstances, the social surroundings. In other words, {one of my aims is for them} to see that a creator is closely related to his era. And also to make a comparison with modern times, the very modern era, the very close one. That is, what would an author in Chile write during the dictatorship? An author living in Greece nowadays who would talk about decline, about a crisis in values... Do we have something of the sort in our times? These are mainly the topics. We can't say much more. {So, my aims are for students} to get to know the authors' names, to get addicted to the reading of literature, and to understand that a work of art, in general and not only a work of literature, reflects an era.

E: OK. Anything else?

Maria: I don't think there is anything else. I don't think we can give much more. And some knowledge, of course. There is also some knowledge that we can give to students. Knowledge about the art of expression. What is a metaphor? What is a metonym? How can we articulate something in a perfect way and more correctly than in everyday speech? Why does an author use these figures of speech? The adjectives? What is the use of adjectives? That is, {we can work and do things} at a word level as well. And definitely, {one of the aims is to achieve} an improvement in students' expression. There is a qualitative advancement through the use of other words¹⁷⁵, which is very important, especially for our times. And something else. This {thing} about knowledge. Through literature you can convey a lot of historical knowledge to students. So it can be combined with history as well. With the akritiki era.¹⁷⁶ Or, students like the period of the Second World War a lot. I won't forget the poem *Axion Esti* by Elytis, which we read in the context of the Second World War and of his personal life, {discussing} that he himself fought {in the war}, that he conveyed his experiences {through his poetry}. Or, Seferis' presentation of the political life that operated behind-the-scenes in his poem *The Last Station*... indeed, it fascinated them... the government that was in Egypt, the intrigues, the erosion, the corruption.¹⁷⁷ So they get to know the historical facts through another domain, the domain of literature, without it being a sterile listing of historical facts, that is, the x battle that took place then... But, through a different domain, an author's domain, we could say.

E: {I would like to ask} something else that has to do with the students. All these years you have taught in many different schools. In general, {we could say that} students have different backgrounds. And you have a rather long experience, you said that you've been to areas where there were upper middle class families,

¹⁷⁵ I guess that when she says 'other words' she means more 'advanced', more 'abstract' vocabulary.

¹⁷⁶ Akritika were the songs that referred to those Greeks who lived on the borders of the Byzantine empire and who defended the country against the various attackers from the East. This is what she has in mind when she talks about the 'akritiki era'.

¹⁷⁷ During the German occupation of Greece the pre-war Greek government had flown to Egypt together with many Greek troops. While they were there they fought alongside the Allies.

others with middle class families, others in the province where, we could say, there were farming families, farming environments etc. Have you noticed students reading, interpreting, approaching literature differently, depending on their background? Or, have you not noticed anything of the sort?

Maria: The only difference I have met is in the province, in the farming families. We talk about minimal or even non-existent incentives. But, a student's personal interest has a very important role to play. So, in contexts that are deprived, as far as the intellectual incentives are concerned, you can see a bigger aptitude {for learning} than in an upper middle-class or middle-class environment, where children have got knowledge ready. In other words, it is more a matter of the {individual} child. I would say that it is the same everywhere. In fact, what has made a strong impression on me was from those four years I worked in the province, which was a purely rural environment. One of these years, I worked at the capital of a county, at Messologi in particular, which has a long intellectual tradition, a very long intellectual tradition. So, I noticed that the class – maybe it had to do with the particular class, I don't know – which I had and taught in Year 3 of Lyceum had amazing knowledge and they would bring in class from their homes loads of books, other than the school textbooks. For example, we would do art and one of the students would come with four or five volumes on Picasso. At those times... we talk about 1982... this is about fifteen years ago. And I didn't even know many of these books. However, this didn't mean that the students, who didn't have these incentives from home, {were very different}. You could see straight away that their eye would fall on every new book and maybe they wanted to read it more than the others did, because they missed it more than the others who had it.

E: Yes. I see. Have you noticed any differences between boys and girls or not?

Maria: Yes, a big one. There is difference.

E: What kind of difference?

Maria: Girls have a bigger aptitude for reading literature. Of course, I am not talking about exceptions, but purely in terms of number. So, we find a bigger number of girls {reading} than of boys. Boys have a stronger preference for sci-fi, scientific, or fantasy {texts}, and a smaller for sensitive literary creations. Maybe because they have identified them with the world of women, {things that are} sensitive, tender. And they are risking losing part of their manhood if they show a big interest in them. There is this attitude. For example, I don't think that a boy would easily read Papadiamantis. A girl would get to read the *Christmas stories* by Papadiamantis much more easily. Of course, this happens at an older age, not at a younger one. At the age of primary school, I think that they are more or less the same. And of course, there are the children who read anything that falls into their hands. They don't choose. {I.e. they don't have a preference.}

E: So, these differences that exist between boys and girls, do they affect the way in which they read literature at school?

Maria: Of course.

E: Or, do they influence the decisions that you make for a lesson?

Maria: Not my decisions. I address both of them the same. To put it simply, a student who wants to be good in terms of the requirements of the subject – I don't know to what extent he will be essentially good – this student makes sure that he meets these requirements, gaining, of course, the relative profits. I believe that sometimes knowledge has to be compulsory too. You need to make someone learn it. Because once he gets to know it, he will love it. He has {many} chances to love it. The way it is presented by the teacher is instrumental in his getting to love it. No. No. I don't make any selection whether it is a boy or a girl. {sic. I don't make any distinction between boys and girls.} And, I won't forget that in {a lesson we did on} a treatise by Evelyn Reed in Year 3 of Lyceum, which talked about women and advertising, even though it was a lesson that ought to interest exclusively the girls, the boys followed it with great interest. And at some point, I said that very often a woman is influenced so much by advertising that she regards her relationship with a boy as being commensurate with the price of the gifts he makes to her. And then, a boy jumped up and said 'At last, Ms. Say it so that they hear it from somebody!' That is, that if one escorts them with an expensive car like the one on an advertisement, or if one gives them an expensive perfume for their birthday, then, he is also the successful man.¹⁷⁸ And, he {i.e. the boy} said, without raising his hand, like this, from his seat. 'At last, Ms. Say it so that someone listens to this! So that some girl listens to this!' Possibly someone from the class who had {such} an attitude.

E: I see. These were more or less the things I wanted to ask.

Maria: I don't know if I've managed to enlighten you.

E: A lot. I also wanted to ask whether there is maybe anything else that you have thought a lot about. Or something you would like to be different. Or, something that is already in place, which you like and helps you a lot. Something which I might have not asked or which has not been covered.

¹⁷⁸ It is interesting to note her use of the third person plural, 'they', i.e. misguided, gullible women.

Maria: I have noticed that audio-visual aids help a lot in the teaching of literature. A lot. What do I mean exactly? When you teach *Eleftherous Poliorkimenous*,¹⁷⁹ it is very important that you bring the parts that are set to music for students to listen to. They are set to music by Theodorakis. Or, {you could bring in class} some play read by an actor for them to listen to. Regarding the visual aids. A lesson becomes very alive when, {for example,} you talk about Solomos and you bring some pictures of Zakynthos where he lived, or it is even better if you have slides and the school has the relevant material aids. That is, if you do the *National Anthem*, you could show them the hill of Strani, where he was inspired and that it is facing Messologi. Or, if you do Lorca {you could show them} *The bullfighter* from Spain. It excites them greatly. They might walk out of the lesson and say – I won't forget it, and it is a bad word as well – 'and fuck the lesson.'¹⁸⁰ That's exactly how they called it. That was when it was presented together with {those aids.} But, unfortunately, we can't {do this} every time and students are partly responsible for that. For example, they might have destroyed the plug and so you go in the class with the tape recorder and, at that moment, it is cancelled. Just like this, because someone felt like destroying the plug. It has happened to me. A lot. Literature can become very dear to students in this way {i.e. by using audio-visual aids}.

E: *Anything else?*

Maria: Regarding the teaching, no. But students could organise something. It could be anything, from a concert to a show, a visit to some place, to some exhibition.

E: *Are you happy with the textbooks that you have now?*

Maria: I don't think that we need to focus there. There is a big selection {of texts} in these and the time is so limited, that you can give {some things}, if you want, even with what is already there. There is no author who is left out. Of course, if we want to have a whole discussion on that, someone might come up and say that women authors are at a disadvantage. OK. Of course, some authors are missing. But, even if they include them, I don't think that we have the time to teach all of them. Only a short familiarisation can be achieved.

E: *OK. Thank you very much.*

Maria: You're welcome.

¹⁷⁹ This is a poem by Dionysios Solomos. He is often described as the 'national poet', because the Greek national anthem is the first stanzas of his long poem 'Hymn to freedom'.

¹⁸⁰ This is a slang expression, which is used when something is very good. I can't translate it in English.

Greek Interview No 9:

Vasso

(7 / 1 / 1999)

Vasso is in her mid thirties and teaches at a Gymnasium on a little island close to Pireus. The interview took place at her house and there was no time pressure. In the beginning, she seemed a bit uncomfortable and seemed aware of the tape recorder. However, after a while she overcame her initial hesitation and sounded very confident and eager to talk, which is why this was the longest interview. She also seemed interested in teaching practices in England and asked about these after the interview had finished. At some point Vasso refers to Margarita, one of the other interviewees, with whom she has been friends since their school days.

E: Well. Let's start. Could you talk to me about your memories of reading literature as a child, either at school or outside it? Of course, if you read literature outside school.

Vasso: I can't remember anything from school. Or better, most of all I remember the feeling that our teacher was pleasant. I'm talking about Lyceum, because I really can't remember anything from Gymnasium, I have no memories at all. I remember the general feeling more than any particular texts or some idea that she might have wanted to get across to us, or things like that. From my personal reading I remember the novel *A child counts the stars*.¹⁸¹ I remember it was the first book for which I stayed up all night to finish. {Before that} there was a long history with various books that a child or a little girl would read at twelve, thirteen etc, but {the only memory I have of all these} was being at Year 2 of Gymnasium and staying up all night so as to finish the novel *A child counts the stars*. {And I even remember} its plot, its characters and all this stuff. So, it was a very strong situation {i.e. a very strong impression}. {However,} I can't remember anything from school.

E: Do you remember what you would do in class?

Vasso: No. I don't know why I can't remember anything. I remember that at my time at Lyceum what had dominated was a...

[There was an interruption as the phone rang.]

Vasso: What was I talking about? Yes. {I was telling you} that most of all I remember a Greek teacher who was a fascist. He taught us Ancient Greek and that's the strongest memory I have from all subjects on language, literature and history. A reaction against him.

E: Earlier on, you said that your {woman} teacher was pleasant. Did you have only one teacher {for literature in all your time} at school?

Vasso: I can remember only one.

E: In what sense was she pleasant?

Vasso: In what sense? {She was} close, smiling. In those days, it was very important {for us} if a teacher allowed us to say a few more things, or if he let us express our questionings or the ideological agony we might have had at adolescence. He or she would, then, become our idol and would be our 'good teacher'. That's what I mean when I say pleasant, in the sense that she let us go a step further, our own step further. {A step} further than the text and what the poet wants to tell us, and all this common stuff.

E: So, you could have a more personal expression?

Vasso: {Yes,} a more personal expression. And I remember it was the first time that we had the opportunity to talk about how we really saw a text in a literature lesson. It was the first time I heard {a teacher saying} that 'Anyway, the poet has died. We can't know exactly what the poet wants to say {through this text}, unless he has left a personal account in his writings or I don't know where.' There was such freedom and opportunities.

E: So, you would talk about your personal feelings and responses to a text in a more general way?

Vasso: Exactly. That's what I remember at least. On the other hand, because I don't have strong memories from adolescence, I think these {memories} might be my own personal projections to a certain degree, {that are influenced by} my experiences as a teacher and by my wish for those times. {I'm not sure} whether I have made up a picture that is more pleasing than it really was. However, I remember discussions on books, on specific extracts, in class and with my friends.

E: When you say {discussions} 'with my friends', do you mean discussions on books you would read outside school?

¹⁸¹ This is a novel by Menelaos Lountemis that was published in 1956. It is a rather melodramatic text and was a favourite with young adolescents in older times.

Vasso: Yes. About books we might have read outside school. There was a... I call it luck, the fact that I had a circle of friends who were interested {in such things.} They would read and listen to music. There was always some sort of dialogue on these. Each one {would do these things} more or less than the others. We also had a classmate whose mum was a Greek teacher and he would introduce us a bit more to other literary forms and to more modern things. And so, there was some sort of play going on, with words, ideas and books.

E: *Would you exchange books and so on?*

Vasso: I don't remember. The most probable is that yes, because I didn't have much money {and still} I read quite a lot then. However, I don't remember anything more specific. I remember that we were educated kids. And now, looking back, I think that we were pretty educated kids {compared with kids of today}, even though I never say that in a class.

E: *What do you mean when you say 'educated kids'? How do you define this 'being educated'?*

Vasso: Educated? We were interested in education, in the sense of acquiring a shape and a personality of our own... in the sense of getting organised. I think we were in a hurry to get organised.¹⁸² So, {I use the phrase} 'to be educated' in this sense, first of all. And then, {I say} 'to be educated' in the sense of having a curiosity and a concern to engage in various things, and to get what is coming {from people and things around you}. It might be something from your classmate, it might be from a newspaper, it might be anything, such as a walk, it might be from a book, anything. But, that you take this and that you work on this.¹⁸³

E: *I see. And do you think that children now are not educated?*

Vasso: No. {Nowadays} children seem to think that they know everything. It is not just the attitude that an adolescent often has in order to get strength, the attitude 'I know everything. I am OK. I am on a good way, on a way of my own' and so on. {More than that} it seems as if they are not moved by anything. {They are moved} only if something absurd comes into their way. I remember a youngster at some time, when I was telling them— in a very rough way — that man had a little tail as well, but then he didn't need it and so it atrophied, and he got up on his two feet and I don't know what, {I was telling them} something like that, in very broad terms... {And} as he was sitting there being in a lethargy, he raised his head and said 'What an idea! Are you serious, Ms?' 'Yes, Niko, I am serious.' 'Oh my! What does one learn at school!' or something of the sort. And this is a very serious issue for me, i.e., what can move them, what can impress them and excite their curiosity.

E: *Could this have to do with the viewpoint from which you look at things? Because it is a fact that you now see things from the point of view of a teacher, whereas, then, you lived all these things from the side of an adolescent. Could it be that these kids see things differently, that they feel things differently?*

Vasso: If you say something like this to them, something like 'Well, don't you have any 'whys'? Don't you have any... — how can I say it? not a search...' Then, they react to this. {They say} 'Of course we have. But what has he got to say to us? What can Papadiamantis say to us with the *Murderess*? What can Cavafy, who lived in the beginning of the century, say to us with 'Poseidoniates' or with Meleager and Krinagoras?'¹⁸⁴ What are these things? What can he say to us? He has nothing to say to me. No, I'm not interested.' {And you might say:} 'Are you not interested in the language? {Are you not interested in} a play with language? {Are you not interested in} a play where you might be looking through the keyhole into the *Murderess*' life, or anything?'¹⁸⁵ {But still they say} 'No way. No. I am not interested.' — I don't know if I'm talking in a very surrealistic way to you...

E: *No. That's fine. Have you noticed whether they are interested in other texts, apart from those they do at school?*

Vasso: Very little. This year, before Christmas, at the Gymnasium I started a discussion {with students} on reading etc. They read magazines. All of them read magazines. But very few of them read books. And I suggested some books to them, some that came into my mind from various genres... from science fiction as well... in an attempt to play a bit with the theme in case it would appeal to them... from detective novels, some classics, and some more recent ones. However, I noticed that in three classes where I did this thing, from twenty to twenty-two kids in every class there were only five who would note down the details.

E: *The others wouldn't even write... ?*

¹⁸² This is a close translation of the original. I think that when she says 'we wanted to get organised', she means that they wanted to get to know the world around them, the world of ideologies and theories and to find their place in it.

¹⁸³ She means that one is 'educated' when one is open to new stimuli and ideas and is willing to elaborate and think on these.

¹⁸⁴ 'Poseidoniates' is a poem by Constantine Cavafy. Meleager and Krinagoras are the names of two characters from Cavafy's poem 'Youths of Sidon (400AD)'.

¹⁸⁵ She refers to Alexandros Papadiamantis' novel *The Murderess*, where the author writes about the main character's psychological turmoil and inner thoughts.

Vasso: The others, no. They were quiet, of course. Moreover, because I would tell them a few things about the book, its topic, what happens in the story and things like that, at some points, they would make questions ‘And what happens next?’ And I would say ‘Well, you need to read the book in order to see what happens next.’ But, I’m telling you that from each class there were only five to six kids that would write down the list.

E: *Let me take you back a bit. After school, you became a Greek teacher. How did you decide to become a Greek teacher?*

Vasso: By chance. I didn’t go to a frontistirio in the summer between Year 2 and Year 3 of Lyceum.¹⁸⁶ I was very good at the exact sciences as well. Anyway, when we started Year 3 of Lyceum, all students who were to do science had already attended a frontistirio {over the summer}. So, I felt a bit insecure, even though we still hadn’t started the courses {at school} so that I could see what was really happening. So, it was more or less by chance {that I became a Greek teacher}. I hadn’t really thought of myself being in a class.

E: *Looking back, have you regretted it or not?*

Vasso: No. I haven’t regretted it. No. What I have regretted is that after completing my first degree I didn’t do anything on the history of art, as I wanted to. But I haven’t regretted the fact that I’ve gone into education. No. I say that at some time in the future I might do something on this adolescent dream – adolescent, that’s how I would call it.

E: *How many years is it that you’ve been working in schools?*

Vasso: This is my tenth year. Since 1989.

E: *And in what schools have you worked? I am mostly interested in the areas.*

Vasso: OK. Kythnos and Samos, which are islands. One year in each of them. Two years at Rafina, Galatas, mainland province. This year I work at Salamina. The rest of the years, I was working in Athens, at East Attica, that is Cholargos, Chalandri etc, special areas, right?¹⁸⁷

E: *How many years were you there?*

Vasso: Three years. At Chalandri and Cholargos.

E: *I see. Let me ask you. How would describe a lesson in literature? In broad terms, obviously, because each lesson, each text, has its peculiarities. In broad terms, how would you describe the way in which you do a lesson? What is the course of a lesson?*

Vasso: Well. First of all, we always read texts in class. Every time I’ve asked {them to read a text at home, they haven’t done it.} There is no ‘read a text at home.’ There is no way they will do it. Very few of them will read it. And also I don’t know if there is a point in asking them to read an extract for homework. Because, as you know, all literature textbooks include only extracts. There is no way that we read a whole book. So this is one thing, that we read texts in class. And {I also read them} in a theatrical way, as much as I can... So if I can, I impersonate the characters, shouting and whispering and all these, depending on what a text says. They like this a lot. But this has the following disadvantage: that they look at you who acts like a clown and then, when you start the analysis, they don’t know what is where in their books, in which page, in which paragraph or anything. Anyway...

E: *Do you ever ask the students to read or is it always you who reads?*

Vasso: Students don’t want {to read.} Most students don’t want.

E: *Why?*

Vasso: Because they don’t read well – that’s what they say. ‘Because we can’t, because we’re shy’ etc. I always ask them to read the poems again. Always. For example, this year, at Gymnasium, I ask each of them to read a couple of lines, bits that have a complete meaning, and it goes on like this. So, a poem might be read three or four times by the whole class. But usually, they decline to read. Especially when we do prose, where texts are longer. They don’t know the text, they haven’t read it, and thus, they feel very insecure. On the other hand, there are some kids in every class, who... and I don’t like this practice... who read well and it is traditional to use them in school shows etc. Well, I don’t like using only some {students}. Which means that for me, either the whole class will read and get over this, or forget it, I’ll read it myself. I don’t know if I’m in the wrong at this. I haven’t reached a conclusion. But, {I think that} by asking the same people to read all the time, you create a gap between students. That’s how I feel about this.

E: *And after the reading?*

Vasso: After the reading, there is a battle. [Her tone as she was saying this was joking.]

E: *Which means?*

¹⁸⁶ See note no.2 for information on *frontistiria*.

¹⁸⁷ Kythnos and Samos are islands. Islands are not very densely populated and are rather deserted in winter. She worked there for 2 years. Galatas at Rafina is a village about an hour’s drive from Athens. She worked there for another 2 years. Attica is the county where Athens belongs. The areas she refers to, i.e. Cholargos and Chalandri, are upper-class neighbourhoods of Athens. She worked there for 3 years. Finally, Salamina is a small island that is close to Piraeus, the port of Athens.

Vasso: {They say} ‘What rubbish is this? This character died as well. What will happen, Ms? Won’t we ever read a text to laugh?’ Margarita calls it ‘the literature of mourning’ and she is right about it.¹⁸⁸ The textbooks are full of people who suffer and whose heart bleeds; poverty, decline and death are prevalent. Everything is black. For me the most important thing is that they are able to say ‘I like it or I don’t like it.’ Kids are very scared of saying ‘I don’t like this.’ They think that I want... {They think that} because a text is in their textbook, and it is a text that they’ve heard about, and they’ve heard the {author’s} name, you know, ‘Ritsos! Venezis! Kazantzakis!’ etc, {they think} ‘I should like this as well. So, what can I say to her now? That I don’t like it?’ And this is why every time I meet a new class, at the beginning and constantly thereafter, I say to them that literature is, to a great extent, a matter of taste. I like {a text} or I don’t like it. So, we should start from this. And from that point onwards, if they could say ‘I like it because of this, this and that. I don’t like it because of this, this and that.’ And many times you see that it is very useful {talking about likes and dislikes}. You see, for example, that kids who say ‘I don’t like this’ have grasped some things, which, if you read a critical account of the text, you will find them in the criticism as well. For example, {they might say} that, at this point, the text sags. Or, that this character could have behaved in a different way. Very important comments. I wouldn’t find them in the criticisms.

E: So, right after the reading, the first question is ‘Did you like it or not? What did you think of it?’

Vasso: Yes.

E: In general, what kind of reactions do you see there? Do they talk? Do they have an opinion of their own? The fact that you stress to them that literature is a matter of taste, does this have an effect on them?

Vasso: It does. Not easily, though. We need to get to know each other a bit more in order for them to start moving more freely about this, in order for them to really say their opinion. And kids can choose for themselves the texts that they like. {They can do it} like this, entirely intuitively, without knowing. Because I don’t think they know that they should like or not like something.¹⁸⁹ And they are not interested in becoming convinced {into reading or liking a book}. I might be persuaded to read a book by a certain author. Kids will not do that. They will reject it or they will accept it automatically.

E: Do you mean that they have a personal criterion?

Vasso: They have a criterion that has to do with their experiences, their personal problems, their own worries, criteria like these. I don’t know if these are close or distant from literature and from the art of speech, but that’s how kids choose {i.e. they choose based on their personal experiences}. This is what I’ve seen happening all these years that we’ve been doing literature.

E: And after this discussion?

Vasso: After this discussion, we start breaking the text into pieces. [As she said this, her tone was a bit sarcastic.] This is... I am still searching a way... I have tried various things. One of them has been to start from the climate, the time and the place, where we are, what kind of era it is... I do this. However, there is another issue that arises with regard to this. Most of the texts {included in the anthologies} are old. So, you go into the fields of history and you need to say a few things and to describe the conditions in order for them to grasp the climate a bit. And kids don’t know about history. So, we keep on going into circles. At this point I spend some time trying to explain to them the conditions of the era, a few things on the economy, the society, any weird things I might know, what was more or less going on in the intellectual world at those times etc. {I tell them} a few things so that they get into it. Because, otherwise, they treat it... Otherwise, it definitely doesn’t fit in with anything they know.

E: Can they still approach these texts, even though they don’t fit in with the things they know, with their experiences?

Vasso: They can, when they focus on specific ideas, which they will then expand philosophically, sociologically etc. I know that this means cutting up a text, I know it is fragmentary, but it is the only thing I’ve found that triggers a discussion in class. This means that every time I try to identify those ideas that might have an application, an extension in their own experiences and in their own time. So that they can make the comparison {between the ideas of the text and their own experiences.} This is part of it {i.e. of the discussion}. Another part is for them to express their opinion on an issue. And their opinion will have to do with the world of today and with their personal experiences. This means that I am interested in the texts... For example, what is there in their books? There is a piece from *Argo* in Year 1 of Lyceum, where the boy says ‘I want letters’ and he shouts for that.¹⁹⁰ This phrase ‘I want letters’ can be the start of a very good discussion. ‘Do you want letters or not? Would you do what the young boy in the story does?’ etc etc. {We

¹⁸⁸ She refers to a common friend, Margarita, who also talked to me about her views on the teaching of literature.

¹⁸⁹ This sentence is not clear in the original either. I guess she means that students are not informed and do not listen to others who might say to them that a book is or isn’t good.

¹⁹⁰ The phrase ‘I want letters’ means ‘I want education’. The extract she refers to is from the novel *Argo* by Giorgos Theotokas, written in 1933. In this extract, a thirteen-year old boy wants to carry on with his studies but his father wants him to help in the small family shop they have. The young boy tries to go against his father’s wishes and at some point he even disappears from home for three days.

might also discuss} why the young boy of those times was asking for more education with such passion, and on the other hand, {I might ask them} 'what do you do?'

E: Which means, though, that you have departed from the text...

Vasso: Which means that you have departed from the text itself, yes. I think there is always some sort of a play there, of the sort 'I go into the text for a while, I look at the text, I look at its era, I look at its character, I look at the reactions, the plot etc, and then, I go out again, I come to our era, I come back.' There is a play of this sort going on.

E: I see. And what other things are discussed? You've said that you discuss about the place and the time, making references to the conditions of that historical period, you talk about the ideas...

Vasso: Usually students ask what happens next, especially when they show some interest in a text. And this is a very big problem.

E: What do you mean?

Vasso: Many of my colleagues have not read the texts that we teach.¹⁹¹ I myself did not like Greek literature at all until the moment when I started teaching, especially this old Greek literature. I mean that I read what I read at school, and then, all my years at the University and after that, I would read exclusively foreign authors. But then, there was a need {to read the Greek authors I teach}. For example, you can't do a small extract from the *Noumero* by Venezis without having a picture of the whole book. {You need to know the whole book} so as to be able to answer the simple question 'what happens next?' and 'how does this whole thing finish?' Because we might say that students should read the books on their own etc, but they can't read thirty or forty books that we might do in class.¹⁹² {You also need to know the whole book} in order to have in your mind the atmosphere and the development of the characters, and to be able to choose another extract from the book and give it to them, if there is enough time or if the class is in the right mood.

E: And, what do the Greek teachers who haven't read the books do? From what you know at least, from discussions that you might have had with them?

Vasso: Well, I don't know. They have a notebook... Do you know how many of them I have seen, especially older teachers but also young ones, at our age... First of all, I have heard the incredible idea that 'this year I will take Greek literature at Year 1 of Lyceum, and thus, I will have everything ready for next year as well.' And there is a book with notes they might have made at some point in their life, which they might be using for over a decade. When I went to Samos, there was another Greek teacher working there. Well, it was only my second year at school and I was young. So, I went and asked her 'what will we do? Should we work together?' and so on. She took my textbook and noted down 'this {text}, this, this, and this' until the end of the year.¹⁹³ Anyway, we get to Seferis with my class of Year 1 of Lyceum, we do the poem 'On a foreign verse', we do the poem 'Eleni', we read 'Epi Aspalathon', and I say 'let's move on.' {And then, the students say} 'Are we not going to analyse the poem 'Epi Aspalathon'?' {I said} 'What more do you want us to say? We have discussed a few things, we have analysed the other poems, we have read three or more poems by Seferis, we've done everything there is in the book.' {And they say to me} 'And what will we write, Ms, in the end-of-year exams?' I was shocked. 'What do you mean? I didn't get it.' {And they say} 'But Ms, [...] always puts the poem 'Epi Aspalathon' in the end-of-year exams.' I was shocked. I was shocked. Can you believe it? She always puts 'Epi Aspalathon'.

E: And did the students know that?

Vasso: Yes. What else could she put? [As she was saying this, her tone was very ironic.] 'Epi Aspalathon' for Year 1 of Lyceum; in Year 2 of Lyceum we put 'Ithaca'; in Year 3 of Lyceum, we put another poem by Cavafy. We might also put a poem by Sikelianos in more advanced schools. And that's it. That's it with Greek literature.¹⁹⁴

E: Have you seen this attitude only at that particular school or have you seen it in all schools?

Vasso: In general, there is a tendency among Greek teachers to do the same texts over and over again, because we have the work ready. It is very easy to work with your last year's book. For example, this year, the deputy head, who is not very old... she must be forty-three or forty-four years only... for the last eight years she has been doing Ancient and Modern Greek in Year 3 of Lyceum. And she says to you 'I will take this. I don't want to do anything else. I don't know how to do anything else.' And the texts {she teaches} are very specific. She has made a selection. Undoubtedly, in every book there are texts that are more important, texts that are less important etc. However, for ten years she has been teaching the same texts in the same way. And you might ask 'does a class allow you to do the same texts in exactly the same way?'

¹⁹¹ She means that they might have not read the books from which the extracts are taken.

¹⁹² She means that in a year they might do extracts from thirty or forty books and students cannot be expected to read all of them at home.

¹⁹³ I.e. the other teacher noted down the texts she had chosen to teach, without any form of discussion. As it turned out she had been teaching the same texts for many years on end.

¹⁹⁴ She is criticising the fact that most teachers are stuck with certain texts from the textbooks and do not go further than that, as if Greek literature has nothing else apart from these texts.

Well, in some cases it does.¹⁹⁵ {But in some cases it doesn't.} For example, at the Technical Lyceum at Rafina, we had the classes of the electricians and the mechanics and we would teach them Solomos. At some point, as I entered the room, I found the whole class on their knees begging 'Please, Ms, no more Solomos. No more *Eleftherous Poliorkimenous*. Please. We will tell you everything. The spring, death, love, the symbol, women. We know them. We've learnt everything. We beg you. No more Solomos.'¹⁹⁶ ...

E: What other things do you discuss, analyse etc? We've said {up to now} time, place, ideas with an extension to our times...

Vasso: ...the characters, the persons. {We discuss} the characters, how they react, and if they had other options. And this is linked to the era and to the current situation. {We discuss} whether they could have acted in a different way.

E: So, do you ask them 'what else {could have happened}?' Or, 'give a different ending to the story'?

Vasso: This as well. 'Give a different ending.' The story 'The River' was a very characteristic example of this¹⁹⁷, where many students suggested a different ending for the story.

E: I see. And what does the analysis of characters entail? Do you ask them to find many nice adjectives that would describe the character?

Vasso: No. How can I explain this? You start from the text. {You look at} what the author has given us with regard to his character, how he has defined him. {You discuss} whether the author's way of constructing his hero is effective¹⁹⁸; whether he {i.e. the author} has made students understand... whether he has created a picture in their mind. A picture... starting from his outer appearance and getting to the way this person moves when he goes to meet someone else or when he engages in a dialogue etc. That's where we get into the technical elements. {We discuss the use of} description. Or, {we might discuss the use of} dialogue, in what ways an author conveys the tension or anything else, the climate of the dialogue... I think that students hate the technical features of a text.

E: Why?

Vasso: I don't know. In general, these features, i.e. description, narration etc, are not being taught systematically until they get to Year 1 of Lyceum, until they do the textbook for Year 1 of Lyceum. In that textbook there is a specific piece on description and narration.¹⁹⁹ Or, at least, there was such a piece until last year. However, at Gymnasium, you ask them to narrate something... a day, an event etc... or to describe something, without having taught these things to them. They haven't done any exercises on these; they haven't played around with description... First of all, they haven't understood the {use of} adjectives. {They haven't understood} that the description of a thing should not always finish with 'this is a fucking good thing'. I say this to them in class and they laugh. 'I went and I bought some fucking good shoes.' {So, I tell them} 'Have we all understood what the phrase 'fucking good' means? Yes? That's good, we have all got it. Let's move on from that. What adjectives can we use instead of this phrase so as to express the same thing?' {I say it like this} so that they understand what an adjective is. And then, in a text. They say that there are loads of images in a text. Where are these images? What do you do with these images? In texts like these {i.e. with strong imagery}, I like telling them 'Think that you are a director and you want to make a short film out of this. How will you make the setting? What will you need for it?' They like this activity.

E: And what? Do they draw or...?

Vasso: Yes. I have asked them to do things like that. To draw, to make collages, or anything they want, in connection with the text. I have asked such things from them, many times. At Lyceum they react to this. But still, they work. Others more and others less, but they work. They do something. At Gymnasium, it is more OK; they accept such plays more easily.

E: So, basically you look at the characters in connection with how the author builds them?

Vasso: How he builds them, yes. And after that, if it is possible, {I ask} them to comment on their stance, on their utterances, on how they react, how they fit in the story that the author has woven. And I also {ask them} to make suggestions, such as what they would do if they were in their position and things like that.

¹⁹⁵ She means that in some schools the students' background is such that you can teach the same texts year in and year out.

¹⁹⁶ The spring, death, love and women are symbols from Dionysios Solomos' long poem *Eleytheroi Poliorkimenoi*. In Technical schools, students specialise in a vocation and are not very academically oriented. However, they need to follow exactly the same syllabus and do the same core subjects as the students of the General Lyceums.

¹⁹⁷ 'The River' is a short story by Antonis Samarakis, written in 1954. In this story, two soldiers from rival camps disobey the orders and swim in a river. When they see each other, they both run for their guns. The one who gets there first realises that deep down all humans are the same and, instead of shooting his enemy, puts his gun down. However, the other soldier shoots and kills him.

¹⁹⁸ In Greece, people often talk about the 'hero' of a story meaning the 'character'.

¹⁹⁹ This piece is not in the textbook for Modern Greek literature, but in the textbook called *Essay writing & Expression*, which has material on language, writing in different registers etc. It is a series of textbooks, one for each year, and they are used as an aid to essay writing.

I'll say this again to you. I don't know if I do well or not, but I constantly try to find elements that are relevant to their experiences, so that they get to understand that texts come out of human lives. We don't talk about people who are 'from another planet', in inverted commas, who have lived different things. {In texts} there is a family as well, there are some fixed elements in time and in social conditions etc. There is a family, there is an educational system, there are feelings... And these things carry on through time and get to these kids that you have in front of you.

E: So, you believe it is important that they find some common elements between their experiences and the experiences presented {in texts}?

Vasso: Yes. Yes. Especially with old texts, I can't think of anything else {to do with them}. When you stay in the past, when you stay in the era of a text, then, kids get bored and get in a block. Because I think that for us a book... When I said to you that I stayed up all night reading the novel *A child counts the stars*, I mean that I had made up a whole story in my mind. My room had gone, everything had gone, and I had made up a whole setting starting from the book. However, these children are not like this. You might talk to them about a book that has been made into a film. For example, I talked to them about the *Electric Sheep* and told them {what the story was about and that it was made into a film}. Well, at that moment they might make a note so as to go and get *Blade Runner* on a video to watch.²⁰⁰ They won't sit down to read the book.

E: I see. Do you mean that the semiotics of our times is different from those of the past?

Vasso: A lot. A lot. Television came into my home when I was in Year 4 or Year 5 of primary school. These kids grow up in a house where there has always been a TV. They are not interested in making up images as they read. They have many ready-made images. And so long as Modern Greek literature is a subject that is being examined I think that everything will be lost.

E: Why?

Vasso: You can't tell them 'Listen, this is something that you might like, something that you might really like' etc.²⁰¹ I also have to face the following issue. They tell me 'OK, Ms. All these were really nice and we really liked the discussion we had, starting from that text. {But} what will we write {in the exam}?' It is a subject that is being examined.

E: Do you mean that the examinations affect the way in which you teach?

Vasso: Among all these things {that we do}, through all these general discussions and the freedom they feel to talk on texts, {at the end} there must be five fixed elements that will get across to the whole class, and which the whole class will be able to reproduce in writing. Often, especially now that I am at Gymnasium, I write words on the board. Characters, blah, blah, blah, a few figures, some basic ideas that we link with small arrows. This is something that the whole class can keep, apart from what each of us liked in the text, or if we agree or disagree with what has happened etc. Set comments, so that the class can go to the exams. {Things like} the technical features that are fixed and which they can keep them for a while... You need to come out with something that will be common. It can't be done in any other way.

E: Let me ask you something. You said that the texts are old. It is a fact that you have the specific anthologies, on which you need to work. I would like to put two questions to you on that. First, how do you see these specific anthologies as well as the fact that there are anthologies? And the other question is about how you choose which texts you will teach from the texts that are there? Because the anthologies are big and you need to choose. According to what criteria do you make this selection?

Vasso: The last two to three years I choose... First of all, I divide the book into thematic units. Some books are already divided, but in some others you need to do that yourself. After that, I choose a central text, on which we will talk more, we will get into ideas, in all those things that I mentioned earlier. But, I also read to them all the other texts that are relevant to this. So, in a way, by the end of the year we have read the biggest part of the book. Let me give you an example. On the occasion of the 28th October 1940,²⁰² their book has eight texts, prose and poetry. We read all of them. And what I asked them to do was, first of all, to find the central concepts, words that were found in all these texts. That was one thing. {To look at} ideas that are common in all texts, more or less. And then, we started looking at the side issues. For example, there was a father in three of these texts. What does this father do in text a, in text b, and in text c? What is the climate in each text depending on what he does and on what he is? And so on. I try so that they listen to as many texts as possible, to as many words as possible. I started this when I was at the Technical Lyceum at Rafina, which was a boys' only school and where students had many problems {in their lives}. After that month with Solomos, I said 'That's enough. We go on. We move on.' In that school, there were very basic problems. For example, they needed to learn how to write a summary. 'You have a text that is five pages long. Could you, please, tell me what happens in ten lines? You can't start talking for a whole hour about

²⁰⁰ She refers to Philip Dick's dystopia *Two androids dream of electric sheep*, which was made into a film. The scenario of the film *Blade Runner* was by William Burrows.

²⁰¹ I guess she means that students feel they do literature because they have to and not because it might be interesting.

²⁰² See note no.24 for information on the 28th October 1940.

what is happening. I want ten things. Ten things that will make sense.' So, I started from that school and also from the need that they listen to as many words as possible, to as many texts as possible.

E: Why do you think this is important? Or else, what do you want to achieve with this?

Vasso: The different perspectives. I aim at breaking the fetish of the single author, who is very good and whom we all choose to teach, while all other authors are being forgotten. Tens of people have dealt with the same theme. So, listen to what each of them has to say on this. Further than that, {I aim at} their hearing words, as I've already told you. I think that children lack words, first of all. And in this way, it is also made easier for them to put their own little stone. So that they can relax and say that I {can write something of my own as well}. For example, in this work we did on 1940, once all this work was completed, I gave them ten words on the board, which were picked up from the texts, and then, each of them wrote his own story {using these words}.

E: When you say words, what kind of words do you mean?

Vasso: Words. For example, there were 'Gestapo men', 'winter', 'greens', because in one of the stories someone was picking up greens etc, 'sun', 'lad', etc.

E: These words were from the texts...

Vasso: Yes. They were from the texts.

E: ...of the thematic unit and you had picked them up?

Vasso: Yes. {They were words from the texts} of the thematic unit, which I had picked up and which I gave to them so as to play with these words and make a story. So as for them to use all these words in their own text and to make a story of their own. And of course, they were full of enthusiasm when they listened to the stories, because they read them out, and each of them had written his own {different piece}.

E: So, afterwards, you read these stories in class?

Vasso: Yes. We read them in class.

E: And did you discuss them or not? Or, did you just read them out?

Vasso: No. In a way, this is a sort of compensation that they get for all the texts they've read, and {they can say} 'Look! This is my own creation.'

E: Do you do this every time with all the thematic units or sometimes?

Vasso: No. Sometimes. Sometimes, when the time allows for it. At other times, we might do the central text, and then, from the others, from the relevant, let us say, texts that we read, I might ask them to make a summary or a comparison. Usually, though, it is a summary. Because I'm telling you that there is a problem with that as well.²⁰³

E: Is it a summary of the text or of the whole unit?

Vasso: Of each text of the unit.

[There was another interruption because the phone rang.]

E: So, what have you been saying?

Vasso: {Let me make} a parenthesis. Once I read an article by some French teacher, who was saying that 'it is incredible how, when we are children, every evening we ask people around us to read us a story or a fairy tale. And then, ten years later, we see a book and we burn it. We don't even want to see it in our eyes.' And this is through the mechanism of school and of examinations. How does it happen and children end up hating the subject?

E: Do you think it is the school to blame for this, up to a degree?

Vasso: Yes. I believe it is the school to blame.

E: Why? What is this that is happening in class, in school, that has these negative results?

Vasso: It is still one more school subject. {It is just} one more subject, with all the rules and the negatives that a subject can have. 'You. Sit down at your desk. I make the questions. You answer.' If I am a bit more lax, I might let you talk a bit more, we will write a few things, and that's it.

E: So, do you think that by taking off the exams and by changing the approach and the way of analysis, you could have different results?

Vasso: I think that yes. I can't give you specific things, because this hasn't ever happened. I could, though, tell you about an experiment that we did at Rafina at some point. You know, sometimes it happens that you have classes that respond in a different way {to the subject}. That year, the whole class read four books that were not in the syllabus.

E: And what did you do with those books afterwards?

Vasso: Well. {First of all,} I bought the books for them, they all had the same ones, and then, they had a month's time to read their book. I had given them a list of questions, which ranged from making a summary to {looking at} the characters, the stylistic {features}, anything that one could do with a text. And in a double lesson at school... From the first time that this happened, they themselves asked that we leave the class and that we go to the amphitheatre – the school had an amphitheatre. {And I said to them} that, of

²⁰³ She means that they find it difficult making summaries as well.

course, we could go to the amphitheatre. At the amphitheatre, there was carpet on the floor, {and so they asked} 'can we sit down?' 'OK. Sit down.' And they sat down, all twenty of them, and they discussed about the book. Some students started presenting the story. And after that, a dialogue started between them on the book, through the book, what they liked, what they didn't like... I had asked from each of them to pick up a small extract that had moved them more and to read this out to the rest of the group. The whole thing was a very good experience, a very good experience.

E: Was this discussion structured or was it free? Was it based on the questions that you had given them?

Vasso: There was a skeleton. The discussion followed this skeleton. Whenever they wanted to go further than that, they did it. But then again, you know how kids are, when you leave them free, it is very easy for them to wander off. One thing brings the other. It is nice to follow their association and where it might take them. But also, when you have something specific before you, it is good for them to remember that they need to come back to the specific. There was a skeleton. That was a good year. And there was another good year at Exarheia, where again the class happened to be good.²⁰⁴ I will remember that class as a... you don't feel tired of going to lessons {with a class like that}.

E: Let me see. You say that it was a good year. The fact that something like that happened, that it succeeded and you had good results, does this depend on the students, on your own mood, on the school and whether you have the opportunity {to do what you want}? What does this {success} depend on? Why don't you do it this year as well?

Vasso: Well. This year there is no time at all {for something like that}. Just take into account that this year, until the middle of November the programme would change every day.²⁰⁵ There are some matters of procedure that overpower you. And when you are at Lyceum this is more so, because there is a very specific curriculum as well. Especially now, with the new system, you know what this means. There are even set texts {that you must teach at Lyceum}. As a result, your freedom of choice disappears as well. So, there are matters of procedure like this {that determine the outcome of your work}. There is also the composition of a class. For example, no matter how many problems the school in Exarheia had, its students were children living in the city centre. These kids had read and, whenever they would leave school, they would pass by the shop windows of five bookshops.²⁰⁶ They would stop for a while at a shop window; something would catch their attention. They were kids who would go to the cinema, who would listen to music. They had nothing to do with the students of the Technical school at Rafina, about whom I was talking earlier on, who didn't know how to write and would say 'I'm going to become an electrician. So, why do I need to know this?' On my side, the will is always there for some kind of... the word 'experimentation' might sound bad, so I should say... for some kind of freshness. {And I do that} for myself as well. Because I get bored as well. For example, in the last ten years I have done some texts for four and five times, because I have the same years, it happens that I have the same years. Well, I can't do the same thing over and over again, in exactly the same way. OK, we said that there are some fixed features. That's fine. But at the same time, there needs to be some kind of play as well. For example, in Year 3 of Lyceum at Galatas where the school had a video, they saw the *Murderess*.²⁰⁷ The *Murderess* has been made into a television film, I don't remember by whom or when. It is nothing special as a film, but they liked it a lot because they could see the whole story in it.²⁰⁸ And they also saw *The price of love*. That as well was a good thing for students.

E: So, your criterion is for them to listen to as many texts as possible, apart from the central text of each thematic unit. OK. There is another question on the aims that you have for the subject.

Vasso: To survive. [laughing]

E: ... in the sense... What do you want students to get from this subject? Taking into account that you've already said some things. For example, you said that you want them to bring elements from their experiences into class and into their reading.

Vasso: Yes.

²⁰⁴ Exarheia is a neighbourhood at the heart of Athens. In older times all Universities were in the centre of Athens and Exarheia was in the middle of all Universities. As a result, many students would gather there, especially in the 70s and 80s, and the place had a very bohemian atmosphere. In the late 80s Universities were transferred to the outskirts of Athens and the place lost its old character.

²⁰⁵ Teachers are appointed to schools by the MNER. Due to budgetary problems, the permanent staff is never enough to cover all needs in schools. Thus, every year the MNER employs temporary teachers that work in schools for one school year only. The MNER prefers this solution instead of appointing more permanent teachers because in this way it saves money. The problem is that these temporary teachers are often sent to schools one or two months after the start of the year, the result being that most schools have many vacancies in the first months and cannot work properly.

²⁰⁶ Exarheia is also the area where all Greek publishing houses have their central outlets. In every corner there is a bookshop.

²⁰⁷ She refers to Alexandros Papadiamantis' novel *The Murderess*. No matter how strange this might sound, it is true that most Greek schools do not have facilities like TV, video, tape recorders etc.

²⁰⁸ In their textbooks they could read only a small extract from the novel.

E: I guess this is one of your aims. Right?

Vasso: Yes.

E: Another aim that you have is for them to understand that a text comes out of the experiences of another person.

Vasso: It is a human creation, a human situation.

E: OK. What other aims do you have?

Vasso: What I told you about words: that they get to love words. That they love words as the most rich way that a person has to express himself. The specific person {i.e. author} who has written something, and by extension, the specific student who is asked to express himself or herself on an idea orally or in writing. Expression is a major issue. Their writings are no more than... what can I say... no more than ten lines, and that might even be too much. This is at least how the situation is in the beginning because I shout a lot for this {i.e. so that they write more}. I remember a young boy at Kythnos²⁰⁹... to that class I would say 'this is not what a thirteen to fourteen-year-old person can write. I'm sure you can think of more things to write.' So, what this boy did was that, as he was writing, he started spacing out the words on each line and there were twenty lines in columns, with something like three words in each line. {And then, he said} 'Here you are, Ms. I wrote loads.' And it was all in columns. They have a very big weakness at expressing themselves.

E: Any other aim?

Vasso: To survive. I told you so, but you didn't believe me.

E: What do you mean when you say that you want to survive?

Vasso: To survive having in my hands texts which do not excite any interest at all. This is one thing that annoys children a lot. There was a very strong example of this at the school in Exarheia. In their textbook there was only an extract from the story 'Squall' by Karagatsis but I read the whole story to them. And when they saw all the things that are happening there, the terrible rapes with the big landowner and all these, they were inflamed.²¹⁰ {They said} 'Why? Are we not capable of reading a scene like this, of being moved and of commenting on it?' And they remarked that in their textbook there is not a single erotic scene, not even a hint, let's say. At an age... I have raised this problem often and we also said it at some seminars they did for us, one of those two-hour seminars. And there was a member of the editorial group present as well, someone called Kapsalis. {This is} at an age when they are burning with various unfulfilled yearnings and desires; and when love is a central play in their lives, as an idea at least.

E: As if there is some kind of censorship?

Vasso: Yes. I think there is. It isn't possible that they choose the bit from the story 'Squall' where the big landowner steps on the scales so as to get more wheat,²¹¹ and later on in the story {in the part that is left out}, to have all hell breaking loose. {And it is in this part that is left out} that the tenant farmers' oppression, hate and all these are presented more vividly.

E: What criteria do you think they have used for the selection?

Vasso: The homeland, religion, family, suffering Greece, the fight for its survival, we receive blows but still we get up and carry on. Things like that.

E: I see. And the other thing you were saying about the 'black' texts.

Vasso: Black! Oh, my God! Black. I don't know if other teachers have said this to you in their criticism of the school textbooks {in the interviews}, but they are very melancholy.

E: Whereas Greek literature is not necessarily like this...?

Vasso: I don't think it is {entirely like this}. I don't think it is. And it has got nothing to say to them.²¹² I'm telling you, the worker who is suffering is a historical feature for these kids. It is not part of their experience. I think it is not part of anybody's experience anymore. Conditions have changed. The texts are on another plane And let us not talk about Digenis 'who is dying and the earth is scared of him', which they do for something like fifteen times throughout school.²¹³ I think they do it at Primary school, at Gymnasium, and at Lyceum. They definitely have to do it. [As she was saying this, her tone was ironic.]

E: Have you got any other aim? Something that comes to your mind as we're talking... because there might something that you can't think of now.

²⁰⁹ Kythnos is one of the islands she has been to.

²¹⁰ I.e. when they heard the parts of the story that had been left out of their textbooks.

²¹¹ I.e. when the landowner cheats them.

²¹² I.e. these texts have got nothing to say to students.

²¹³ Digenis is a legendary hero of many akritika folk songs. The akritika songs talked about the akrites, who were the Greek fighters protecting the Eastern borders of the Byzantine Empire from various attackers. At all levels of education students are taught the folk songs as part of Greek literature. The extract in inverted commas is a line from a song that talks about Digenis' fight with Death, his victory and then his death, after Death cheated him. In fact the akritika songs, like all folk songs, are really interesting. I think Vasso's objection is not so much the fact that they do these songs as the fact that they do these so many times at the expense of others.

Vasso: In general, no. I don't think so. Every time, for every text there is a secondary aim, depending on what it gives you. Generally speaking, {my main aim} is expression, the opportunity to express themselves through language, as well as the approach to feelings and ideas through time. I think that texts in school, at least in the way I do them, function as an opportunity for students to free their mind a bit.

E: *To free it?*

Vasso: To free it. To free their mind by making it think about a {different} perspective, about the perspective given by a text, but to think about it in their own way, making their own extensions. Starting from the general principle that the author is dead. This is very important for me. And so that they overcome the shock about... I think that children are shocked when they are faced with Modern Greek literature. Because you present it to them as something that is very important and great. So, this {treatment} makes a child look and feel small. For example, when you say to him about Kazantzakis 'look what words Kazantzakis has used and in what a successful way!' then that's it; the child has become that small {in front of such a great writer}. {And he might think} 'What word can I write now?'

E: *I see. From what you've said I understood that you put them some homework. What kind of work is that? Apart from what you've already said about them having to make summaries, to write their own story, or what you said about painting, collage etc. Are there any other types of work that you ask them to do?*

Vasso: Well, the classic things as well, some characterisations... There is another issue here with regard to the questions set for homework. I don't usually ask them to do the questions of the school textbook. Or, if I set these questions, then I change them so as to avoid the {use of} 'answer books'.²¹⁴ This is a very serious problem. There is not a single student without an answer book. So, I try to set questions different from those of the school textbooks, so that they won't be able to go straight to the answer book to copy the answer, changing it a bit, and then to bring it to school. Regarding poems, I usually read the new poem at the end of a lesson. So, the homework they always have for a poem is to choose a couple of verses, with a complete meaning, a couple of verses that they like and to write something on these.

E: *To write what?*

Vasso: Anything. Anything. Each of them chooses a piece that he likes. For a poem this is easy, {because} it is not about the whole poem, it is only about a few verses. Well. And each of them writes something on it. And then, in the next lesson the analysis is based on their works. So, we start the poem from the beginning and I ask them who has worked on the first lines. And from what they say I pick up the points, I single out some of them, I write some on the board, I sum up etc. And so, the analysis comes out of that. Most of the times there is no need for me to add anything. Many things come out of there {i.e. out of the students' work}. In the end, I make the synthesis myself. Based on the words, which are written on the board and which the students can see all the time, I bring out the whole picture. This is a set way of working. What else? {I put them} various {other questions as well}. {Having to do} with the ideas most of all: with the conditions, the family, school. There was a unit with texts on schooling. {I asked them} to compare the education system of those times with that of our times. Students, teachers, things like that. Anything. I think that anything can be turned into a question set for homework.

E: *Does it ever happen for students to give different interpretations to a text?*

Vasso: What do you mean when you say different?

E: *For two or three different interpretations of a single text, of a single verse, of a single extract to come out?*

Vasso: Yes. Yes.

E: *And what do you do then?*

Vasso: What do I do then? Well, I say 'this is right as well',²¹⁵ according to the known joke. {I say} 'This is right as well. And this is right as well. But, could it be that this is more relevant...?' Because very often their interpretations are very interesting but they depart from the specific. They depart from the climate of the text. So, you might say – of course, all these depend on the specific case, you can't make a general rule out of it – but you might say that 'what you write is nice and interesting, if I isolate it. If one has only these two sentences, this paragraph, these verses, and writes one's thoughts on these freely, then, yes, your work is terrific and well done! But, if you look at them in conjunction with the text, then you see that you have wandered off. For example, the character is melancholy and in your work, in your interpretation, you talk of him being the opposite. What you write cannot be supported psychologically in the text.' This is something that comes into my mind now. In general, for me, different interpretations are acceptable, even in the exams. Even in the exams. I mean that I mark them positively. {I mark them positively} when they have followed a framework that is close to the text, when they have understood {the text} but have made an

²¹⁴ All students in all schools, both in the state and private sector, have to follow the same curriculum and to use the same textbooks, which are supplied free of charge to all students by the Ministry of Education. As these textbooks are in use for a big number of years, many publishing houses bring out answer books where one can find the answers to all questions of school textbooks.

²¹⁵ She said this laughing. In fact, this is a phrase from a widely known Greek joke. In Greece jokes are very common and people tend to use catch phrases from them.

extension of their own – of course, so long as they write things that are a bit relevant to the text. This is something positive for me. It is a good thing if different interpretations are expressed. In any case, they are different persons...

E: One more question and we finish. Students come from different environments, different social environments, cultural environments etc. All these are different. And this is one of the reasons I asked you in the beginning about the areas in which you have worked. From your experience, have you noticed any differences between students as far as their approach to texts is concerned?

Vasso: Very big ones. Very big.

E: And how do you see these differences?

Vasso: Children who have some sort of contact with books are those children who have educated parents, who have more experiences of civilization, and who are, we could say, more cerebral. They know things and this knowledge comes into the text, into their contact with the text. Children who come from lower strata or who have not read a lot have a more spontaneous reaction. Their reaction is more clear – no, I wouldn't say clear – it is more pure... you know, their attitude might be more primitive but it is clear. You know that it has not been mediated by the knowledge of the sort 'yes, this is a good book and we've heard about it and we admire it through time'. Well, of course, as far as the islands are concerned, especially at Kythnos, or the Technical Lyceums, where we talk about the workers... {in those schools} the students themselves have accepted that 'OK, there is no need for me to know very many things. I won't need them. I will do something practical.' They have isolated literature from language. In those schools I was always trying to explain this thing {to them}: Do you talk? Do you write? Yes. You do talk and you do write. You {sometimes} need to write a letter to a friend of yours. You talk, you talk all the time. Well, this person in this book {i.e. the author} has used exactly the same means. He can't use any other. So, {in those schools} all the literary searches, the theories and the philosophies and... well, there is no need to talk about literary movements etc etc... all the introductions had to be skipped through very very quickly looking only at very basic things... so, things are very limited. When you have to deal with such a big problem in language use, both in speaking and in writing, you can't do much. And I've told you already that it was not by chance that the class at Exarheia was working so well. Their parents were mainly teachers, lawyers, doctors.

E: Have you noticed any differences between boys and girls?

Vasso: Well, the little girls, the little girls. [As she was saying this, her tone was half-joking, half-ironic.]... Well, literature is something made for those people who walk ten inches above the ground, and who are lost in I don't know what kind of skies... and girls have got such a nature, sensitive etc. So yes. Girls will be more interested in literature and they will talk more. Literature is for sensitive souls. Only girls can do it. Little boys are more... they are more of 'men'. {They say} 'we can't spend time now with all these feelings and these dead-ends etc', and all these things that are in their texts. 'We are dynamic types. Dat, dat, and that's finished. What nonsense is this character doing now?'

E: I see. OK. These were more or less the things I wanted to ask you. Is there anything else that we haven't covered, which is worrying you with regard to the subject of literature at school?

Vasso: Very limited time. {We have only} two teaching periods per week {for literature}. And then, two more for the teaching of language. Nothing. You run after time. You run after time. You don't have time to do almost anything. There is a curriculum that says you must do at least twenty-five texts.

E: And how do you see that?

Vasso: Impossible. At the end of the year, when you give the texts that are for examination, they are twenty texts maximum.²¹⁶ And this will be in a year when there won't be any problems with the flow of the programme. So, all these things... the further discussions and the links etc need to be done in a hurry. Time is an extremely serious suspending factor in our reading of texts.

E: Your whole practice, how has it been formed? Is this the result of your personal search and experimentation or... ?

Vasso: Of discussions as well. There are two or three people {with whom I discuss}. Margarita is one of them.²¹⁷ And then, there's another friend, who has now gone to Syros²¹⁸ and I miss her a lot for this, because we would talk for hours. You know, {we would talk about things like} 'I'm preparing an exercise or I'm doing this in class. How would you do that? What response did your students have to this?' Things like that. Apart from that, I have also read, I have thought, I pay attention to a class and their mood etc. I think that you need to have your mind on that constantly.

E: Have you been to any seminars etc organised by the MNER... ?

Vasso: Very few things. Very few. A seminar for Modern Greek literature that I attended was ridiculous and an absolute end. The woman doing the seminar looked at seven texts in two hours. And she said various incredible things like... For example, in the poem 'The crazy pomegranate' by Elytis where it says that 'she unties day's silken clothes in haste', {she said} that we can talk to the students about the series *The lethal*

²¹⁶ I.e. you can cover twenty texts maximum in a year.

²¹⁷ She refers to Margarita, one of the interviewees.

²¹⁸ Syros is an island.

silk, which is being played on television, so as to bring it close to their experiences. And there were thirty of us there ready to die.

E: What is the Lethal Silk?

Vasso: The *Lethal Silk* is a television series that is half-porn, half-detective. The trailer has some silken socks, which are fluttering in the air and things like that. My friend [...] told me that the same woman told them at a seminar in Syros that ‘Cavafy talks about Meleager and Krinagoras in the same way as we would say unripe boys.’ Oh God! So, we have heard some incredible things in those seminars. But we have heard some interesting things as well.

E: Regarding the methodology or... ?

Vasso: Yes. With regard to the methodology. Of course, they have talked to us about all the different ways of approaching a text, a psychoanalytical, a sociological, a semiotic, anything you can think of ending in –ical.²¹⁹ And we have said to them ‘all these things are very very nice. Just give us ten hours per week for literature and we will gladly do all these.’ In general, the time spent on seminars is minimal. They call you for three afternoons, and you do ancient Greek in the first, Modern Greek in the second, and history in the last one.

E: Is this every time?

Vasso: No. It’s not every year and it’s not for all teachers. For example, now the teachers of Gymnasium...

E: How many times have you been?

Vasso: I went to two seminars last year that were more of a briefing for the new type of Lyceum and the new system etc.²²⁰ And, I’ve been to a systematic seminar on Modern Greek literature once. Most of these {seminars} are by lot. There are no more seminars in cycles, you know, something like two times a week for a term. So, you see how things go. Unfortunately, there are very few things going on in terms of seminars. And there is a need {for seminars}. I’ve seen that in my discussions with [...]. {I saw} how much I was helped, and she did as well, by talking about our teaching.

E: OK. That’s it. Thank you.

Vasso: OK.

²¹⁹ Nouns ending in –ism in Greek form their adjective with –ικός (-ic / -ical) at the end. So, she means ‘anything related to an –ism’.

²²⁰ She refers to the educational reform and the new system that was introduced in September 1998.

