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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

**Faculty of Humanities
(Centre for Applied Language Studies and Services in Africa)**

**Hypertext and the Act of Reading and Learning:
A Study of The Use of Hypertext on The Web in The Secondary School
English Literature Classroom.**

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy

BY

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work or works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Louise Staak

Date

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Abstract

Hypertext as a teaching medium is still in its developing phase. Conventional methods of teaching seem to dictate the meaning of the text to the student or reader, although recently the importance of the active reader in negotiating the meaning of text has been stressed. This qualitative study evaluates claims that hypertext allows a student of English Literature to engage in more independent reading and interpretation. I investigate the current use of hypertext in the English literature classroom at Diocesan College as presented on personal laptop computers, via the school's intranet. Data was collected through classroom observations, open ended questionnaires, and interviews with both students and teachers. The sample group for the questionnaire consisted of two laptop classes of Grade 11 boys. Six of these boys were selected for interviews based on their response to the questionnaire. An analysis of the content of web pages was also vital in examining the effectiveness of this teaching methodology.

The study finds that while hypertext has the potential to deliver poetry in an innovative way, through the web, current content and design of web pages is at fault. The result is that the web as a teaching tool is not being maximised to its full potential. The way the web is used is paramount to its success. This study also finds that the presentation of poetry as hypertext is better suited to some students while others struggle to adapt to reading poetry off a computer screen. This study will enable those in the language-teaching field the opportunity of being able to look at possible strategies to make teaching through hypertext more effective and productive for the learner.

Introduction

1.Rationale:

1.1 Motivation

The number of studies on the use of hypertext in the English Literature classroom is minimal—especially studies which focus on how hypertext affects the reading of English Literature. Studies that have dealt with the reading of hypertext, have tended to focus on the cognitive psychological aspects of reading (Foltz 1996). My investigation is into the aesthetic response of the reader whilst reading English literature as hypertext, based on the reader response theories of Louise Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser.

1.2 Objectives

Only recently has the importance of the reader, in print bound text, been stressed. The reliance upon the 'critic's' interpretations of literature to instruct the reader on how to read literature is no longer viable. The point of art is that the beholder is the one who must make sense of art from the beholder's point of view. In this instance the art is the literary text and the beholder is the reader. Conventional methods of teaching still seem to dictate the meaning of the text to the reader or student. One of the objectives of this qualitative study is to determine the extent to which the reader/student is able to read English literature in a fairly independent and personal manner through the medium of hypertext, in the Diocesan College (DC) context. This study seeks to discover how issues surrounding the use of computers and hypertext in the classroom hinders or enhances the way readers respond to poetry. The presentation of poetry as hypertext is also an important factor to consider. Another aim of this

study is then to assess the content of web pages used in order to establish the teaching philosophy inherent in them.

1.3 Significance

The contribution of this study is that it looks at the current use of hypertext in the English literature classroom. It highlights its strengths and weaknesses. The study also makes recommendations as to how literature as hypertext can best be presented in the classroom to promote a reader centred approach to literature. It enables those in the language-teaching field the opportunity of being able to look at possible strategies to make teaching through hypertext more effective and more productive for the learner.

2. Conceptual or Theoretical Framework:

2.1 Key Concepts

- **Aesthetic reading:** the reading of a text which draws on one's affective responses to the text (Rosenblatt, nd, 1066).
- **Conventional teaching:** teaching methods that do not involve the use of the computer.
- **Efferent reading:** the reading of a text which focuses more upon the factual knowledge one can glean from the text (Rosenblatt, nd, 1066).
- **Home page:** a hypertext document on the World Wide Web. It is usually the first page, introductory or focus page displayed on the site (Oxford 1998).

- **Hyperlinks:** links within hypertext, which enable the reader to enter a 'semic' web of related texts (Burbules 1998:105) by merely 'clicking' on the highlighted word or phrase.
- **Hypermedia:** The multimedia capabilities of hypertext.
- **Hypertext:** electronic text that is displayed on the computer screen and through which the reader is able to follow optional paths through associative links displayed in the text. In this study I use the term 'web' and 'hypertext' interchangeably.
- **Internet:** an international computer network linking computers from different organisations and institutions (Oxford 1998).
- **Intranet:** an internal, independent computer network or internet within an institution, used generally on site by members of the relevant institution.
- **Text:** a body of words usually described as literature.
- **Web Page:** a hypertext document, displayed on the World Wide Web, that becomes represented as a 'page' on the computer screen and can be printed out as such.
- **World Wide Web (web):** a set of standards for the representation and distribution of hypertext documents (Oxford 1998).

3. Research Design

3.1. Delimitation:

The data for this study has been collected from the English Department of Diocesan College (Secondary School). Diocesan College, Cape Town, has –within the past two years—adopted a teaching methodology through which the boys are taught using personal laptop computers. In certain classes the lessons are presented to the boys on their own personal laptop computers through an intranet link. The boys are thus able to log on to a relevant web site designed by the teacher. The school refers to this means of curriculum delivery as ‘the laptop project’. The project is in its foundation phase, and has called for an innovative approach to teaching on the part of the teachers. For the purposes of this study I have decided to focus on two Grade 11 laptop classes as these students have been involved with the laptop project from its beginnings. I have also chosen to look at only poetry on the intranet based on the fact that poems are generally presented in their entirety. Poetry also requires an aesthetic response to it in order to be fully appreciated and since this study looks at reader response theories I felt that poetry would be preferable to other forms of literature.

3.2. Methodology:

I administered a questionnaire to the two laptop classes of Grade 11 boys. The questionnaire comprised four open-ended questions investigating attitudes toward poetry in general and experiences of poetry on the web. After analysing these questionnaires I decided to interview six of the boys, based on their response to the questionnaire, in order to get more insight into the boys’ experiences of poetry in hypertext format. To make the referencing of the questionnaires simple I coded the questionnaires: the letters A or B represent the

two different laptop classes; each boy's questionnaire is also numbered; the letter 'T' stands for 'interview' and 'Q' stands for 'questionnaire'.

I interviewed teachers both informally and formally. Classroom observations were also essential in being able to give a broader picture of the teaching methodology used in an English Literature laptop lesson. I also examined the content of certain web pages used on the Diocesan College Intranet in order to provide a critique of the teaching methodology used.

University of Cape Town

Chapter One

Theories and Trends in Hypertext

The aim of this chapter is to explore the various issues surrounding the use of literary text as hypertext. To this end I have examined theories and arguments of hypertext. As this study is concerned with how students read hypertext in the literature classroom, I have sought to include a basic theory of the reading of printed text. This theory includes the theories of Wolfgang Iser and Louise Rosenblatt whose theories of reading place greater emphasis on the reader's involvement in the act of reading. In trying to isolate studies which look at how the reader reads literature in hypertext format, I have found very few relevant studies and so will, during the course of this dissertation, examine for myself how exactly students, or readers, read literature as hypertext.

1.1 Hypertext and the Hyperreader

We live in an era where a book is no longer just a book. It is not a given that a text is merely 'linear, bounded and fixed' (Delany and Landow 1994:3). The advent of hypertext has changed the way text is read and written. Hypertext is essentially an 'information medium' only existing 'online in a computer' (Snyder 1998:126). Hypertext is a structure made up of blocks of text interwoven by means of electronic links (Snyder 1998:126). Characteristically hypertext can be read in a 'non-linear and non-sequential manner' as the reader connects various pieces of text by choosing certain links – hyperlinks (Snyder 1998:126).

There are those who feel that hypertext provides new and exciting opportunities for literacy, literature and education. Snyder refers to them as the 'techno-evangelists' (1998). Indeed hypertext is exciting as a new medium. Stannard explores the nature of the World Wide Web, in which hypertext exists.

He looks at the 'mythopoeic' nature of the Web, as portrayed in the icons associated with Web use, as well as the jargon used as a Web user (1997). For example the icons used in Netscape Navigator (an engine used to navigate the Web) portray a certain image: there is an icon of a globe turning; the wheel of a ship; one speaks of 'surfing' the Web. All this Stannard feels encourages the user to 'mentally undertake voyages of discovery in a virtual parallel universe' (1997:15). The Web is thus seen to be a vehicle of limitless opportunities with the potential to 'manipulate our senses and our attitudes' (Stannard 1997:15).

Snyder comments on the non-linearity of hypertext in her discussion of hyperfiction - fiction produced through the medium of hypertext - by saying that

Hyperfiction apparently dispenses with linear organisation. Although the experience of linearity does not disappear altogether, narrative chunks do not follow one-another in a page-turningforward direction. (1997:28)

Interestingly Snyder also looks at the whole emergence of hypertext which she says has its roots in the Dadaist theory, developed from the 20th century tradition of experimental literature (1997). The Dadaists often 'attacked the conventions of the realistic novel' and in so doing 'found themselves straining at the limitations of the printed page' (Snyder 1997:25). Almost simultaneously the development of versions of an experimental game called 'Adventure' - initially developed by SAIL (Stanford University's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory) - occurred. 'Adventure' was a narrative game in which the player had to 'negotiate a series of spatial and narrative obstacles' (Snyder 1997:25). By the late 1980s, says Snyder, the game had developed to such a level that the 'multiple fictions' of the game were able to differ 'significantly on every reading'. The point is that

hypertext is able to create texts that can avoid a sense of closure (Snyder 1997:29).

Hypertext can

enable you to write a book that would never be read the same way twice. (Yellowlees 1998:145)

Other authors such as Charles Deemer (1995) and Barbara Duncan (1997) argue that Vannevar Bush – a ‘leading engineer and technical consultant’ during World War II—was responsible for the concept of hypertext, coined in those days as ‘memex’ (Duncan 1997:3). Bush wanted to design an information ‘retrieval’ system that would operate as the human mind does—through a system of linked associations (Deemer 1995:2). Barbara Duncan explores the claim that

hypertext... encourages users to think differently, to break out of traditional reading practices – that it can promote poststructural thought. (1997:1)

Duncan argues that firstly the web was not created out of poststructuralist thought. She argues that hypertext was

originally meant to be a model for the way the mind thinks – a better, more efficient model, not a tool for deconstruction. (1997:1)

She claims that although hypertext was created alongside ‘thinkers working on notions of deconstruction and nonlinearity’ it was a product of ‘modernist’ ideas. Duncan also states that the only similarity the web has with poststructuralism is its apparent non-linear make up. However the web does essentially have structure. Its structure, both Duncan and Deemer argue, is one of nodes and links. Duncan says that

there may be alternative routes, but there are still pathways and structures and thus fixed interpretations of knowledge (1997:3)

Hypertext's structure is 'simply a reflection of the non web world' (Duncan 1997:4). Still, others argue that the apparent non-linear, non-sequential nature of hypertext 'challenges students, teachers and theorists of literature' as it breaks down 'our habitual ways of understanding and experiencing texts' (Delany and Landow 1994:4). Delany and Landow also point out that hypertext is 'reader centred and reader-controlled' as readers choose their own paths through the text (1994). They argue that the ability to choose one's own path through the text encourages the art of critical thinking as one makes a selection of which hyperlinks to choose. In this respect though, it has been argued that hyperlinks are often used without careful thought (Burbules 1998:103). Added to this argument is the argument that although it may seem that the reader is in control of the reading process, in that the reader chooses his or her path through the web of texts, the 'juxtaposition of two related texts' can often carry an implied connection. Burbules uses the illustration of a link on 'rock music' leading to an article on 'drug abuse'. Thus

The use and placement of links is one of the vital ways in which the tacit assumptions and values of the designer/author are manifested in hypertext - yet they are rarely considered as such. (Burbules 1998:103)

Stannard states that in hypertext meanings are made 'in the spaces between textual elements' and through 'the ambiguities created through their juxtaposition' (1997:18). This point is further illustrated and argued by Calvi. He analysed the readings of various hyperfictions, such as Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, a story*, in order to determine the strategies used by readers. Calvi finally concluded that

the exclusive nature of linear, paper-based reading is indeed guaranteed and preserved by the provision of typographical conventions and rhetorical relations. (1999:107)

Calvi agrees with Duncan in the conclusion that essentially the reading is almost the same as reading a 'paper-based' text. The difference lies in the use of links. The links are able to carry meaning aside from the main body of the 'text'. Morgan who experimented with the 'associative linking' of hypertext felt that the links possessed a quality to push beyond the boundaries of conventional books making them more powerful (1999:206).

However, one can use links 'without reflecting on them', and this Burbules warns, is dangerous (1998:107). Hypertext has the potential then to be read on a very superficial level. The constant 'scrolling' down of the text can also lead to the text being read in a very fragmented manner (Burbules 1998:103). It is all too easy to merely browse the text without ever having to engage with the text. The nature of hypertext can threaten to bombard the reader with too much information. The reader might then be tempted to 'skim over the surface of information', never reaching the rich and complex texture of knowledge (Duncan 1997).

Hypertext also has the capacity to merge the visual and the verbal (Stannard 1997:18). These multimedia capabilities of hypertext are commonly referred to as hypermedia. Through hypermedia we are able to reintegrate both our

visual and auditory faculties into textual experience,
linking graphic images, sound and video to verbal signs.
(Delany and Landow 1994:7)

The electronic text has the potential to be multimodal as the text can combine 'words and images in dynamic ways' (Stannard 1997:18). Hypermedia differs from mere 'television' in that the text in television is 'absorbed into the video image'; the video image is thus central (Bolter 1995:113). Hypermedia on the other hand is the 'revenge of the text upon television': the video image now becomes part of the text. Bolter further explains the concept of hypermedia by stating that

hypermedia simply extends the principles of electronic writing into the domain of sound and image(1995:107).

All of these elements are then seen to contribute to the meaning of the text enhancing and reinforcing the whole learning experience. Cumming and Sinclair claim that hypermedia in literary studies

promise to further goals of critical interpretation, sophisticated use of language, aesthetic appreciation and awareness of cultural tradition. (1995:315).

Duncan also concedes that the ability of hypertext to merge graphic and text, and the ease of which 'layers of meaning can be embedded in multiple forms of overlapping media' can hold interesting possibilities for the student or reader (1997). However, Duncan is careful to mention that despite the potential value of hypermedia one must be aware that it is important for readers to be able to come to a 'close understanding' of the text without 'worrying about multiple interpretations' that are possibly linked into the text (1997:5). Snyder also warns against uncritical acceptance of hypermedia in the classroom by stating that

'although some' claims 'seem quite appealing, many are yet to be verified by systematic studies' (1998:134).

While considering how readers read hypertext I feel that it is important to consider how much the visual aspect of the text on the screen plays a role in the reader's relationship with text on screen. Kress speaks of a move from verbal literacy to a new literacy where 'images and visual design' are seen as carriers of a message independent of the text (1990:15). Kress says that Roland Barthes argued that the meaning of images is related to and is dependent on the verbal text. Kress argues instead that the

visual component of a text is an independently organised and structured message - connected with the verbal text but in no way dependent on it. (Kress 1996:17)

In the area of computer technology the reader is directly confronted with the visual design and aspect of the screen:

[it] is obvious to anyone who looks at a computer screen: the visual is there and the possibilities even of producing written text focus on visual aspects—font types and size, layout, visual to accompany the linguistic text. (Kress 1997:56)

Designers of web pages therefore need to be aware of the importance of the visual aspect of the web page. Both the images and the text carry certain messages. The images to be included in the web page must in themselves be carefully considered and must not merely be an afterthought. Johnson states that:

The graphic interface revolution has changed all that: we now intuitively understand that visual metaphors - all those blinking

icons and desktop patterns and pull down menus -have an important, and increasingly indispensable cognitive function. (1997:149)

Kress further says that 'multimedia production requires high levels of multimodal competence' (1997:56). This should be based upon an intricate knowledge of the 'operation of different modes, and highly developed design abilities'(1997:56). It is important then in this shift from the old literacy to the 'new literacy' practice that the value of the image not be ignored. Designers of hypertext must be aware of the weight that the image carries. Beavis (1997:244) comments that the ability to use these new literacies must 'include the capacity to 'read' and 'write' the new technologies'. Beavis, quoting Lemke says that there are probably five new literacies that will emerge from the new 'information technologies':

multimedia authoring skills, multimedia critical analysis, cyberspace exploration strategies and cyberspace navigation skills...the capacity to negotiate and deconstruct visual and verbal images. (Beavis 1997:244)

The boundaries between author and reader and between even author and author become blurred in hypertext. This again is a marked difference between the printed text and hypertext. The printed text is 'selective and exclusive', only so many words, references and ideas can be included in any one book. Hypertext on the other hand is by nature 'inclusive' (Burbules 1998:103). So much more information can be included in the hypertext through the use of hyperlinks. Through hyperlinks authors of one text may include texts of other authors. Interactive hypertext, as opposed to passive hypertext also allows the reader to contribute to text, adding comments and suggestions. Thus no one author can claim direct ownership of the text. Delany and Landow state that in the print bound text 'collaboration is not usually encouraged unless predecided' (1994:15).

The status of the author thus changes. The text is no longer the intellectual property of one author (Delany and Landow 1994:17). However this argument is contested by Duncan (1997) who says that ownership is still retained in hypertext – as is evident in the numerous online journals in which the academic genre still holds for the online text. I think that it is important to note that the theories of Delany and Landow (1994) have been considered to be idealistic. In reality the type of hypertext envisaged by them – a collaborative and interactive one – is not being instituted. A great deal of hypertext being produced is relatively passive by nature and is read more as text presented on the computer screen rather than interactive hypermedia.

Despite the seemingly overwhelming support and enthusiasm for the use of hypertext Snyder (1998), Burbules (1998) and Bowers (1988) agree that caution must be used when using the Web, or hypertext. This is particularly with regards to teachers and students within the educational context. Bowers (1988) stresses the point that there is a misconception about computer technology which states that such technology is ‘neutral’ – meaning that technology is a mere tool in man’s hands. Bowers argues that technology cannot be ‘neutral’ since it is designed by humans who are naturally placed within a social context. Kress states that ‘technology is socially applied knowledge’. In other words society is responsible for changes in technology and not the other way round (1998:53). Many covert messages are implied merely by the type of software one chooses. Another problem surrounding the use of computers in education involves the issue that, through technology, we are being conditioned into believing that technology is more important than the human factor. Bowers says that the

underlying metaphor involves viewing the world as a machine; thus the task of the rational-calculating mind is simply to re-engineer the

various systems in order to improve prediction, control and efficiency. (1988:9)

Bowers (1988) and Roszak (1986) agree that although hypertext might seem to encourage a postmodernist approach to reading, there is still a striving for a machine-like intelligence that does not encourage liberal and artistic thought. Bowers (1988) emphasises the point that teachers must take responsibility for the task of placing the computer within a social, political and historical context. If it is argued that computers make the student realise his/her own individuality, encouraging independent thinking, Bowers makes the point that:

meanings are deepened by a sensitivity to relationships. Relationships are the content of memory and memory is what makes experience shared rather than isolating and individualistic. (1988:94)

I feel that it is important to take the 'dehumanising' argument into consideration when evaluating the use of computer technology in our classrooms. However one must find a balance between a 'non-critical acceptance' of hypertext and the view that hypertext, or technology, is a 'totalitarian nightmare' (Snyder 1998:129). Snyder succinctly says that :

We must retain, against all odds in this rapidly changing literacy landscape, a position of informed scepticism. (1998:140)

Computers have undoubtedly caused a revolution in the learning environment but while theorists such as Landow were enthusiastic about the merits of computers in education, one must question the actual value of the computer in the classroom. Kleinman, in his article *Myths and Realities About Technology in K-12 Schools* (2000), looks at various myths surrounding the use of computers in the school. One of the myths concerns the statement that 'putting

computers into schools will directly improve learning' (2000:2). Kleinman and Snyder concede that computers are indeed 'powerful flexible tools' but their value is only determined by their purpose and use (Snyder 1998). Kleinman further adds that while computers can indeed 'help make learning more engaging, better address the needs of individual students, provide access to information' and 'encourage exploration and creativity' there is a danger that computers can play a more negative role such as the ability to play 'mindless games' , 'access inappropriate materials or isolate students' (Kleinman 2000:2). Along these lines he also says that computers are often not used to their full potential to improve teaching and learning. There are various reasons for this, an important reason , according to Kleinman, is that teachers are not adequately trained to integrate the technology into the 'core of day-to-day classroom instruction'. Teachers also often do not have software that supports 'major curriculum goals'. Technical glitches can often lower enthusiasm for the use of computer technology as the necessary technical support is lacking (Kleinman 2000:2-3). However, the fact that there are these problems does not mean that the teacher is not responsible and accountable for the way the technology is used in the classroom.

1.2 The Printed Text and the Reader: a Theory of Reading

In order to examine the way students respond to and engage with hypertext, I feel that it is important to look at recent theories of reading printed text. For this purpose I have decided to focus primarily on the theories of Wolfgang Iser and Louise Rosenblatt. These theories of reading both seek to elevate the status of the reader in the act of reading. Past theories such as the New Criticism Theory, Stucturalism and Stylistics relied more on the text to convey meaning. In terms

of theory the emphasis has been to turn away from the text as the conveyer of all meaning to the acknowledgement of the important role of the reader.

Iser, known for his 'reader response' theory (1978;1989), states aptly that

if texts actually possessed only meaning brought to light by interpretation, then there would remain little else for the reader (1989:3).

Readers, according to Iser, have at their disposal the means within the text itself to determine meaning for themselves. The text has 'signals' within it that guide readers to make their own meaning of the text. In other words there can be no correct interpretation of the text. Iser points out that there are 'gaps' within the text which force the reader to make meaning of the text. The 'gaps' are the 'indeterminate' elements of literary prose that

are the vital switch that activates the reader into using his own ideas in order to fulfil the intention of the text. (1989:28)

Iser further elaborates on this point by stating that the intentions of the text are 'fulfilled' by the 'guided projections of the reader's imagination' (1989:29). In this process, in the relationship between text and reader, the communication in the reading process is 'exercised *by* the text' and not *in* the text (1989:33):

what is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed...whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins...(1989:34).

Iser also makes mention of 'blanks' which occur during the 'flow' of reading. The 'blanks' are a 'referential field' that enables the reader to relate 'interacting textual segments' to one another (1989:36). As the reader moves from the theme

of one 'segment' to the theme of another, the previous theme forms the background 'against which new themes occur' (Iser 1989:39). Iser refers to this shift of a theme to the background as a 'vacancy' and it is from the vacancy that the reader is able to give the text aesthetic meaning. Iser also states that the 'literary work' has two poles: the artistic and the aesthetic. The artistic pole is the author's text, and the aesthetic pole is the 'realization accomplished by the reader' (Iser 1978:21). Iser stresses that one should not concentrate on any one particular pole as the imbalance will force us to neglect the importance of the relationship between the two poles. In looking at the reader Iser refers to the concept of the 'implied reader' (1978:34). The implied reader is concerned firstly with the structure of the text. The implied reader represents no one particular reader, as the implied reader is a 'textual structure anticipating a recipient without necessarily defining him' (Iser 1978:34). The implied reader is thus an 'expression of the role offered by the text' (1978:36). The 'real reader' on the other hand is the subjective reader, more concerned with the aesthetic reading of the text.

Rosenblatt is also interested in 'freeing' the reader from the 'obsession with a single correct reading' of a text, and in particular literature (1978:118). Rosenblatt (1978; 1938; nd) describes the whole reading process as a 'transactional' relationship: a two-way relationship between the text and the reader (1978:ix). Readers are actively involved with the text as they draw on 'past experiences'. Rosenblatt explains that the reading event falls within or along a continuum: the two poles being an 'aesthetic stance' and an 'efferent stance'. The 'efferent stance' or reading of a text entails the reading of a text whereby the information gleaned is read and 'retained after the reading event' (Rosenblatt nd:1066). The 'aesthetic stance' is one which suggests perception through 'the senses, feelings and intuitions' (nd:1066). Thus the aesthetic reader

pays attention to, savours ,the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities and emotions that are called forth (nd:1066).

By adopting a specific 'stance' the reader is guided through the 'stream of consciousness' making choices about what to include from the reader's own 'linguistic-experiential reservoir' (nd:1068). The reader and the text are, as Rosenblatt says, involved in a 'complex, nonlinear, recursive, self-correcting transaction' (nd:1065). This brings a particular meaning out of the text for the reader. A reading of a text can 'fluctuate' between the aesthetic and the efferent reading as the reader sees and responds to different aspects of the text. Rosenblatt further says that the 'primary goal' of the reader as 'he meets the text' must be to have 'as full an aesthetic experience as possible' (1978:132). This is particularly important in the reading of literature. Rosenblatt also says that a text has an 'evocation' which is the meaning of the text (nd:1070). While the evocation is taking place a 'second stream of consciousness' transacts with the evocation. Rosenblatt refers to this as the response to the text that the reader has whilst reading the text. These responses may be more aesthetic dealing with the 'confirmation of ideas and attitudes' or may relate to the more technical aspects of the text. 'Expressed response' is the kind of response that is a more reflective response after the reading of the text. 'Interpretation' is a continuation of the 'effort to clarify the evocation' (nd:1071). Important for this study is the claim Rosenblatt makes that reading is a 'choosing' activity, as the reader makes choices about the meaning of the text based on the reader's own 'personal, social and cultural factors'. In the teaching of literary works Rosenblatt says that students need to be assisted to have 'unimpeded aesthetic experiences'. Any discussion of the 'form or background' of the text must only be a means of enhancing it (nd:1064).

It is evident that the question of how one reads literary text as hypertext needs to be examined. Is the reading of hypertext more 'efferent' in nature, or can one have an 'aesthetic' reading? Theories of reading printed text clearly might not be relevant to the reading of hypertext. However, theorists such as Duncan (1997) and Bowers (1988) feel that the 'web' is read in the same way as printed text by virtue of the fact that the reader is almost programmed to read in a certain way, reflecting the 'non-web' world. Yet we have seen that other theorists claim that 'hypertext confers greater freedom and power on the reader' (Snyder 1997:29). Is the difference in reading hypertext merely due to the use of hyperlinks as Calvi (1999:107) and even Burbules (1998) argue? Stannard says that we need to

build into our programmes of study an exploration of how these texts are structured and how meaning is conveyed through them. (1997:20)

.In conclusion my feeling is that hypertext is read in much the same way as printed text. The reader must still negotiate meaning in hypertext in a linear fashion. The skills we have acquired as readers of print bound text are used in reading hypertext. Hypertext may contain links within the text and the content of the links will influence our interpretation of the text in constructing meaning. If the content of links is of a purely efferent nature then we will, as readers, respond to the text from a more efferent stance. In the reading of poetry as hypertext it is important that as readers we be given the chance to respond to the text on a personal and more aesthetic level. In this regard it is the responsibility of the author or designer of hypertext to allow the reader the opportunity to encounter the text on an aesthetic level.

1.3 Teaching Poetry

The teaching of English poetry should be an event that causes a certain 'wide-awakeness' in those being taught (Greene 1978:37). Poetry forms part of the whole 'arts' culture that is so essential to our existence as human beings. In a world where an aesthetic appreciation of the arts is pushed to the sidelines as we strive to become more rational, utilitarian beings, the teaching of literature has more than one task: Teaching literature must aim not only to teach the content of the literature, but must seek to educate the reader into a way of feeling (Greene 1978; Paffard 1973; Rosenblatt 1938; Abbs 1982). Maxine Greene writes:

If we are to enter such a created universe and disclose ourselves a world of value, as the poet did, we cannot allow our imagination to be arrested by one-dimensional seeing. Opening ourselves as imaginative, intuitive, feeling, thinking beings we may discover something about what it signifies to create our own meanings along with other human beings. (1978:36)

We must then be taught and teach others how to appreciate the aspect of aesthetic feeling that poetry endeavours to stir and evoke in order to make us more creative, empathetic, thinking beings. Greene speaks of allowing poetry to fulfil its purpose by 'proposing aesthetic encounters that are bound to disturb, if they do not simply confuse' (1978:39). This type of awakening to the aesthetic, because it has been suppressed by an age of scientific, rational reasoning, must be reintroduced. Rex Gibson writes:

There must be opportunities for the expression –indeed overflow – of feeling provided for in the curriculum. The arts in all their forms are vital to such expression and overflow and must therefore be part of the central core of any curriculum. (1989:59)

I think that one of the ways in which the teaching of poetry has failed to awake students to the aesthetic value of poetry is that for too long the teacher has been the authoritative expert on poetry. So too have the curriculum and examinations forced the teacher into teaching within a box wherein the examinable aspects of the poem are taught at the expense of the non-examinable aspects of the poem i.e. the personal and aesthetic aspects. The experience of readers reading poetry has in essence been 'disvalued' by the 'traditional authority' given to poetry (Dias and Hayhoe 1988:41; Paffard 1973; Abbs 1982). The reader fails then to be at the centre of interpretation. The poem was written for the reader to respond to and because of this we must value the reader's own interpretation of the poem. Dias and Hayhoe comment that all too often, teachers may 'focus on one level of meaning at the expense of others' (1999:41). Rosenblatt (1978:118) states that the reader and indeed the teacher need to be freed from the 'obsession of one correct reading'. Dias and Hayhoe state that

Readers should be allowed to stray, to fail, to discover by indirection, to exercise intuition, to sense, to feel, and to draw on experience, in order to provide for a truly literary reading. (1988:109)

Abbs agrees with this sentiment by saying that it is the 'obsession' with 'one correct reading' that deadens and 'seals off the hidden springs of preconceptual creativity' (1982:3). Mitchell (1993) states that the way to remedy the focus on the more 'efferent' academic, stylistic approach to literature is to make the students aware of a more aesthetic way of interpreting literature. She was concerned with the compatibility of reader-response theory and the demands of the prescriptive academic A level essay. After studying students' essays she concluded that it is possible and even beneficial to teach literature according to reader response theories:

To provide well-thought-out responses [to literature] students need access to organising tools besides those of point-making and paragraphing; they need access to the fundamentals of their study, to an understanding of the processes they are engaged in, the ways in which meanings are made and structured. Such awareness would legitimise open aesthetic response, making space for tentativeness, provisionality, renewal. (1993: 27)

In other words Mitchell is saying that students need to be taught how to read on an aesthetic level. If readers are educated in the ways to approach literature from a point of view where their own interpretation and appreciation of the text is meaningful then they will be open to multi-dimensional ways of reading. Turner in considering reader-response theories writes:

A consideration of such aspects of responding to texts has had a positive effect on my own reading practices, and is leading me next to consider the pedagogical implications – if an experienced reader like me can succumb to such insights, what might be possible for young readers unencumbered by the inevitable baggage of years of reading (1996:28).

Rosenblatt further says that:

in building up the habits of mind essential to the attainment of sound literary judgement, the student will also be acquiring mental habits valuable for the development of sound insight into ordinary human experience. (1938:226)

Dias and Hayhoe (1988) and Dias (1986) recommend a style of poetry teaching that involves working in small groups. Rosenblatt(1938) and Tunnicliffe (1984) also recommend group work and class discussions. The teacher should read the poem, after which the students should read the poem. Unfamiliar phrases should be discussed. However Dias and Hayhoe stress that the teacher's roll must be to guide and facilitate giving value to the interpretation of the

students (1988:48). Benton and Fox (1985) argue that while group teaching might be beneficial to the sharing of interpretations and views of poetry, readers must be given room to form their own interpretation of poems on their own. They state that a poetry lesson must allow for an aesthetic encounter with the poem. Teachers need to prepare lessons based upon a methodology that encourages 'reading rather than criticism' (Benton and Fox 1985:17). The teacher's role as 'expert reader' has for too long reinforced the 'conviction of many pupils that they cannot read and understand poems on their own'. Thus one must be able to strike a balance between a style of teaching that lets the reader have the relevant information needed to read the poem and yet be independent in a formulation of an opinion and an interpretation of the poem itself. Web agrees that it is essential to the teaching of literature that the students are 'engaged' in the learning and reading process otherwise the experience becomes 'a tedious and prescriptive task' (1992:106). Rosenblatt aptly says, in praise of teaching literature where the readers 'transaction' with literature is brought to the foreground:

The teacher of social sciences as well of the teacher of English should hold firmly to this fact that literature is something "lived through," something to which the student reacts on a variety of interrelated emotional and intellectual planes. Therein lie its many educational potentialities (1938:240).

Chapter 2

The Study in Context

2.1 Aims, Methods and Procedures

This is essentially a qualitative study. Newman states that qualitative data 'are in the form of text, written words, phrases, or symbols describing or representing people, actions, and events in social life...' (1997:418). He also says that qualitative researchers 'identify multiple processes, causes, properties or mechanisms within the evidence' (1997:419). It is from looking for patterns 'similarities and differences—aspects that are alike and unlike' in the data that researchers are able to 'create new concepts and theory by blending together empirical evidence and abstract concepts' (Newman 1997:420).

This study aims at discovering how hypertext affects the reader's experience or appreciation of literature and in this case poetry. I decided to choose poetry as the focus for this study as I felt that the poem is more easily presented on the screen. A novel can only contain fragmented pieces of actual text on a computer screen. Thus I felt that a reader's response to the poem could be studied more thoroughly.

My aim in collecting data was to gather information that would give me insight into the way secondary school English literature pupils read, understand and appreciate poetry as presented on the web. I also obtained personal comments and input from both teachers and pupils.

2.2.Design of Instruments

2.2.1.Classroom Observations

McMillan and Schumacher make it clear that there are various types of procedures that one may use for classroom observation. I have chosen the 'continuous observation' approach, where behaviour is recorded for 'an extended period' (McMillan and Schumacher 1993:258), combined with the 'duration recording' where the observer 'indicates the length of time a certain behaviour lasts' (1993:257).

The observation is thus recorded on an observation schedule sheet keeping check on how long certain behaviour lasts, commenting on the behaviour as it occurs. The description is written in chronological order. I decided to use this method of classroom observation as I felt that I wanted to investigate and observe the workings and behaviour - teaching and learning - peculiar to a laptop lesson. I chose lessons where laptops were in use to teach English literature. In order to get a sense of the different styles used when teaching with laptops I also observed different kinds of web-based lessons: poetry and prose. I also observed a non-laptop class to note the difference in approach, by teachers and students, to laptop lessons.

I had hoped to be able to observe how the learners read poetry on the web, what differences, if any were there in their approach to reading on the web. My classroom observation, while valuable, proved to be somewhat difficult in that while some boys were quite verbal about their web experience, others were remarkably quiet leaving questions unanswered as to what was actually taking place. It also was not easy to observe what the boys were actually doing on the

computer, as the screen is not easily read from different angles due to the type of screen used on a laptop computer. I was able though, to get a sense of the interaction between the teacher and learners as well the interaction amongst the learners themselves.

2.2.2 Questionnaires

My use of questionnaires was intended to investigate the attitudes of the boys towards reading poetry in general and reading poetry on the web. Thus I decided to hand out a questionnaire to two laptop classes of grade 11 boys. The grade 11's are split into four classes: two laptop classes and two non-laptop classes. I asked four open-ended questions designed to allow the boys to write as much as possible in response to the questions. I asked questions that would determine and explore various aspects of poetry and poetry on the web.

In my analysis of the answers to the questionnaire I decided to total the different categories of responses: those pupils who enjoyed poetry, those who didn't enjoy poetry, and those pupils who had a fairly apathetic attitude towards poetry. These categories were then divided into subcategories: those whose attitude had improved since using the web, those whose attitude had remained unchanged, and those who felt that their experience of poetry had deteriorated since using the web. I set about looking at the correlations between the various groups in an effort to establish a general pattern or trend in various groups. I examined the answers of the questionnaires of the different grouping of responses in order to discover possible similarities or differences in responses.

The advantage of using this questionnaire to collect data was that I was able to get a general feel for the views the boys have about using the web to read and learn poetry. I also was able to gain insight into the boys' experience of

reading on the web. However, the responses were somewhat superficial in some instances. The question on the recommendations the boys had concerning poetry on the web was enlightening as it revealed possible features that are at present either absent from, or are interfering with their reading experience on the web.

2.2.3 Interviews

Robson writes that the interview is a 'flexible and adaptable way of finding things out. I had hoped to gain more insight into reading poetry on the web from the questionnaires (1993:229) however, I found that some issues raised needed to be probed more in order to come to some conclusions. I chose six boys to interview based on the responses to the questionnaires. I chose three boys whose attitude towards poetry had improved since using the web, and three boys whose attitude had deteriorated since using the web. One major problem was that I was interviewing seventeen-year old boys, and their responses were not as elaborate as I would have liked. However the interviews were valuable in that I was able to go into more detail as a follow up to relevant responses from the questionnaires.

The interviews were semi-structured (Robson 1993:231); thus I had a basic set of predetermined, open-ended questions to ask the interviewees. I was able also to go into more detail and ask different questions based on individual responses. I recorded the interviews on a tape recorder, transcribing the interviews afterwards to analyse more carefully. The interviews were based closely on the students' responses to questionnaires.

2.2.4 Analysis: a General Overview

My analysis of the data began with a process that Newman refers to as 'open coding' (1997:422). During this phase, which is a first 'pass' through the data, the researcher 'locates themes or concepts and assigns codes or labels in a first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories' (1997:422). During the open coding I carefully studied the data in an effort to discover emergent themes. After the process of open coding I then proceeded to carry out an 'axial coding' where the initial themes and categories that had emerged from the open coding were re-examined. In axial coding Newman says that a researcher 'asks about causes and consequences, conditions and interactions, strategies and processes and looks for categories and concepts that cluster together' (1997:423). I tried then to look for ways in which themes and categories clustered together and looked at general patterns as well. I tried to also examine the reasons for the emergence of themes and codes, constantly looking at causes and consequences of issues that emerged

2.3 Background Information

Diocesan College is an Anglican based school for boys. The school itself is split into three sections: pre-preparatory, preparatory, and the College (senior school). The College comprises of some 650 boys and an academic staff complement of about 60.

Inspired by the introduction and subsequent use of laptop computers in Trinity School Kew, Melbourne Australia, headmaster Clive Watson (1993-2000) initiated the concept of laptop teaching into the College. The College already had in place a computer laboratory and the inclusion of computer studies as a Grade 12 subject. The task was to now introduce the use of personal laptops into the school as a teaching and learning medium. The project was dubbed the 'laptop

project'. The deputy principal at the time (1997), Mr Mike King, was instrumental in launching the project and actively developing a working ideal. The planning phase of the project took about two years during which the concept was launched to parents as well as the planning of the more technical aspects such as the laying down of computer cables to make up a school network. Classrooms were also furnished with network points. The primary aim at this stage was, as Mr Mike King states, 'not to use the laptops to teach computer literacy,' but rather to 'use them as devices which would enhance the teaching and learning of various subjects' (King 1999).

The school's intranet currently includes English, Biology, History, Geography, Art, Afrikaans and Science departments. Teachers in these departments are required to design web pages with the aim of covering all or some of the present syllabuses. Each department seems to have a different approach to the laptop project. The fact that laptop computers are very expensive, means that not every boy is able to purchase a laptop. Thus some boys have access to them whilst others do not. This means that some departments maintain the philosophy of boys who have laptops sharing screens with those who do not within the same class. Still other departments split the classes into laptop classes and non-laptop classes. In this case the computer lab is available to teach lessons which may have been prepared for the laptop computer.

Teachers meet during the term for 'laptop liaison' meetings. At these meetings current technological trends are discussed as well as ways to improve on the design of web pages. There is also opportunity throughout the year for parents and teachers to attend basic computer skills classes to ensure an ethos of computer literacy. Teachers do complain that they often lack the time necessary

to improve on their web design skills. Thus there are a variety of skills amongst teachers within every department. There is no formal training of teachers in the design of subject-related web pages, rather one on one training is expected to take place as more experienced teachers help other teachers.

2.4 The English Department

The English Department has classrooms of which approximately 5 are equipped with laptop network points. The goal of the department is to design web pages for use on the intranet which should then be used in the classroom.

Each grade in the school is divided into sets. The sets divide the boys according to academic ability with 'set one' being the strongest. In the English department these sets are further divided into laptop classes and non-laptop classes. Despite the fact that there is a split in grades between classes taught with the laptop and classes taught without them (non-laptop classes) all material produced by the department is available on the school's intranet. Lessons can be taught or studied from computers either in the school library or the computer laboratory. It is believed that as the school develops its laptop teaching ethos the number of non-laptop students will be minimal. It is expected that the acquisition of a laptop computer will eventually become a prerequisite for entrance to the college. Mike King (1999) is careful to point out that 'although the big adaption [sic] is from traditional to computer based teaching, we still believe that the traditional teaching skills and their associated habits still form the core of classroom activity'. Even within the 'laptop' classes certain lessons are taught through the conventional teaching method. Only those lessons that have been prepared for the intranet, through a web page, can be taught on the intranet. Having only been fully operational on the laptops for a year the Department is steadily building up the materials for the laptop lessons.

Chapter 3

In The Classroom

3.1 Grade 11 Poetry Syllabus -- On the Web

I have chosen to look at the Grade 11 poetry syllabus as my sample for data collection is taken from the Grade 11 laptop classes. The syllabus for grade 11 includes poems by Philip Larkin and T.S. Elliot as well as three matric poems: Sonnet XXX (Shakespeare), On His Blindness (John Milton) and The Tiger (William Blake). Some of these poems are available on the school intranet in the form of poetry web sites.

The poems of Philip Larkin include: Ambulances; Aubade; Money; Church Going; Mr Bleaney; To Failure; Friday Night at the Royal Station Hotel; Toads; and Toads Revisited. The home page for Larkin includes a list of the poems that are linked to the actual poem. Part of the site also includes a background page that has information on the poet's life. The page also has instructions on how to use the Larkin site with links to worksheets on the poems. Some poems are displayed as just poems, without links or explanations, whilst others have a glossary of foreign or unfamiliar terms and a series of questions that probe the reader's understanding and interpretation of the poem. Many questions on the poems involve imagery, language use. Occasionally the readers are asked for their own interpretation or perspective.

The T.S. Eliot poems include: The Hippopotamus; Journey of the Magi; and Preludes. The home page for T.S. Eliot is a comprehensive web site that instructs the reader on how to work through the poems and exercises. The page also points out the aims and objectives that the reader needs to be aware of in

order to work through the 'learning programme'. Such aims are to 'come to a general understanding' of the context, to understand the themes of the poet and to be able to 'analyse and respond to questions'. From the home page there are links that lead to a biography, background information, the poems themselves and then various worksheets and exercises.

3.2. A Typical English poetry Laptop Lesson

The following is a description of a typical English poetry lesson. I was able to observe a variety of lessons and felt that it was important to describe the format most of these took.

The pupils walk into the classroom and begin to set up their computers. Posters from well-known films, based on English literature, are dotted around the room. This gives the classroom a visually pleasing look to it. Power-points for the computers are placed in the walls around the classrooms thus wooden desks are situated around the periphery of the classroom in a sort of semi-circular fashion. The desks are grouped together in groups of four facing inwards. For this reason the teacher sometimes has boys with their backs turned towards him or her. At the outset it is clear then that the teacher is not the centre of attention.

Setting up the laptops takes about five minutes and is a fairly busy time. The boys wander around the classroom in an attempt to set up their computers and get connected to a power supply. Some boys wait patiently while everyone gets ready but a few boys take this opportunity to talk making the classroom rather noisy. Eventually everyone is ready at which stage the teacher gives instructions on how to get to the relevant web page on the intranet. In some instances the pupils are instructed to down-load the relevant page and then to

work offline, and in other instances the pupils work online especially if they need to have access to the internet during the lesson. The pupils are then given

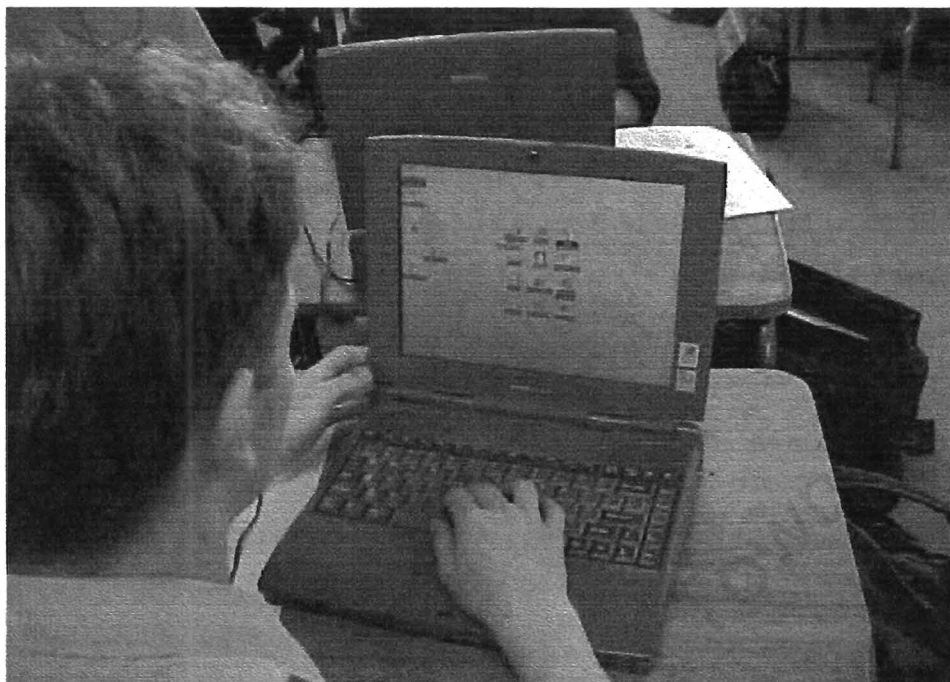


Photo # 1



Photo # 2

some guidelines as to how to proceed with the poem or reading displayed. The boys then read the poem or poems to themselves and sometimes the teacher reads along with them. The more sophisticated web page might even have a link to an audio reading of the poem. The goal is that they should be able to read the web page to themselves and work through the relevant exercises on their own.

A few boys seem to be able to focus and get on with the reading whilst others are restless and seem distracted. The teacher has to remind the boys to 'concentrate' and get on with the readings. After reading the poem they are expected to continue with the next section of the web page, a worksheet type page that deals with questions and issues raised in or by the poem. If the boys need to get further information they are allowed to log on to the internet to do so. Some web sites might also be recommended by the teacher for further exploration or study. About five minutes before the end of the lesson the boys are instructed to shut down their lap tops and while they are doing so are told what to do for the next lesson. As the boys shut down applications they are dismissed and file out of the classroom as soon as they are ready.

Clearly the above lesson scenario is disturbing. At a glance you get the impression that both boys and teachers are floundering. The teacher has stepped back in an effort to allow the boys to work through the web pages on their own. However, the boys are still looking for some sort of guidance as far as the actual content of the web pages are concerned. One teacher read through the web pages with the boys in an effort to try and hold the boys' attention. Yet, although this sort of approach does seem to generate more class interaction it makes the use of the laptop rather redundant. It is necessary then to look at the content of the web pages in order to examine just what the boys are being confronted with on the web as a reading and learning experience.

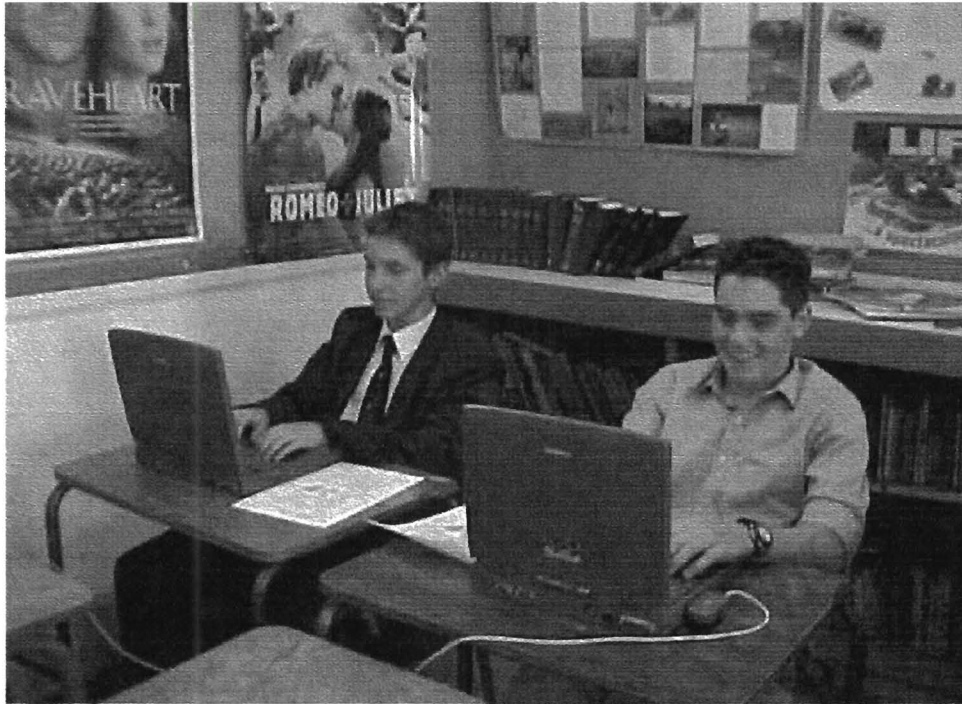


Photo # 3

3.3. Poetry on the Intranet: A Critique

3.3.1 Teaching and learning

The concept of teaching literature on the web is seen, by the school, to be a way forward, in that the technology is fast becoming a medium used to design, write, communicate, teach and learn. However, the way in which the technology is used is critical to the success of the whole process of teaching and learning. Poetry presented on the web as hypertext has the potential to be a highly effective learning medium in that the text takes on multimedia capabilities. Delany and Landow said that hypertext could 'transcend the linear, bounded and fixed qualities of the printed text' thus hypertext presages a 'potential revolution in literary studies' (1994:6). Hypertext by nature can present text with links to various explanations and information that the reader might not have

otherwise have had access to. The type of hypertext that Delany and Landow envisaged was one in which the reader had more control over the reading experience, one that was interactive, filled with relevant links and a rich 'interweaving of materials' (1994). The reality is that this 'ideal' hypertext is generally not realised in a typical school environment as the teachers, who are expected to design the hypertext for the web, are often not equipped to design a high level of hypertext.

In many instances the hypertext on the DC intranet falls short of the inherent potential the web has to offer. While the poetry sites for Larkin and Eliot may be informative and at times innovative they do not maximise the potential of hypertext. The text seems to be merely replicated on a screen as plain text and not as hypertext or hypermedia. The poems displayed on the screen have no direct links to necessary information. The whole interactive side of literature on the web appears to be lacking. The text should be filled with links to other relevant sites and to pieces of necessary information thus enriching the efferent. Links could also be linked to student's personal interpretations and opinions or responses to words or parts of the poem thus enriching the aesthetic. Dias and Hayhoe say that when teaching poetry

There should be as many poetry books as a school can afford - poetry posters, with their appeal to the eye as well - tapes or records of poets and other voices making poems in sound - the words of lyrics and their realisation on records and videos (1988:84).

The web has the potential to incorporate all the above features into an exciting teaching medium if used in the right way. Unfamiliar or foreign phrases could be linked to explanations, animations, graphics and the like. If a lesson is to be

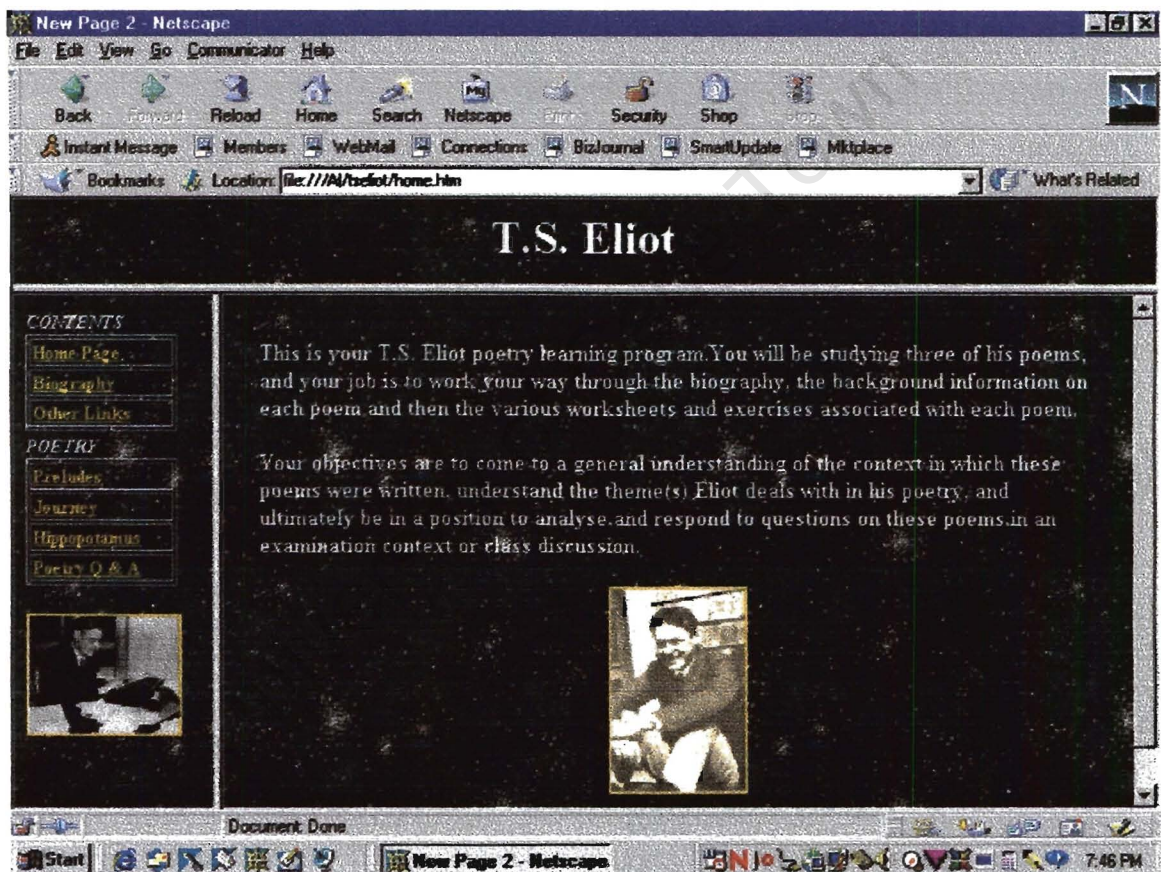
developed on the internet then it is important that the material be up to date with the latest interactive devices and technology. If the teacher is to stand back and let the boys read for themselves and come to an understanding and appreciation of the poetry through learning programmes on the web then the poetry must be linked to different interpretations and have space for the pupils to share their own views and ideas on the web page. As it stands the material developed on these DC web pages could just have easily been handed out in printed form. One then asks why such an expensive teaching medium is being used when the same results could be produced using paper. Some of the pupils felt that they were motivated to study poetry on the web because it was something different. The text on the screen then *should be* something very different. It should be engaging, informative, exciting and involve the reader as an active reader.

3.3.2 Lesson Content

I have chosen to analyse the web pages or 'learning programme', designed to teach the poetry of T.S Eliot. My choice in this regard was governed by the fact that of the two poets the Grade 11s were required to study, the Eliot web page seemed more comprehensive and was fairly detailed concerning background information. I propose to work through each of the web pages commenting on the content, and so add to the critique of web teaching in its current state, in the Grade 11 English literature poetry classroom. I feel it is important to analyse the web pages, as it is the way the poems and indeed the poet is presented that affects the readers' response to poetry.

To begin with, the overall design of all the pages is as follows: white font on a black space-type background (see illustration 1). The links are in yellow font, and the menu appears on all the web pages on the left hand side. The menu

contains a list of the web pages on T.S Eliot. In the menu, under the heading 'contents' are links to the 'Home Page', 'Biography' and 'Other Links'. Added to this under the heading 'Poetry' are links to sections entitled: 'Preludes', 'Journey', 'Hippopotamus' and 'Poetry Q and A'. In the discussion that follows I will discuss each of the web pages on T.S Eliot commenting on design and content in the light of reader-response theory. The contents of the web pages can be viewed in Appendix B.



i. Home Page

The text on this home page is a short block of text of approximately six lines, divided into two paragraphs. It exists within a block defined by a line-border within the page. The background remains the same within the block. Below the text is a small black and white photograph of the poet, smiling. On the whole the impression one gets is not one of excitement. The content of the text further adds to the feeling that what is to follow is just another, ordinary poetry lesson on another medium. The computer is now the teacher. The text begins 'This is your T.S. Eliot poetry learning program'. Immediately the experience of reading Eliot's poetry is relegated to the position of a 'learning program'. There is no sense of the poetry being something to be enjoyed, something to look forward to. The next few lines contain words that reinforce the idea that this is just another lesson, something that has to be done to get through the syllabus: 'You will be studying' is a command, an imperative; 'your job is to work your way through the biography, the background information on each poem'. Again poetry is clearly a 'job' not something pleasurable, there is no freedom merely to enjoy, to feel and to respond. And, in fact, in this, the home page, no reference is actually made to the reading of the poems. This attitude towards poetry is so typical of the scholarly-academic response to poetry. The second paragraph of this web page continues in the same way. It begins with 'your objectives are to' again there is an instruction that deals with a one sided approach to poetry. Students are told to understand the 'context', 'understand the themes', 'analyse' and be able to 'respond to questions' in an 'examination context' or 'class discussion'.

The focus here is on the 'endpoints and end products' (Greene 1988:50). The actual process of reading is ignored. So much more could be done here. A home page such as this cannot inspire or excite and this is a pity as the home page undoubtedly sets the tone for the rest of the 'learning program'.

ii. Part One: Biography

I think only a little needs to be said here as the web page is an extract taken from *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia*. 'The Biography' is then a chronological account of T.S Eliot's life in typical 'encylopaediese'. The extract follows the literary highlights of Eliot's life. Notable is an absence of any personal details of his life. The last line of the extract contains the fact that he was married twice, the most 'personal' information we are given about the poet.

ii. Part Two: More Background Information

This section gives more personal information about the poet. This aspect is important, as the reader is able to get a sense of the poet's hardships and personal challenges. The poet begins to come to life as a person. The information given includes references to Eliot's marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood, his friendship with Emily Hale, his nervous breakdown and his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism.

iii. Preludes

This section is divided into three separate sections linked to each other. The one section is titled 'Background to Preludes'. The text outlines the context in which the poem was written. The text gives information about when the poem was written and what the poem is about. The text also gives information about the setting that the poet had in mind. What is lacking is the use of authentic graphics about the poem and setting.

The second section is the poem itself. The only visible links are to various parts (ie I, II, III etc) of the poem and to the background section. The poem exists then as hypertext devoid of links within the poem. Again the absence of links speaks volumes about the lack of innovation and imagination in the design of

this web page. Granted teachers have little time to design creative interactive web pages but this factor is detrimental to the poetry experience of the students as one can see from the design of this web page. Even more appalling is the use of clip art images to illustrate the poem (see Appendix B: iv). Clip art images are generalised images that cannot even begin to do justice to a poem of T.S. Eliot. It would be far better to have used a photograph or picture depicting the actual times or scene in which the poem was set in.

The third section encompasses questions or exercises on Preludes. There are four sections of questions corresponding to the four parts of Preludes. For the first two parts of Preludes the questions are formatted in a multiple choice question program. Students are required to 'click' in one of four boxes corresponding to the correct answer. Questions are notably of an efferent nature. For example:

How old was Eliot when he wrote "Preludes"?

- 21-3
- 37
- 33
- 18

The aesthetic side of the poem has been ignored. Questions that relate to imagery pick out the technical use of imagery instead of the aesthetic use. One question asks: 'What image here best illustrates the sordid ugliness of evening in the modern city?', there are then four choices of images that the poet has used: 'smells of steaks in passage ways'; 'Burnt out ends of smoky days'; 'newspapers from vacant lots'; 'The lighting of the lamps'. The fact is that all of the images work together to project the feeling of the 'sordid ugliness'. To be asked to choose the best one from these images is missing the point of the poem and the

poet. Another question comes close to finding out what the reader thinks but is marred by the limitation of choices given to the reader: 'what name would you give to the first part of Preludes?' – 'the people of the city', 'one woman from the city', 'something beyond', 'the city'. In this set of questions readers are not given room to express their own interpretation or response to the poem. The questions do not guide the reader into a personal reading of the poem. The questions are asked in such a way as to make the reader think that there is in fact only one correct interpretation of the poem. This is especially true when there are several choices of answers to which there is no one correct choice yet the reader is required to make this choice. For example:

In what tone of voice would you read the final line?

- Aggressive tone
- Nostalgic tone
- Depressed tone
- Excited tone

The choice of answer would definitely depend on a personal reading and interpretation of the poem. Rosenblatt says:

The reader, too, is creative. The text may produce that moment of balanced perception, a complete esthetic experience. But it will not be the result of passivity on the reader's part; the literary experience must be phrased as a transaction between the reader and the text. Moreover, as in the creative activity of the artist, there will be selective factors molding the reader's response. He comes to the book from life (1938:34-35).

The type of questions asked in these exercises for the first two parts of the poem does not give the reader a chance to respond to and think about the poem creatively.

The questions on Preludes part III and IV are questions that require a paragraph for the answer. Students are required to 'open a [sic] Msword document and answer the questions there-after [sic] cutting and pasting the questions into the document'. Again the questions themselves tend to force one interpretation on the reader. The first question dealing with part III of Preludes asks

Is this woman beautiful? Explain your answer with references to the word or phrases from the prelude'.

However, it is not obvious that a woman is being described in physical terms and the words and phrases pertain more to her spiritual state, her inner workings. It is this type of question that throws the reader or student of poetry into turmoil as they try to arrive at the 'right' answer when the question is wrong to begin with. The rest of the questions in this section are of a similar nature. Part IV's questions are more probing and require the reader to think about the poem. But I still feel that the questions are too confusing to the reader. For example:

What do you think Eliot's notion of 'an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing' might be?

For a moment the reader might think that there could be multiple interpretations or answers to this question. However, the following question, which comes directly after the above question, serves to confuse the reader:

How is the notion completely proven untrue by the final lines of the poem?

The teacher has interpreted the poem in this way; yet it is not necessarily the only interpretation of these last few lines. The teacher should strive instead to guide the reader into a personal interpretation of the poem. A personal

experience of the poem is vital to full appreciation of the poem. Iser states that the

Reader's response is neither subjective only nor prestructured only, but the result of a guided interaction. (1989:30)

There must be an 'interaction between the text and the reader. Rosenblatt agrees when she says:

The young reader's personal involvement in a work will generate greater sensitivity to its imagery, its style, and structure; this in turn will enhance his understanding of its human implications. A reciprocal process emerges, in which growth in human understanding and literary sophistication sustain and nourish one another. Both kinds of growth are essential if the student is to develop the insight and skill needed for participation in increasingly complex and significant literary works. (1938:53)

The student must become involved in the interpretation of the poem and the kind of one-sided questioning evident in this web page does not encourage an active, creative involvement with the text.

iv. Journey of the Magi

The page begins with a brief paragraph giving the background for the poem, as well as a sentence telling what the poem is about. Questions on the poem are categorised according to the various stanzas of the poem. The questions are also of an efferent nature closely resembling questions from a comprehension exercise: 'Give alternate meanings for "galled" and "folly" in stanza 1'; 'What is an "old dispensation"?. Interrogative adjectives such as: 'what', 'whose', form the start of some of the questions, again asking very factual based questions. One question comes close to asking for a personal response from the reader but it is asked in such a way as to make the reader feel that there is one set response demanded

from the poem: 'Describe what the poet wants you to feel after you have read the first three lines of stanza two'. Apart from a few questions that ask the student to 'describe' certain events the boys are not really encouraged to form their own opinions and interpretations of the poem.

v. The Hippopotamus

The poem is featured on one web page with a link to the questions. The 'question page' begins with two sentences about the poem. There are eight questions on The Hippopotamus and again they focus on the technical and factual aspects of the poem. The questions home in on the meaning of words or phrases in the poem as well as the use of tone and images. A few questions also ask what the poem or the poet is saying. The final question illustrates the underlying feeling that there is one way to interpret this poem: 'In what ways do you think Eliot is justified in his beliefs? Answer this question in no more than five lines'. The question should read 'Do you think Eliot is justified in his beliefs?' in order to give readers a chance to decide for themselves what they do in fact think about the issues raised in the poem and whether or not they agree. The restriction of the answer to five lines also prevents the student from expanding on their own responses.

3.3.3 Summary

It is evident from the web pages that the reader is not being given the opportunity to experience the poem on a personal level. The teacher as web designer appears to have decided on one interpretation of the poem leaving little room for personal interpretation. There is also no discussion of the poems that might interest the reader interested or make the reader feel that the poems meaningful in their lives. Clearly the issues raised by the poems are relevant and can raise awareness on the part of the reader, of the problems of modern society. Many of the questions are

shallow and irrelevant and do little to stimulate any reflective responses by the students. Most significantly the questions also fail to make use of the laptop as a teaching and learning medium. Questions in this medium need to allow the students to use the internet to find out other views and interpretations of other people outside the classroom environment. The poem also needs then to be discussed and commented on. This could be done in class, or a forum could exist online between the students and the teacher in order to comment on the poems at a personal level. Links could also feature comments by students in an effort for readers to communicate and relate their own experiences of the poem. By allowing students to see other interpretations and others' experiences of the poems, the authoritative interpretation forced upon the students by the teacher would cease. In this way it is possible to come closer to a reader-response experience of the poem. There is a danger of blocking out a personal interpretation of the poem by having access to too much information about the poem. Again the teachers need to be selective about what to include and they need to guide the students towards an engaging reading and interpretation of the poem. There must be an entirely different teaching methodology for web-based teaching. This concept is discussed in more detail in the 'Recommendations' section in chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Findings

In reviewing the data collected – questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations and informal interviews – certain issues have been raised. This study is not about quantitative research and thus my analysis of data has tended to focus more on what has been said. There are many conflicting arguments and points raised by the students and I strongly feel that each point raised, no matter how small in terms of numbers, is important in formulating a broad picture of how the web affects the reading, learning and appreciation of poetry. In this chapter I first examine the comments of boys about their attitude towards poetry in general and then about their experience of poetry on the web.

4.1 Attitudes and Experiences of Poetry: off the web

When analysing the completed questionnaires the results showed that out of 32 questionnaires 15 readers said that they enjoyed poetry; 8 were not especially interested in poetry; and seven said that they did not enjoy poetry. Of the 15 who said that they did enjoy poetry only three students said that they unequivocally enjoyed poetry:

I enjoy poetry. It is an inspiration. I find it incredible how a man can capture a feeling and present it in a special randomisation of words (A14 Q)

It is an interesting and creative way of expressing one's self...I enjoy reading it and usually become involved in the emotions and storyline of the poem...(B8 Q)

Reading English poetry is often fascinating and there are many ways in which you can react and respond to it and there isn't a fixed response...(B3 Q)

The rest of the 15 said that their enjoyment of poetry depended on a number of factors. Most of the comments, throughout all three groups, referred to the choice of poems for study and how this affected their enjoyment of poetry:

I enjoy reading poetry, but my response obviously depends on the poem I am reading. Humorous poems amuse me. Most of the poems on the English syllabus however, are somewhat dry and not that interesting to read time after time. (A8 Q)

Depends on what kind of poetry it is...(A4 Q)

I don't enjoy old poetry, I enjoy more modern poetry...(A3 Q)

At times I find reading poetry very enjoyable...I find poetry about landscape extremely boring, but I find poems about love and war very interesting because they deal with the feelings and emotions of 'real' people. (A1 Q)

I prefer South African poets that we can relate to. Not poetry about church or negative, sarcastic poetry, written by some old depressed and uninteresting guy. It must be fun and descriptive. (B18 Q)

I enjoy bits of it but only certain things interest me. Some poems bore me to tears but some I find inspiring. I enjoy poems with a meaning behind them and not just ones that tell a story. (B8 Q)

Certain poems are incredibly stimulating, but on the other hand some are fairly weak and boring. Much thought must go into the choosing of a poem to study. (B1 Q)

Depends on the poem, if good then it can be moving. (A11 Q)

It can sometimes be very boring because the poems are often arbitrary. (A7 Q)

Ok, but it can get boring at times especially when it is a boring poem. (A6 Q)

Some of the poems written are good. But some are really bad. I don't mind reading good ones and some of them are quite nice to read. Yet there are a few that I think are a waste of time. (B4 Q)

I also feel that the poems we choose are very depressing and gloomy...(B14 Q)

I get bored. Sometimes it can be fun but not the stuff that we ever read in school. (B14 Q)

Another point raised is the relevance of the poems to today's society. Some students felt that poetry is no longer relevant while others felt that the poems chosen for study were not relevant:

I prefer South African poets that we can relate to...(B16 Q)

I used to love poetry in grade 10a but now we do poetry which has no meaning to me or my fellow peers which has sadly put me off poetry. (B15 Q)

Generally pointless and boring. Holds no relevance to today's society, especially poetry of the older era. Today's poetry is somewhat relevant but needs more attention. (A5 Q)

I enjoy poetry but I'm not sure its really a necessary part of the syllabus. Because, I mean as a life skill it's not a requisite need to learn in school. (A8 I)

Some students found poetry to be 'difficult' and 'confusing'. The whole poetry experience was thus negative and put them off poetry:

...Poetry is difficult to understand and laborious. (A13 Q)

I don't enjoy poetry and I find that it does not interest me. I also find many poems vague on what they are meaning. (B2 Q)

..it can get very difficult at times...(B11 Q)

Sometimes I find poetry difficult to read...(B5 Q)

Related to the issue of the apparent 'difficulty' some students have with poetry is the point raised that poems are over analysed:

and the main thing about which poetry occasionally irritates me is how they'll read through something, they'll overanalyse it. (A8 I)

The fact that poems are read with a view to one correct interpretation being used for marking purposes was also a contributing factor to the frustration and irritation some students experienced:

Personally I think that poetry can be too 'deep' at times, so it becomes confusing...(B12 I)

I think that it is very awkward trying to interpret what the poet was trying to say and I think that there are no right or wrong answers...I enjoy the struggle of looking for the deeper meaning but many times it is very boring analysing every stanza and sometimes every line...(B13 I)

I don't enjoy poetry and I find it does not interest me. I also find many poems are vague on what they are meaning...I enjoy reading poetry but hate being questioned about a poem for marks because people interpret poems differently and poems are normally emotions someone has experienced for which there is no right or wrong answer. (B2 I)

I think, when poems go into too much detail, when the poet is trying to, doing it for a reason, and he's trying to confuse you instead of just writing down what he feels (B 11 I)

Clearly it is not only the choice of poem that will affect the way in which boys respond to poetry, but it is also the way it is taught that will ultimately determine how students respond. Sadly much poetry is taught with a view to equipping children for writing an examination on the poem rather than allowing them to experience poetry in ways that will teach the student the value and relevance of poetry to our own personal growth and development (Rosenblatt 1938). The fact that there were only three students who without reservation could say that they enjoyed poetry, regardless of the choice of poem or the structure of the syllabus reaffirms the point that the appreciation for the aesthetic value of poetry must be taught. The message that is coming across from the boys is that they want to enjoy poetry but it is 'too deep', 'confusing', and 'boring analysing every stanza'. One boy commented that the poet is 'trying to confuse you' instead of 'writing down what he feels'. This comment is a clear indication that the students are not being given a chance to experience and be moved by the poem as the poet intended. Students will not find their way to an aesthetic reading of poetry on their own. Nor will they experience poetry in its fullest sense if classroom methodology hinges upon close critical analysis, the writing of examinations and the scholarly essay in its present form.

4.2. Reading Poetry as Hypertext

In discussing the student's response to poetry on the web I refer to the poetry web pages specific to Diocesan College as a school. As the critique of the web pages designed for the study of T.S. Eliot's poems show, there are some serious issues that need to be considered when designing a web page and not to the internet in general. Poetry on the web need not be a passive, tutorial, academic, scholarly experience. Web sites such as Oxford's site on Wilfred Owen (<http://firth.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/jtap/>) can be exciting and motivating. Here it is possible to access live interviews with World War 1 participants and view relevant authentic pictures. In sites such as this you are taken into the world of the poet without being bombarded with one text trying to inform you about the poet. There are also elements that can be included on a web page using software such as 'story-space' that allows the user to comment and enter into discussions online. There is the technology, and the software to make it possible to design interactive web pages. This can make poetry more accessible and a reader response approach to poetry something that can be achieved if the author of the web page itself is willing to experiment, be innovative and imaginative.

4.2.1. Issues of Compatibility: Screen Literacy

Some of the participants in this study felt uncomfortable with reading poetry, seen by most boys as 'writing from the past', on a new modern medium: a computer screen. There were also readers who were opposed to reading poetry, in general, off a computer screen. One subject's response was:

...poetry is no longer a tangible item and thoughts and ideas are difficult to just jot down on the poem. (B16 Q)

The issue here is that poetry on a screen can appear to be somewhat impersonal. You can't feel the page in your hands, nor can you make it personal by jotting down 'thoughts and ideas' onto the poem. The reader could merely be expressing the feeling that he cannot 'jot ' down the teacher's 'thoughts and ideas'. He had previously commented that he did enjoy poetry. The problem for this reader, when reading poetry on the web, was that he was unable to feel the poem in a tactile, physical way and thus felt distanced or separated from the poem. This took away his ability to relate to the poem aesthetically. This reader no longer felt in control of his response to poetry. The screen was the same screen displayed to others in the classroom. There was nothing unique to him about his particular screen as opposed to a book in which he could make his own by adding his own comments and remarks. One could say that he related differently to the poem when it was displayed on the screen because it was no longer a personal experience. Another reader agreed by saying:

I enjoy reading poetry from books because it is more than just writing on a screen. (A4 Q)

The following reader had a similar experience:

Maybe it's the new technology now and all that but it just doesn't seem proper...poetry should be on a piece of paper...poetry was written a long time ago so it's meant to be read on a piece of paper...it just doesn't seem proper...not the way it was meant to be...(B15 Interview).

Clearly the fact that the poetry was now displayed on a computer screen affected the way in which this reader read poetry. His attitude towards poetry had been one of enjoyment. With poetry now displayed and read off a computer screen he was no longer able to relate to it and thus it no longer 'moved' him. He

commented, in the questionnaire, that his attitude towards poetry had deteriorated since using the web because

Its like playing golf indoors, it isn't any fun (B15 Q)

The web in the classroom thus changed the way he read poetry in a way that made him feel uncomfortable with the genre. He no longer felt inspired, his reading was without direction or meaning. Interestingly, he was not, in principle, averse to computer technology. He even said that he wouldn't mind modern poetry on the web:

Modern poetry would have more of a different approach and I'm sure it would mix well with it...(B15 Q).

This reader also said that he liked the way the poetry is stored on the web

Normally, if you have it on a piece of paper they get lost, on a computer you click on the poet's name and he comes up, it's all accessible (B15 I).

The problem then was not with the computer technology itself but rather with reading what he termed 'olden-day' poetry on the web. This reader is saying then that poetry presented on the web, in its current format within DC, is only meaningful as long as the poetry is not too 'deep'. So again one can say that this reader had more of a problem with poetry itself as displayed on the web. The web, or the screen, changed his approach to reading. His comment

The background provokes thoughts which wouldn't have been in the first place...(B15 I)

indicates that the web is an intrusion on his normal reading experience of poetry. Perhaps too, one can comment that like B16 and A4, B15 was no longer able to get into touch with the poem. He was unable to relate to the poem displayed and thus he too no longer felt in control of his experience of reading poetry.

Those students who did not feel that the presentation of poetry on a screen affected their reading of poetry at all contrasted the above sentiments. The following students felt that reading poetry off a screen (off the web) was:

...the same as having a piece of paper in my hand with the poetry on it...(B12 Q)

I feel it is the same as reading a book...(B5 Q)

B12 also said that although he could see the value of reading poetry for other people, he was 'not a great fan of poetry'. B5 also commented that he found poetry 'very confusing'. One can assume then that these readers did not hope to gain much from their poetry reading experience. Whether reading poetry off a computer screen or off a page the experience of reading for these two readers remained the same.

The problem here is that these students are being confronted with the same text on the screen that they are familiar with on a printed page. Some students react adversely to the fact that this text is now being displayed on a computer screen and yet others do not mind, it holds the same experience for them in whichever medium it is presented. However, the web does require a totally different approach to teaching than the worksheet-method-approach so typical of the conventional lesson. There can be a lot more exposure to audio links, detailed graphics, film clippings and the like on the computer in order to

make the poetry experience something entirely different to print orientated teaching. The teacher, teaching in whatever medium, must strive to make the English poetry lesson more reader centred and aim to stimulate the imagination and emotions of the reader.

4.2.2 The Reader's response: Efferent or aesthetic—referential overload

Louise Rosenblatt says that there is a 'transactional relationship' between the text and the reader (1978:ix). She explains that our response to this transaction occurs along a continuum, a 'stream of consciousness' (Rosenblatt nd:1068). Our response falls between two poles at either end of this continuum: the efferent pole and the aesthetic pole. The efferent is concerned with the:

Cognitive, the referential, the factual, the analytic, the logical, the quantitative aspects of meaning.(nd:1068)

The aesthetic stance on the other hand, is more concerned with the 'sensuous, the affective, the emotive, the qualitative' (nd:1068). Every reading has a different position along this continuum. Rosenblatt points out that while one can read a text efferently and paraphrase for someone else in order to 'satisfy' their efferent purpose (nd:1068), it is impossible for anyone to read a literary work 'aesthetically' for another person. Iser also says that a 'literary work has two poles': the artistic (the text) and the aesthetic. The meaning of the literary text is a 'dynamic happening' between the two poles. Iser says:

Now the traditional form of interpretation set out to instruct the reader; consequently it tended to ignore both the character of the text as a happening and the experience of the reader that is activated by this happening...such a referential meaning could not be of an aesthetic happening(1978:22).

The problem is that, in many English literature classrooms, the efferent or referential stance is emphasised to the detriment of the aesthetic stance. Thus Rosenblatt (1978) agrees with Iser when she says:

Efferent classification and the analysis of the elements of the text can yield much interesting data. But it can lead to the neglect of the work, the actual aesthetic event in time. (1978:163)

In terms of teaching on the web, the experience of poetry is clearly almost entirely efferent. One reader in particular said that his attitude to poetry had deteriorated since using the web as he felt that the web provided too much information. He felt that he no longer had the freedom to respond to the poem in his own way.

Well a lot of information is given to you on the web. You've got the analysis, you've got the summary...it's a bit boring I find...(B1 I)

When one examines this comment one can see that the problem this reader has with reading poetry on the web is that his ability to appreciate the aesthetic value of the poem is curbed because of the ready supply of efferent information. 'the analysis' and 'the summary' are efferent aspects to the poem which this reader finds 'boring'. By being readily supplied with links to these bits of information the reader cannot be 'stimulated' and 'stirred' by the poem. B1 even comments that:

The web gives away that anticipation to explore the writer's thoughts. All the summaries and notes are given, taking the excitement out of the poem. (B1 Q)

This reader feels uncomfortable with the amount of referential information being given to him about the poem. The poem no longer exists on the screen free of the

efferent interpretation and background information now given automatically on the web. The 'anticipation' and 'excitement' are pushed to the side, as the efferent becomes the main focus of the reading experience. B1 did comment that a 'bit of background information' was important in order to fully appreciate some poems. Rosenblatt does not negate the importance of the efferent stance but does emphasise that the aesthetic response should occur before the efferent response in order to have as full an experience as possible:

students need to be helped to have unimpeded aesthetic experiences...when this can be taken for granted, efferent analytical discussions of form or background will not be substitutes for the literary work, but becomes a means of enhancing it. (nd:1084)

There are students however, who seem to enjoy the more efferent information provided to them on the web. One must ask then whether they enjoy or respond to poetry aesthetically or efferently. If one is to experience the poem in more efferent way then does this mean that the 'aesthetic event' is ignored? The following readers commented that their attitude towards poetry had improved since using the web.

I find it easier to read things off the web, I read a lot off the web and it's more interesting...You can also find more information about what you're reading about...(A6 Q)

It is evident by the choice of words such as 'easier', 'interesting' and 'information' that A6 uses when he comments on his poetry experience on the web that he enjoys reading from a more efferent stance. Since using the web to read poetry B11 said that his attitude had improved towards poetry:

I think that we're actually...are able to get more information on the poet, it's not just a piece of paper, it's kind of exciting to go onto the

web and see these things...I'd go into more detail with a poem on the web than on a piece of paper. (B11 I)

For this reader too the efferent is what makes poetry exciting to him. He enjoys the input of the referential that is provided on the web. The presentation of poetry on the web seems then to provide the referential information that these readers (A6 and B11) need to enjoy poetry. Indeed, the fact that the internet is referred to as the 'information highway' makes the web appealing to a reader seeking the more 'efferent' type of reading in that there is an abundance of referent information available to the reader. But for the reader seeking the more aesthetic experience the web is frustrating and even boring.

4.2.3 Classroom Participation vs Individualised Learning

Socialisation is an important aspect of our educational system. The teacher communicates with the students and in an ideal classroom the students are allowed to interact with each other and the teacher. Within a literature classroom group discussions and classroom participation or discussion are traits to be nurtured and encouraged (Dias and Hayhoe 1988). With the advent of computer technology, there has been a shift towards a more individualised learning system. The aim of Bishops in developing web pages is to develop 'learning programs' through which students can learn. Subject content is thus produced on web pages so as to let individuals work at their own pace. The problem is that some students are ill equipped for this type of learning experience. Poetry on the web demands not only technical skill but a new way of reading and responding to poetry. The teacher has for so long been central to the learning environment to the point of dominating the construction of meaning and the production of ideas. From teacher and class involvement the student is suddenly faced with staring at a computer screen and learning on his own. Although there are ways to incorporate online communication and discussion on the web this is clearly not

the case at DC. The absence of personal and class interaction, in this web context, in the English literature poetry class affects the reading of and attitude towards poetry:

It [the web] takes away the whole aspect of class atmosphere. (B1 I)

Well a lot of information is given to you on the web...it takes away the whole aspect of class atmosphere...(B1 I)

It would seem then that B1 feels that all the 'fun' is taken out of the poetry lesson because the class no longer has the opportunity to debate and discuss. Another reader felt the same way saying that poetry on the web is 'not as interesting' (A4 I). Reading poetry on a computer screen therefore had a negative affect on his reading and on his enjoyment of poetry. Both the boys above experienced deterioration in their attitude towards poetry because of the lack of lively human interaction.

The following student experienced a similar feeling of isolation:

You can't really talk [when using the web], the class works well together... normally we have like groups and we all talk about it. (B15 I)

This reader also commented that the class read at 'different paces' and he commented that some boys 'didn't even bother with reading'. The problem then could also be that the familiar structures usually in place in the poetry classroom were no longer there. One could not be sure that one was doing the right thing, reading the poem, doing the exercises, if everyone was reading at their own pace and some not even reading the poem at all. There is then an element of a

devaluing of the whole poetry experience as the students could feel at a loss as to how to proceed. B15 also pointed out that

You have to read it on your own, which usually in the class he [the teacher] points out all the similes and metaphors and all that...(B15
D)

The boys are thus accustomed to a more traditional approach to teaching poetry where the teacher is the authoritative voice where poetry is concerned. The feeling then is one of abandonment by the teacher and that the boys felt this was evident in the classroom observations. The boys at times seemed quite disturbed by the prospect of having to read on their own without the input of the teacher's commentary. The task in one instance was for the class to read a poem on a web page and then to complete the relevant exercises assigned to them. One boy in a state of exasperation asked the teacher:

Can't you help us with the reading...when are we actually going to understand the poem? (Observation i)

The teacher had to reassure them that he would assist them but only after they had read through the material given to them on the web. Thus a shift has to occur in the boys' thinking. The web does have the potential to encourage readers to read independently and interpret the poem on their own, but it is imperative that readers have the tools and skills to be competent readers of poetry and especially poetry on the web. The text too should be embedded with helpful links to aid and encourage their reading. The social aspect of the learning experience in the classroom could be nurtured by giving the readers a chance to take part in an online discussion, with the teacher monitoring the class's development. Snyder aptly says:

We must continue to look critically at assertions that the technology will either radically transform or diminish the social interactions that are intrinsic to effective teaching and learning.
(1997:vxvi)

Within the laptop English poetry context it is important to strike a balance between the use of the computer in the classroom and the vital human element so necessary to learning. One should also look at educating the student towards reading independently, equipping the learner to enjoy poetry without having to rely solely on the teacher for the interpretation of the text.

4.2.4 Technical considerations

Theorists such as Burbules (1998) expressed their concerns about the quality of our reading when reading off a computer screen. Laptop computers in particular are known for being even more difficult to read off than a normal monitor because of the low resolution of the screen. Foltz (1993) said that studies have shown that a factor that might affect reading hypertext is the low resolution of the screen. Reading off the web can also tend to be fragmented and superficial because of the way the text is read. The constant scrolling down of the screen-page is an issue that disturbed some students:

I know things are going that route but I still hate scrolling down instead of turning a page...(B8 Q)

You definitely lose what you've just read when you scroll down. It takes quite a bit concentration...(B1 I)

Scrolling does tend to break into the flow of reading, as your eyes have to adjust and refocus throughout the reading process. Perhaps it is this aspect of reading off the screen that accounts for a general attitude of 'distractibility' and to some extent boredom. Studies have shown that people read '25% slower from a screen

than from paper and read less accurately from a computer screen' (Walton 2001) In my classroom observations it was quite noticeable that some students were focused and could concentrate on the screen in front of them. However, it was also clear that some students were distracted and had a difficult time trying to settle down and work. Comments criticising the process of reading poetry on the web raised the issue about how hard it is to concentrate on the screen:

I feel that while reading poetry you should be totally focused on what you're reading and its hard to focus on a computer screen...I prefer reading poetry [on paper] than reading it off the web. It helps to concentrate more on the poem when I read it on paper. I can visualise what is happening in the poem better.(A1 Q)

It is quite difficult reading off computer screens (A10 Q)

For students who find it hard to concentrate generally, reading off a computer screen does not help. Those students who commented on problems with reading off a screen did experience a worsening in attitude towards poetry since reading it off the web.

Aside from the actual problems with reading off a screen or web page, other students took this one step further and commented that the inherent potential of the web was distracting to them. In other words when reading from a book there is little else to do except read from that book. However, when reading off a screen there is a certain element of distraction present by virtue of the fact that there are many other things that could be done with the computer:

There's always something else you can do...(A4 Q)

A lot of distractions...there's always e-mail...(B1 Q)

Lots of guys...they're distracted...no backgrounds because it distracts your mind (B15 Q)

The students who commented on the fact that the 'distraction' factor of the web negatively influenced their reading had said in the questionnaire that they enjoyed reading poetry prior to using the web. Again this is related to web design and content. Certain backgrounds are more distracting, so too can the absence of the whole aspect of a personal interaction contribute to an element of distraction when the students are using the web. The web pages need to be designed in such a way so as to engage the student in the process of reading and responding.

4.2.5 Accessibility

The potential of the World Wide Web in the classroom seems almost limitless. Students are no longer tied down to one text but can shift from and move between texts. There are dangers in just surfing the web with out actively engaging with the text (Burbles 1998). As the data of this study shows, some students become overwhelmed by too much information at their fingertips, some are distracted by it and yet there are those who relish the opportunity to be exposed to more information and a wider variety of literature.

For those students who said that their attitude towards poetry had improved since using the web, they also said that they felt encouraged by access to more literature, access that you do not usually get through the teacher:

...I find accessing poems on the web to be very efficient. (B2 Q)

By 'efficient' this reader explained that the process of accessing poems and information was a lot quicker than reading from a book.

there is no worse only better as one is more exposed to it and it is more available. (B10 I)

...the web provides a greater variety of poems for me to enjoy. (A8 I)

it makes [poetry] more interesting. You also get a whole lot of background information etc. Pictures to make you understand better. (B9 Q)

I've seen more and had more access to it. (A3 I)

One student even said that he liked the way everything was stored on the computer:

[be]cause normally if you have it on a piece of paper they get lost, on a computer you click on a poet's name and he comes up, it's all accessible. (B15 I)

In fact the above student said that his attitude had deteriorated since using the web but this was one aspect that appealed to him.

There also seems to be a feeling by some that they no longer are passive readers. They can control and read at their own pace.

I find it easier to read things off the web and more interesting...(A6 Q)

..it is more interactive and sources of explanation are available (A7
Q)

However if Rosenblatt's theory is to be considered then it could actually be that these readers are more passive by virtue of the fact that they are concentrating on the 'efferent' information presented. It is, according to Rosenblatt and Iser, an aesthetic reading that causes the reader to reflect, to ponder, to 'interact' in terms of the transactional relationship that should exist between reader and text.

4.2.6 What the Boys Want

The following section is based upon the response to the final question on the questionnaire that seeks to discover what the students would like to see or experience on an English poetry web site. The responses are enlightening in that they show up shortcomings of both current DC web sites as well as a methodology that the boys have been accustomed to.

Half of the boys (13 out of 27) said that they would like to see more information about the poet, the poem and an analysis of the poem. Most felt that this information should be linked to the poem itself. The students felt that they would like more information that would help them understand the poem better. One student's response even went so far as to say that there should be 'explanations' to show the 'true meaning' of the poem (B8 I). The boys are then seeking to discover what the poem is supposed to mean rather than concentrating firstly on their own interpretation of the poem. Another group of about three students said that they would like more links to other poetry and other sites available to them.

Six responses dealt with the issue of images or illustrations. 'Pictures, colour and interactive exercises' was one of the comments. One reader said that the page should look 'lively' otherwise people will not read it. Yet another reader commented that there should be no backgrounds otherwise the reader is easily distracted. The issue of web design is again of great importance and designers should realise that it is not a haphazard event but must be carefully considered. This factor of design is very important in the design of a poetry web page when one considers that poems are often written with the visual impact of the words in mind.

Only two students felt that there should be an audio recording of the poem available to the reader. Both these readers enjoy poetry but felt that this was one way in which their poetry experience could be enhanced. There are sites on the web that have authentic readings of poetry by the poets themselves published on the web. This makes for a fascinating and more hypermedia oriented web experience.

One student commented that he would like to have a discussion online about other people's responses to the poems. It is interesting to note that this student surfed other poetry web sites outside of the classroom environment and felt passionately about the fact that in the classroom one is generally limited to a very one-sided reading of the poem. In his interview he also commented that 'there should be a kind of forum you can go to, to see everyone's views'.

Five readers felt that the web sites should offer more relevant poems. Poems that they can relate to within their own modern context:

Current, recent, relevant poetry. Relevant to today and us. (A4 I)

Rosenblatt (1938) comments that it is up to the teacher to enable students to see the relevance of poetry today. The reader must be helped to an aesthetic appreciation of the poem that will enable the reader to see the poem's significance within a broader social context.

Some responses did address real needs of the students in terms of audio recordings of poems, relevant issues, and online discussions. These are things that need to be included in a poetry web site. Other students are seeking an experience from a web page that will ultimately bring them closer to the 'true meaning' of the poem. However, this is not what they really need. It is what they have become accustomed to expect. With the teacher no longer providing a verbal commentary of the poem the boys are feeling even more concerned that they cannot understand the poem or poems. Poetry on the intranet, where the boys are required to read by themselves, should lead the boys to a more personal experience of the poem. But they have not been taught how to do this. The boys need to be guided toward a personal interpretation of the poem.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1. Conclusions

It is evident from the findings of this study that the way poetry is being taught on the web, in the context of Diocesan College, is doing little to change the way students respond to and interact with poetry. Hypertext has the propensity to be used as interactive text because of its multimedia capabilities. One of the aims of this study has been to investigate the claims that hypertext as text can encourage a more independent reader-centred approach to reading. However, the manner in which poetry as hypertext is being presented on the Diocesan College intranet is not changing the way students experience poetry. Their experience of poetry remains teacher centred; only now, the computer is the teacher. This study also asks how the use of hypertext affects the reading and learning of poetry in the literature classroom. I propose then in this chapter to draw together some important conclusions.

5.1.1. Screen Literacy

A few students felt that poetry does not belong on a computer screen. This is in part because the conventional methods of teaching poetry are being applied to web based teaching. The poem is being approached the same way as on paper. And for these students this does not work. There is also an issue of screen literacy. Some students are unsure about how to read off the web. The web experience of poetry must not try and mimic the printed or paper version of poetry. It must be something entirely different. The computer is clearly different from a book both visually and physically. This presents problems that the reader may have with reading from the screen. This could be because of the low resolution of the screen. The reader may also struggle with the impersonal,

technical nature of the screen. The need to scroll further breaks into the flow of reading. These differences and problems affect the way poetry is read off the web. Some students seem to be able to cope with these differences while other students have difficulty trying to read poetry off a computer screen because of them.

5.1.2. Web Design and Content

Web design plays an important part in contributing to an interactive and engaging reading and learning experience. Images, background and illustrations need to be appealing and yet relate to the poem on a deeper, more aesthetic level. The content of the web pages is as important. The teaching methodology of the teacher is transferred to the web design and content of the pages. This study shows that the methodology implemented in the Diocesan College web pages is reflective of an analytical, academic approach to teaching English poetry. There is a need to train teachers to design interactive web pages, and more specifically, to educate them on how to use the computer in the class with appropriate teaching methodology. A new methodology needs to evolve when teaching through the web. The reader must be challenged and encouraged to respond to poetry on a more personal level.

5.1.3 Human Interaction

There is the absence of class interaction when the students are expected to work through web sites on their own, as is the case in the Diocesan College context. The opportunity to debate and discuss certain issues that may have arisen is now taken away, as the boys are required to read and study the poem on their own. This leaves the student even more frustrated and at a loss to 'make sense' of the poem. The teachers are also not sure of their position in the classroom. One teacher commented that he found it difficult to strike a balance between

technology and teacher presence. Both the boys and teachers seem to be floundering. The teachers comment that the boys are reluctant to work on their own and the boys complain that they cannot come to grips with what they are reading on their own. In the English poetry classroom perhaps it is not fair to insist that boys study the poems on their own. Unless the boys have learnt how to respond to poetry on a personal level they cannot be expected to suddenly read poetry in isolation and feel that they are making progress. It is important to take cognisance of the fact that there is no freedom for the boys, within these web pages, to experiment with poetry, to learn to appreciate the aesthetic value of poetry. The most obvious feature of the internet, which would greatly help foster a climate of shared interpretations, is online discussion and forums. Within the classroom the advantage of online discussion is that students can discuss and present their views anonymously, thus allowing students to voice opinions that they might not have shared because of the fear of public humiliation. Outside the classroom, online discussions can promote the sharing of ideas between students in other schools or even in other countries. Students can then share ideas and views more easily with those across the globe. A lot more could be done in promoting a more reader centred approach to poetry.

5.1.4. Aesthetic Response?

The efferent aspect of the poem is more accessible to the reader on the web as the students are given background information and biographies. Some students enjoyed being able to access information and were satisfied to read with a more efferent thrust. Yet there is more to poetry than just information, poetry is a creative act, dependent on the aesthetic response of the reader to bring the poem to life (Iser 1978; Rosenblatt 1938). Because of the predominantly efferent content of the web pages some students reacted negatively to the absence of aesthetic

content or stimulation. They felt that the amount of efferent information being given to them took away the 'anticipation' of reading the poem. Poetry became, for them, boring. The need to draw upon the aesthetic side of the poem needs to be even more prevalent when presenting poetry on the web as the web is generally efferently structured. The aesthetic experience can easily be buried in a layer of meaningless information.

2. Recommendations

Certain recommendations must be made as a result of this study. I feel that the use of hypertext as poetry text can be used more successfully in the English literature classroom. There are some important points to consider if the use of hypertext on the web is to make a difference in the English poetry classroom.

- A different methodology is needed to teach off the web: rather than merely presenting the poems on the web, and then asking closed worksheet type questions, the teacher could direct the students to relevant sites where the students can research issues; students could also work in groups to find information or to discover different views and interpretations of poems thus keeping the spirit of classroom interaction alive; students could also present poems through the computer, perhaps using a presentation programme such as 'PowerPoint', they could decide on relevant images, backgrounds, audio recordings and the like to make them, as students, more involved in the process of learning; students could also provide links to the poem to pieces of information, views or issues that they feel are relevant and meaningful.
- More interactive, multimedia or hypermedia features need to be included in the design of web pages.

- Online discussion, forums and the like need to feature in web pages to make readers feel that their interpretations and responses do matter.
- Hypertext needs to be used to its full capacity. Hypertext should have relevant links embedded in the text. These links can link to comments of the students themselves or to other pieces of text giving multiple interpretations, or explanations.
- Studies need to discover what works best as far as the presentation of poetry is concerned. There is a need to assess whether or not the presentation of the actual poem on the screen is in fact beneficial to the student's experience of poetry. Perhaps more of a mixed media approach might be more beneficial.
- Studies need to look at different approaches to teacher training and examine the effect this has on the design of web pages and the implementation of the web as a teaching tool. There needs to be an awareness of the computer as positioned in society and an awareness of the theories of visual literacy in the design of teaching aids, especially web pages.
- Further studies also need to look at the way in which literature is being taught in schools. One needs to ask whether tertiary institutions are ensuring that students are adequately trained in the theories of reader response and the like. And if they are, then are these approaches being implemented within schools?
- Studies also need to probe into the effects of the examination system upon the teaching and learning of literature. Studies must also ask how web based literature teaching affects the process of writing examinations.

5.3 Final Thoughts

While the use of computers in the classroom is becoming more prevalent and even inevitable, the findings of this study raise some serious issues surrounding the use of the web in the English literature classroom. The web as a teaching medium has its value but there are difficulties and problems that need to be addressed if the reading and learning process is to be valuable and meaningful in the lives of the students. Web design, lesson content, classroom interaction, and a new teaching methodology are important issues to be considered to make the implementation of the technology successful.

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Appendix A
A.i Questionnaire

1.What is your attitude towards poetry in general?

2.What is your response to reading English Poetry? In other words how do you react to reading poetry? Briefly explain your experience.

3.Since reading poetry on the Web do you find that your attitude towards poetry has improved or deteriorated. Give reasons for your answer.

4.In your opinion, what features should be included on an English poetry web site in order to make poetry more enjoyable to you?

A.ii Interview Schedule

- 1. What aspects of poetry do you enjoy?**
- 2. What aspects of poetry don't you enjoy?**
- 3. How do you feel about the Grade 11 poetry syllabus?**
- 4. Explain how you experience reading poetry on the web?**
- 5. What aspects do you enjoy about poetry on the web?**
- 6. What aspects irritate you about poetry on the web?**

B.i. Home Page

This is your T.S. Eliot poetry learning program. You will be studying three of his poems, and your job is to work your way through the biography, the background information on each poem and then the various worksheets and exercises associated with each poem.

Your objectives are to come to a general understanding of the context in which these poems were written, understand the theme(s) Eliot deals with in his poetry, and ultimately be in a position to analyse and respond to questions on these poems in an examination context or class discussion.



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B.ii Biography of T.S. ELIOT (1888-1965)

"I am an Anglo-Catholic in religion, a classicist in literature, and a royalist in politics." T.S. Eliot so defined, and even exaggerated, his own conservatism. The ideas of this stimulating writer were perhaps traditional, but the way in which he expressed them was extremely modern. Eliot was one of the first to reject conventional verse forms and language. His experiments with free expression contributed to his reputation as one of the most influential writers of his time.

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Mo., on Sept. 26, 1888. His family had produced distinguished Americans since colonial days. He entered Harvard University in 1906, completed his course in three years, and earned a master's degree the next year. After a year at the Sorbonne in Paris, he returned to Harvard. Further study led him to Merton College, Oxford, and he decided to stay in England. He worked first as a teacher and then in a bank. Precise and moderate in his habits, he devoted his evenings to study and writing. He liked cats and wrote a book about them 'Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats', published in 1939. It was the basis for 'Cats', a spectacular musical comedy of the 1980s.

In 1915 the verse magazine *Poetry* published Eliot's first notable piece, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. This was followed by other short poems such as 'Portrait of a Lady'. 'The Waste Land', which appeared in 1922, is considered by many to be his most challenging work (see American Literature).

In 1927 Eliot became a British subject and was confirmed in the Church of England. His essays ('For Lancelot Andrewes', 1928) and his poetry ('Four Quartets', 1943) increasingly reflected this association with a traditional culture.

His first drama was 'The Rock' (1934), a pageant play. This was followed by 'Murder in the Cathedral' (1935), a play dealing with the assassination of Archbishop Thomas a Becket, who was later canonized (see Becket). 'The Family Reunion' appeared in 1939. 'The Cocktail Party', based upon the ancient Greek drama 'Alcestis' by Euripides, came out in 1950 and 'The Confidential Clerk' in 1953. The dialogue in his plays is written in a free, rhythmical verse pattern. Eliot won the Nobel prize for literature in 1948 and other major literary awards. The author was married twice. He died on Jan. 4, 1965, in London. 1.

1. Excerpted from Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia. Copyright (c) 1994, 1995 Compton's NewMedia, Inc. All Rights Reserved

B.iii Some more background information on the three poems you are studying

The Preludes were written in 1909-11 while Eliot, aged 21-3, was a student at Harvard, then Paris, then back at Harvard. He has in mind Roxbury, a rundown slum area of Boston. Despite the variation in time and place, there is a continuity in ideas, narrative [story-line] and imagery. This poem is an early work, and takes the form of a monologue, or aloof [detached, distant] commentary on life. The characters are not heroic, but are ordinary men and women, struggling to survive in a harsh urban landscape. (Note how the cab-horse and the lighting of the lamps set the poem in its time, the early twentieth century.)

Eliot left the US, where he was born, and gone to Britain to continue his philosophy studies at Oxford (having previously studied at Harvard and then the Sorbonne in Paris). Aged 27, he met and married (within two months) Vivien Haigh-Wood. He decided not to return to the US, did not continue his studies, got a job in a bank, and discovered that his wife suffered from terrible mental disorders, which led to drug abuse. He realized that his marriage was doomed.

When he left the United States, he left behind a young woman called Emily Hale. How much they were in love is not known, but they stayed very close friends all their lives; at her death, it was found that Emily had kept over a thousand letters Eliot had written to her over many years.

Around the age of 33, working on his major poem, "The waste land" he suffered a nervous breakdown. Entirely depressed about his own life and about the world around him, he was beginning to 'turn to the religious life' It is in the midst of all this that 'The hollow men' was written and published.

Having lost his Christian faith in late adolescence, Eliot converted to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, when he was 39. He wrote 'Journey of the Magi' in that same year. Also, at the same time, he became a British citizen, he was seriously considering leaving his wife, and he decided to take a vow of celibacy. So, it was a time of the end of old things and the start of new beginnings and possibilities. The poem comes out of all of these things.

B.iv a) Preludes

Background information

I II III IV

I Top

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in
passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burn't-out ends of smoky
days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant
lots,
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-
pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and
stamps.

And then the lighting of the
lamps.

II Top

The morning comes to
consciousness
Of faint stale smells of beer
From the sawdust-trampled
street
With all its muddy feet that press
To early coffee-stands.

With the other masquerades
That time resumes,
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.

III Top

You tossed a blanket from the
bed,
You lav upon your back, and
waited;
You dozed. and watched the night



revealing
 The thousand sordid images
 Of which your soul was
 constituted;
 They flickered against the
 ceiling.
 And when all the world came
 back
 And the light crept up between
 the shutters
 And you heard the sparrows in
 the gutters,
 You had such a vision of the
 street
 As the street hardly
 understands;
 Sitting along the bed's edge,
 where
 You curled the papers from your
 hair,
 Or clasped the yellow soles of
 feet
 In the palms of both soiled hands.

IV [Top](#)

His soul stretched tight across the
 skies
 That fade behind a airy block,
 Or trampled by insistent feet
 At four and five and six o'clock;
 And short square fingers stuffing
 pipes,
 And evening newspapers, and
 eyes
 Assured of certain certainties,
 The conscience of a blackened
 street
 Impatient to assume the world.

I am moved by fancies that are
 curled
 Around these images, and cling:
 The notion of some infinitely
 gentle
 Infinitely suffering thing.

Wipe your hand across your
 mouth, and laugh;
 The worlds revolve like ancient
 women
 Gathering fuel in vacant lots.



b)Background to Preludes

The Preludes were written in 1909-11 while Eliot, aged 21-3, was a student at Harvard, then Paris, then back at Harvard. He has in mind Roxbury, a rundown slum area of Boston. Despite the variation in time and place, there is a continuity in ideas, narrative [story-line] and imagery. This poem is an early work, and takes the form of a monologue, or aloof [detached, distant] commentary on life. The characters are not heroic, but are ordinary men and women, struggling to survive in a harsh urban landscape. (Note how the cab-horse and the lighting of the lamps set the poem in its time, the early twentieth century.) - Preludes Poem

University of Cape Town

c) Preludes 1

Click on the correct answer

1 How old was Eliot when he wrote "Preludes"?

- 21-3
- 37
- 33
- 18

2 What inspired the writing of this poem, for Eliot?

- The London underground
- An Ethiopian Township
- A slum area in Boston
- New York City

3 What were Eliot's religious leanings at this stage of his life?

- Anglo-Catholic
- Atheist
- Anglican
- Hedonist

4 What image here best illustrates the sordid ugliness of evening in the modern city?

- Smells of steaks in passage ways
- Burn't out ends of smokey days
- Newspapers from vacant lots
- The lighting of the lamps

5 Why is "and" repeated so often?

- To give a continuous picture of images the poet is observing.
 - He used them in place of commas.
 - To speed up the reading of the poem
 - To make it feel like life is long and drawn out.
-

6 What name would you give to the first part of "preludes"?

- The people of the city
 - One woman from the city
 - Something Beyond
 - The City
-

7 In what tone of voice would you read the final line?

- Aggressive tone
 - Nostalgic tone
 - Depressed tone
 - Excited tone
-

8 Why is the last line separated from the rest of the first prelude?

- There is no reason for the separation
 - Time has passed
 - To make you think
 - This signifies that night has finally settled in.
-

9 What information mentioned by Eliot makes us aware of the fact that it is about 1910?

(There are two answers to this question)

- The lighting of the lamps.
- Newspapers from vacant lots

- Broken blinds and chimney pots.
 - A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
-

d) Preludes II

Click on the correct answer

1 "Morning comes to consciousness" is an example of what figure of speech?

- Simile
- Metaphor
- Hyperbole
- Personification

2 What TWO early morning rituals does the poet describe?

- Getting an early morning cup of coffee
- The Morning coming to consciousness
- The raising of dingy shades
- The faint stale smells of beer

3 What comment do you think is being made about human activity?

- It is a ritual and repetitive
- Everyone is excited about the new day
- Everyone is unhappy
- There is no meaning to life

4 A masquerades is a false appearance. Why does Eliot call these daily rituals masquerades?

- In reality, life is worth living in Boston
 - Eliot is hoping to have a fancy-dress ball soon
 - They are pretending life has meaning and is pleasant
 - None of the above
-

5 What does 'a thousand furnished rooms' imply about life in the city?

- All people at least have a roof over their heads
 - It is impersonal
 - Nobody owns a big house in Boston
 - There are many people living in the city
-

6 What title would you give to this prelude?

- THE CITY
 - THE PEOPLE OF THE CITY
 - ONE WOMAN FROM THE PEOPLE
 - SOMETHING BEYOND?
-

e) Preludes III Questions (*ONE WOMAN FROM THE PEOPLE*)

Open an MSword document, cut and past the questions into it and then answer the questions thoroughly.



Preludes poem

1. Is this woman beautiful? Explain your answer with references to the words or phrases from the prelude.

2. Read lines 3-6 carefully. It is highly unlikely that Eliot means this literally. What do you think really happened?
3. What vision do you think the woman had of the street? Is it likely to have been a hopeful one? Why would you say so?
4. When referring to the street hardly understanding, Eliot is referring to whom/ what?

f) Preludes IV Questions (*SOMETHING BEYOND?*)

Open an MSword document, cut and past the questions into it and then answer them thoroughly.



Preludes poem

1. How does the person in this stanza differ from the other people of the city?
2. What is destroying him?
3. What do you think Eliot's notion of 'an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing' might be?
4. How is the notion completely proven untrue by the final lines of the poem?
5. So, what is Eliot's vision of life in a modern city then?
6. What does this kind of life do to those people who suffer it?
7. Is there any hope for meaning in this life, in Eliot's view? Why do you say so?

B.v Journey of the Magi - [questions](#)

[Stanza 1](#) [Stanza 2](#) [Stanza 3](#)

'A cold coming we had of it, [Top](#)
just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile, and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley. [Top](#)
Wet, below the snow fine, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dinging for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember. [Top](#)
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.



Journey of the Magi Questions Background

Having lost his Christian faith in late adolescence, Eliot converted to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, when he was 39. He wrote *Journey of the Magi* in that same year. Also, at the same time, he became a British citizen, he was seriously considering leaving his wife, and he decided to take a vow of celibacy. So, it was a time of the end of old things and the start of new beginnings and possibilities. The poem comes out of all of these things.

The term Magi refers to the Three Wise Men of the East who brought gifts to the infant Christ. The poem is divided into three stanzas.

Open up a new MSword document and answer the questions that follow. Save this document to a folder entitled "Eliot"

Stanza 1 *Poem*

1. Give alternate meanings for "galled" and "folly" in stanza 1.
2. Briefly discuss, in no more than two lines, what their journey was like.
3. Whose voices rang in their ears, saying that it was all folly?

Stanza 2 *Poem*

4. Describe what the poet wants you to feel after you have read the first three lines of stanza two.
5. The three trees and pieces of silver symbolise... (a) Christ or (b) the crucifixion?
6. The white horse and the vine leaves symbolise... (a) Christ or (b) the crucifixion?
7. Describe the world into which Christ was born. Make particular reference to the people.
8. The word 'satisfactory' hints of disappointment. Why were the Magi disappointed?

Stanza 3 *Poem*

9. In stanza three much time has passed and the Magi have returned to their Kingdoms. The narrator (Wise Man) says that he would do it again. Why do you think that this man, who has suffered to much hardship, would be prepared to make the journey again?
10. Why was he no longer at ease from the time that he returned to his Kingdom?
11. What is an 'old dispensation'?
12. He appears to be confused between birth and death. He now sees them as the same thing. Study stanza three and explain what is meant by this.

B.vi The Hippopotamus

questions

And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans.

The broad-backed hippopotamus
Rests on his belly in the mud;
Although he seems so firm to us
He is merely flesh and blood.

Flesh and blood is weak and frail,
Susceptible to nervous shock;
While the true church can never fall
For it is based upon a rock.

The hippo's fearful steps may err
In compassing material ends,
While the True Church may never stir
To gather in its dividends.

The 'potamus can never reach
The mango on the mango-tree;
But fruits of pomegranate and peach
Refresh the Church from over seas.

At mating time the hippo's voice
Betrays inflexions hoarse and odd,
But ever weak we hear rejoice
The Church, at being one with God.

The hippopotamus's day
Is passed in sleep; at night he hunts;
God works in mysterious way-
The Church can sleep and feed at once.

I saw the 'potamus take wing
Ascending from the damp savannas,
And quiring angels round him sing
The praise of God, in loud hosannas.

Blood of the Lamb shall wash him clean
And him shall heavenly arms enfold,
Among the saints he shall be seen
Performing on a harp of gold.

He shall be washed as white as snow,
By all the martyr'd virgins kist,
While the True Church remains below
Wrapt in the old miasmal mist.



The Hippopotamus



T.S. Eliot lost faith in the church in his twenties for a variety of reasons (See biography page for details). When he was about 28 he wrote a poem called *The Hippopotamus* that showed his disillusionment with the church.

The Hippopotamus - Poem

1. What does it mean to seek 'material things'?
2. What 'material things' do you think the Hippopotamus might seek?
3. How is what the hippopotamus seeks different from the tithing the church demands from us? (Tithing is when one gives one tenth of your earnings [particularly farm produce in the old days] to the clergy.)
4. If one reads the first six stanzas of the poem, The tone of the poet is? What does it reveal about the poet's attitude towards the church?
5. Refer to stanza six. Rewrite the last two lines in the stanza so that it is clear what Eliot is trying to reveal about the church.
Note the 'I' at the start of stanza seven. We now realise Eliot is about to put his belief forward.
6. From the last three stanzas quote three images (one from each stanza) that symbolise innocence.
7. Look up the meanings of 'miasmal' in a dictionary. Which meaning best fits Eliot's use of the word?
8. In what ways do you think Eliot is justified in his beliefs. Answer this questions in no more than five lines.