Literature, Creativity and Language Awareness

Geoff Hall

Literature can be taken broadly as an instance of creative language use; for some, in some texts at least, it is the most creative use of language we have. Literature can and does frequently prompt awareness of language. There are evident relations between literature, language awareness and creativity which this chapter attempts to disentangle.

At worst, the language awareness prompted when reading literature is of the difficulty of language as a barrier to understanding, though arguably even that has its educational value and might be exploited by a good teacher. More positively, readers of literature will often report returning to a favourite passage and re-reading to experience again a valued sense of the ‘right words in the right place’. They will quote favourite passages to each other on social media, cutting and pasting to express their own feelings through words of others that have been noticed and remembered as particularly personally meaningful (referred to later in the chapter as ‘resonance’). Thus Rowberry (2016) studies readers sharing Kindle quotations together online. Zwaan (1993) demonstrates empirically that readers reading literature give heightened attention to the surface language features to a greater extent than when reading other text types, and remember precise wordings more accurately. In the same way, as we struggle to express, describe or understand significant experiences in our lives, we will pay particular attention to the exact phrasing chosen, ever conscious of the resistance of language to our desires and intention.

Literature, then, is a privileged place for the conscious examination and communication of significant life experiences through language. Language use in literature can sometimes be felt to matter and be personally engaging. One question arising from all this for the current chapter in this section of the handbook is how far such creativity with language can be taught, or more realistically, what do we know of the role of formal education in supporting, through literature-related activity, the development of valued creativity and language awareness in an individual or group? Literature is already widely taught in various ways after all. Thus a more useful question might be to ask what is the specific value of creative writing classes (CW) or literature study in these respects beyond the anecdotal openings of this chapter? Should creative writing be taught? Some have argued that the creative writing industry, with its
programmes, awards, prizes and academic positions, has impacted negatively on the variety and inventiveness of creative writing over time. Dawson (2005), for example, writes on the history and on-going controversies and general scepticism around creative writing programmes in many university departments still today. Alternatively, do close reading or stylistic approaches informed by linguistics promote language awareness, and beyond that, can such arousals of language awareness be associated with more creativity in language use of some kind? As with CW, we note the hostility to linguistic approaches to literary study in many literature or ‘English’ departments around the world. There is still much resistance to any demystification of R/romantic ideas of the sanctity and genius of creative productivity.

I begin to disentangle all these complicated questions and inter-relations by clarifying the three major terms of the chapter’s title, literature, language awareness and creativity, none of which are entirely straightforward. I then turn to some examples of the three being brought into fruitful dialogue in educational settings. These efforts at raising language awareness through pedagogy are loosely clustered in my account into ‘stylistics’ and ‘creative writing’ sections, with some overlaps also recorded. I close with a brief consideration of some more recent developments in this whole area and possible future trends and developments. Controversies will persist, but they could sometimes be better informed by what is already known of literature, creativity and language awareness.

Definitions and Delimiting the Field

Literature

A broad understanding of literature informs this chapter, according to which literature is not seen as a totally distinct and unique use of language but is rather situated on a continuum from everyday word play, punning etc., to media use, advertising and on to canonical literary texts at the far end of this continuum. Literature is for some at least a prototypical highly valued creative use of language, and is claimed recurrently by educators, writers, or others with investment in the field, to be typically characterized by more creative or more original language use. Linguistic and stylistic analysis has in recent decades given an ever-better knowledge of the extent to which uses of language in literature are distinctive or, rather more accurately, are typically characterized by certain tendencies. To look at the same question from the other end of the telescope (as Biber has done for example through corpus linguistic investigations) is to ask how far certain tendencies in language use, which can be scientifically established, correlate with genres and recognized literary categories such as ‘the novel’, the romance, poetry, the essay and so on (Biber and Conrad, 2001). The answer, again, is that the correlations are there, but there are no clear black and white lines and spaces dividing (say) language use in a novel definitively and unambiguously from language use in a newspaper, only statistical tendencies and probabilities over a number of examples. It does not require much reflection to appreciate that a particular word, phrase or even sentence can occur across a range of different text types. Literature, even broken down into its various genres (epic, drama, romance, prose, poetry), is not a distinct text type identifiable without regard to readership, marketing, publishing history and other such non-linguistic considerations. The idea warrants further clarification in what follows, but literature is finally best understood as a coming together of forms and functions. A reader, critic or
analyst identifies ‘literature’ as a linguistic object, or even the experience of a linguistic artefact, when it is used in certain ways. Indeed, one of the fascinating things about literary text, some have argued (e.g. Carter, 2004), is that it is best characterized as a type of text use whose purpose is not entirely clear, in the way that is different from other written artefacts such as a newspaper (information), tourist guide, tax form or personal letter, yet a literary text is likely to share features with all of these and may even directly incorporate their language, word for word at times, where other non-literary texts tend to be more easily identifiable by specific or even unique linguistic features. Literature reading as an event or practice comes about when literary reading practices are prompted by or seek out texts that tend to contain certain linguistic features such as apparently purposeful repetition, parallelism, foregrounding and deviance and (yet) pragmatically speaking, when the addressee is not always clear, or even the intention of the communication.

Guy Cook’s work is stimulating in this context. He endorses the idea of everyday creativity beyond the literary, for example in his studies of advertising language use (Cook, 2001). At the same time, however, Cook also insists that we do not confuse the value of great literature with that of (say) great advertising copy (Cook, 2011), which ultimately exists to sell or to enhance the aura and desirability of a product or service. There are some extraordinary uses of language, notably in works of literature, which should not be trivialized, according to this view, by placing them too casually on a continuum with uses of language in advertising or in everyday speech. I would tend to agree with the idea of some particularly valuable uses of language. ‘Everyday banter’ does not achieve the condition of ‘art’, as Cook rightly suggests. I similarly invoked the idea of ‘resonance’ earlier to refer to some instances of language use in literary works which at least for some readers (not always the same readers or the same texts, notably) will be noticed, remembered and particularly highly valued as personally ‘significant’. At the same time, I do not fully understand why these experiences are in some way thought to be categorically different from other creative language use. In any case, as Eagleton taught us long ago (1983), valuation of literary texts (‘this is a great use of language’/ ‘a great work of art’) is the point at which enquiry should begin, not stop. Who values this, why, and for what exactly? This will tell us much about who we are and how we have been formed. The fact that valuations of creativity are widely shared across societies at a given time does not make them any less relative to time, place and purposes.

We may begin then from the position that literature is valued creative work in language. The language will often itself be noticed or particularly highly valued, thus raising language awareness of the unusual or unexpected or especially fluent and effective uses to be found, which in turn imply a knowledge of more standard, less salient uses of language. At the same time, it is important to notice also that the language itself may not be the primary reason for valuing the literary work, and in some cases indeed the language is barely noticed, if at all. (Examples in Peplow and Carter, 2014).

**Language Awareness**

Ideas such as ‘resonance’ and the sharing of quotations by ordinary everyday readers of literature are taken from extra-institutional contexts. **Language awareness (LA)** promotion and potential is to be discussed in this chapter mainly in institutional terms, through uses of literature in education. Paradoxes of teaching literature and creativity that I sketched earlier are to be addressed through advocacy of
LA approaches to literary text, including those informed by stylistics, as well as the
texts and opportunities of creative writing classes and programmes and possi-
mentioning that language as well as the
challenges and opportunities of creative writing classes and programmes and possi-
bilities extending beyond these to media writing, and the full range of production and
performance, notably ever more enhanced by the internet.

Svalberg (2016) rightly stresses the remit and ambitions of LA beyond mere knowl-
edge of language however: “LA covers not only language structure and vocabulary but
also, for example, how language works socially and culturally, people’s perceptions of
and beliefs about language, and how languages are taught and learnt” (p. 399). She goes
on to quote van Lier (1995: xi): “[LA] can be defined as an understanding of the human
faculty of language and its role in thinking, learning and social life. It includes aware-
ness of power and control through language, and the intricate relationships between
language and culture” (quoted by Svalberg, 2016: 400). Svalberg and van Lier see LA
as concerned with learning and about learning how to learn. LA promotes the noticing
of differences “often examining non-standard language, [and gives] young people the
opportunity to reflect on their own language, including identity issues and the effect of
linguistic choices” (p. 402). LA in this wider view promotes attention to and changes
in attitudes (‘education’ can itself be understood in precisely those terms). LA should
direct attention to metalinguistics, bilingualism, multilingualism, problem-solving
skills, and creativity. Learning about languages of others in this view is as important as
learning others’ languages. Again, I would suggest that literary texts can be and indeed
often are, used centrally to pursue all these aims and concerns. The language of litera-
ture, in English at least, is often innovative, typically mixes standard and non-standard
(Adamson, 1998) and increasingly uses mixed codes and international and rapidly shift-
ing forms and modes. In this contemporary environment Blommaert (2010), among
others, suggests the nature of ‘a language’, rather than the reality of creative everyday
‘languaging’ by users, is increasingly problematic. Our understanding of ourselves and
others and issues of culture and communication are regular concerns of literary writ-
ers and performers. Awareness is generally argued to be a central feature of progressive
approaches to education where learners are encouraged to take their own decisions and
directions, creatively.

Creativity

Contemporary views of creativity view it as an activity or event rather than a reified
thing. Thus what is defined or valued as creativity is to some degree defined by those
with some power or persuasive resource in a particular group or society ascribing cre-
ative value to an event or activity. In the case of literature, it means the creativity resides
not so much in the language or other design features of a literary text itself, as in the
interaction of readers or audiences with a text likely to possess more of certain fore-
grounded or patterned features as already suggested. A new connection, a new way to
consider some aspect of reality already believed known or understood, or engaging new
variations on an old theme, will be found by influential modern readers to be notable
and valued literary creativity. Thus prestigious literature prizes are awarded by inter-
national committees for ‘originality’ (Man Booker Prize) as a prime criterion of liter-
ary excellence. Without on-going innovation and variety, art (just as language) would
not survive. Creativity is a pervasive fact, as are the struggles around which creativities
are to be valued and will survive and which will be ignored, repressed or forgotten
(Bakhtin, 1981). Swann (2016) usefully reminds us also that readers of literature are
creative in their responses. To understand a text is to know what you can ‘do’ with it, what it means to you, how it can help you think and see more than you could before reading it, and typically this is done creatively as in reading groups or online interaction. Once again it may be seen that creativity is not a property or possession of an individual or of a text but a jointly constructed emergent social phenomenon.

Boden (2003) may finally be instanced in this section for distinguishing three major varieties of creative activity valued in modern societies as combinatorial (new combinations of known elements), exploratory (taking existing ideas or practices further) and transformational (a new practice or idea which completely changes previous understandings or practices). I would submit that literary texts can both illustrate and prompt reflection as well as practice in all these three areas of creativity.

**Literary and Linguistic Creativity**

Language use in literature has often been taken as or argued to be particularly creative, as already indicated. Roman Jakobson, the founder for many of modern western stylistics in his important essay ‘Linguistics and Poetics’ (1960), argued that ‘poetic’ text, or poetic language use, is to be identified as exactly that which draws attention to itself, where the words and structures used are in some way unusual and different (creative), and inseparable from the meaning communicated, or indeed where linguistic form can sometimes take precedence over meaning, so that the words come first for a writer and sometimes even for the reader too. T. S. Eliot famously observed that: “Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood”. It is significant that this observation of Eliot’s is itself still so widely remembered, quoted and approved on Google and social media as well as in the seminar room; in many cases, no doubt, by those who have never read the original essay in full or not recently. It has resonance, if I may use that term again. The idea of communication without understanding initially is strange, but can be grasped and appreciated after a pause for reflection. Readers who quote Eliot (including me) recognize their own significant experience in that collection of words. Elsewhere, creative writers will report language leading their thought rather than, more conventionally, language being expected to be used to express pre-existing thoughts. The function of literature is to take a reader outside their own habitual zones of perception and understanding, and the way the language is organized can prompt and facilitate that aim. Literary language use, in other words, itself creative, will tend in turn to prompt new ideas and perceptions, what might be termed approximately, ‘responsive creativity’: Why is something like this? Does it have to be like this? Could it not be other than this? (In the Eliot example, Do I need to re-examine my commonsense notion of ‘communication’?)

Cognitively, the effects of unusual language use referred to by Jakobson came to be known as ‘foregrounding’ through ‘deviant’ language (Gregoriou, 2014). A background is that which is not noticed or given attention; a foreground stands out against a background. Internal foregrounding can be language unusual in this particular context, for example a single use of a past simple tense when the narrative until then had been using a progressive –ing form suggests something more important is about to be reported; or colloquial style when language in the text until then was all more formal or standard. Repetition of a word or phrase will come to be noticed and expected to be significant in a work of literature, rather than just poor writing. (See Toolan, 2012.) External foregrounding is when the language is not what would be expected from
norms set by an outside context, for example historical dissonance (‘people at that time wouldn’t have used that expression’ would be an example of such ‘dissonance’; Leech (2008) explains more fully with examples.) “One thing worth highlighting … is that norm violation rarely occurs on one linguistic level alone, but mostly takes place on a number of different levels simultaneously…” (Gregoriou, 2014: 94).

An important precursor of Jakobson’s ideas on poetic language was Shklovsky’s suggestive and influential earlier 20th-century idea of ‘defamiliarization’ (ostranenie). He argues for literature as characterized by “material obviously created to remove the automatism of perception” (my italic). This works, Shklovsky proposes, because “perception is impeded” resulting in “slowness of perception”, “lingering” on the newly strange words (Shklovsky, 1965: 27). Interestingly, empirical studies of actual readers reading foregrounded passages, and passages reported meaningful to them, confirm that passages identifiable as linguistically deviant or foregrounded are indeed often read more slowly, given more attention and (so) more likely to be remembered and valued. What is found salient will vary across time and place and between individuals, but it is also noticeable, sometimes quite remarkable, how often perceptions of salience or ‘foregrounding’ effect, coincide (van Peer, 1986; Miall and Kuiken, 1994; Zwaan, 1993). In this instance a key tenet of stylistics – the perceptibility of poetic language use – can be empirically demonstrated and brought to the attention of readers.

In Cook (1994), with its illuminating subtitle, ‘The interplay of form and mind’, literature is seen in cognitive terms as ‘refreshing schemas’ of readers. The idea of ‘refreshment’ is in the tradition of Russian Formalism, which celebrates ‘defamiliarization’ – to perceive the stone as ‘stony’ again and the like (note the word coinage needed to express an unusual idea): “People who live by the sea no longer hear the sound of the waves” in the words of Shklovsky (1965). Jeffries (2001) and Hall (1996) have expressed reservations around the idea that ‘the new’ will always remain new, which seems both theoretically counter-intuitive as well as not quite capturing everyday experience of re-reading classic literature. What is valued on a first reading will not be exactly what is valued on a second reading, and also the earlier readings inescapably become part of the later reading experiences. I would argue that the objectives of modernist literature are being extrapolated and generalized anachronistically back over the literature of earlier eras when such refreshment was not the primary function of literature. Readers of popular literature are not always looking for such intellectual disruption; they also seek escape or relaxation (see for example Gavins, 2013). Similarly, readers report noticing different features on re-reading than when they first read a poem or a novel. Creativity, then, here as usually elsewhere now, is to be operationalized as valued innovation, unexpected or unusual new connections, linguistic connections to be found in more literary texts in this case or new or refreshed ways of seeing and understanding prompted by unusual language use – but always in a context. The creative, the novel and the valued are not always the same for all people at all times, but they are often, though certainly not exclusively, found in literary texts.

Everyday linguistic creativity (Carter, 2004) and more highly valued linguistic creativity in literary texts are on a continuum as has been stated and argued by Carter across a range of publications. Creativity and variation are basic facts of everyday language use as evidenced in the fact that languages are always changing as they are used. No language is ever finally fixed until it is dead, and even then (as with Latin) the arguments go on. As Cook (2011) rightly asked, however, where and how do clever uses of language attain greater literary significance? Is a nursery rhyme literature? A tale by
Beatrix Potter? Harry Potter novels? Children’s literature is an interesting example of a body of texts that an earlier generation of scholars would not have admitted to the sanctum of literature but that are now studied with the reverence previously reserved for Shakespeare. The body of drama and poetry attributed to Shakespeare was not of course itself initially taken seriously as literature either. These debates over the canonical, what is to be valued and should be read and taught are on-going and will never finally be settled because value matters to people, by definition. What is valued, however, will change over time and space and according to all the human and societal variables. Literature is a communicative act in a cultural context. Value has to be ascribed by someone and maintained by institutions like education or publishing, textbooks, curriculum designers, prize committees or the media, often all working together. In modern western traditions, written literary language is more valued than spoken but of course many of the patterns and devices to be found in written language use are just as prevalent and sometimes even more obvious in spoken creative art (see Bauman, 1984, or Finnegans, 1977). Creativity, like literariness, is socially and culturally relative. Innovation that is not valued by those in positions of power is not found creative and will disappear or at least lie dormant till more favourable conditions develop in which the value of the innovation can be recognized.

**Literary Linguistic Creativity in Education**

**Stylistics and Linguistic Approaches to Literature in Education**

Literature is traditionally taught in schools and universities in ways that tend to marginalize the language if not the literary text(s) in question in favour of larger questions of contextualization, whether historical or generic (the history of the novel, or the place of a work in an author’s oeuvre, issues of power and gender and so on). Where language is noticed at all, it is noticed and discussed incidentally and impressionistically in support of a larger argument and with little if any awareness of linguistics (compare Hall, 2014b; Dawson, 2005). ‘Close reading’ and ‘practical criticism’ were at one time more highly favoured and required closer attention of a kind to the words of some selected canonical texts. The method was notably popular and successful in schools. Ultimately, however, such close reading was found to be too blinkered ideologically, and impressionistic (it was never informed by any linguistic knowledge) and was overtaken by the ‘theory wars’ in literature departments in the 1980s. Ironically, those such as Eagleton or Belsey who led the charge against such close reading are now foremost among those complaining that students do not read closely enough. Having excluded linguistics and stylistics however as possible legitimate approaches, they have no solutions to offer to the problem they report (Hall, 2014b).

Stylistics is a kind of poetics which asks not so much “what does it mean?” but more “how does it work?” How, for example, are dominant readings arrived at? It does this with an approach informed, sometimes even led, by linguistics. A stylistician may notice a linguistic feature being used and pursue this line, ‘bottom up’, which may in turn ultimately influence the meanings taken more globally; equally legitimate in the field is to begin with an interpretation and to try to trace how the language of the text contributes to the meanings that have been taken. In the last 20 years or so, stylistics has taken a more discursive turn unnoticed by the critics and theorists, so that issues of genre, history and reception are seen to be relevant to a stylistic description (Hall, 2014b).
Just as creative writing needs to move from formalism for its own sake to contextualized understanding of formal decisions, from text to discourse as it might be expressed, so previously formalist stylistics in recent times has expanded its descriptive horizons into more ambitious modelling of actual rather than idealized literary communication, whether through the hypothesized “text worlds” of cognitive poetics (Gavins, 2007) or studies of actual readers reading rather than idealized imagined models of ‘the reader’. (See Swann and Allington, 2009).

Stylistic study raises awareness of foregrounding of language as a characteristic feature of literary texts, through repetition, parallelism or deviance. Beyond this, it models and describes the importance of readers and reception to ascription of literary value to language uses. Current stylistics research is very much concerned with the extent to which formal features contribute to ascribed value of texts, but necessarily includes literature reading research as well (Swann and Allington, 2009; Peplow and Carter, 2014). Literary texts are demonstrably rich in a wider range of language features than found in probably any other instances of language use, e.g. ‘the novel’ (sic, Bakhtin, 1981) incorporation of variety, registers, genre, as well as generally increasingly ‘novelised’ and vernacularized forms of modern literature is a distinguishing if not defining feature. Standard and non-standard language forms and uses are brought into mutual interrogation, as Bakhtin had suggested from his own limited studies of Dostoevsky in particular. Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are not unique to literature but very much intrinsic to how modern literature works. Such texts can be of the greatest value to the language awareness development of readers, particularly if awareness can be made more conscious, more consciously examined, and explored in class and through assignments.

Teaching of literature in schools and even higher education is increasingly interactive, in line originally with reader response theory and pedagogies, and since then with the rise of language and communication studies in language arts and broader humanities curriculums. Techniques of investigation of literary and linguistic texts are ever-more interventionist, enabled by technology as well as prompted by the educational desire to understand better how the text in question works, how it emerged and how it might be used or not (why not?) in future, and how else it might have been done. There is access to ever-more information in the form of drafts and working notes, and sources that can be investigated by students help inform a notion of a text as a rather contingent and provisional formation in response to various contingencies, a set of more or less finally convincing choices. Interventions by educationists such as Rob Pope (1995) with his pedagogy of ‘transformations’, rewritings and other active interactions with and interrogations of texts, have been important models for the development of new ‘English’ pedagogies bringing together literary and linguistic studies and creative writing. This ‘taking down from the pedestal’ can ultimately increase respect for the ‘classic’; strong writing should not fear analytic examination to see what exactly is unusual or special about it. Elsewhere and more recently, Jeremy Scott (2013, 2014) has explained and shown how and why stylistics and creative writing pedagogies can be usefully brought into dialogue, the key issue or proposal of my own next section.

Creative Writing Programmes and Methodologies

Understanding of literature is increasingly taking place in creative writing (CW) classes and related activities that have proved very popular in recent years. Attempts to write or
use language creatively will in themselves prompt greater language awareness. Beyond this, creative writing classes will be more effective and prompt more reflection where informed by awareness of how authors in previous ages and genres have innovated and chosen to create new forms and messages. The study of stylistic and narratological issues such as genre, register, style, voice, point of view, irony, free indirect speech and the whole range of such topics are seen to have a sharp new relevance rather than to be arid subjects of study for their own sake, much as rhetoric was once studied by those who would need to speak in public on important and contentious issues. Here stylistics and creative writing begin to join up in their concerns.

Thus, creative writing classes, like stylistics classes, will typically take a text and ask “how does this mean?” rather than “what does this mean?” The main interest is in techniques and devices that aspiring or developing writers need to be aware of, what I have called ‘poetics’. But usually, and this is predictably odd to the stylistician, with no recognition of the work that has been done in stylistics. Dawson’s (2005) chapter 3 gives a useful overview of characteristic concerns and procedures of CW teaching, which include no recognition or apparent awareness of this close cognate discipline. In a CW workshop, there will be more discussion of construction and design than in a typical literature class, but the frame is typically narratological (‘showing vs. telling’ is a preoccupation for example; plot; or who speaks vs. who sees?). At best, the references to language will be incidental, as in the typical literature class, and of a very general commonsense nature (‘too many adjectives’, ‘use simpler language’). To caricature a little, and to risk a kind of positivist provocation, the approach is to see writing as a craft, improved mainly by critical reading and workshops with other writers, rather than to employ any insights from a more scientific or objective approach, which can make finer distinctions and replace impressions and speculations with more reliable findings. If the mainstream literature class is sometimes found to over-theorize texts at the expense of the ‘words on the page’, creative writing classes will tend to tip in the opposite direction, to under-theorize in the sense that broader and deeper understandings of issues like point of view or diachronic changes in literary texts could be developed beyond what might otherwise be understood as rather unmotivated individual choices. Language, as in literary studies, is rather taken for granted and its description and analysis taken as unproblematic.

The value of the CW class is to raise awareness of a writer making conscious or less conscious choices. ‘Writerly reading’ is rightly encouraged where more literary reading tends to look through the writing rather than at it. Read to learn how to do it and what can be done and what effects available choices may have. All this raises awareness of writing as a creative process rather than a product, which is sometimes the implicit attitude of traditional literary study. In terms of creativity, divergent thinking should be encouraged by good creative writing teaching; there are other possible options, combinations, permutations to be explored, other ways to do it. Beyond this there is the more obvious value of CW as learning-by-doing, coming to appreciate literature ‘from the inside out’ as some of its practitioners have it. Those who have tried to write worthwhile stories, poems or dramas themselves, it is argued, will be in a better position to appreciate the skills and value of works by more accomplished writers and producers. This is surely right. (See also Pope, 1995, for example, for this orthodox view from CW). As such CW seems to fit all the requirements for creativity outlined in my opening definition as raising larger issues around creative language use and progressive education.
As education, nevertheless, indeed as an LA activity, it may be felt that the missing dimension in this kind of apprenticeship model of learning is a more explicit and elaborated understanding of the choices found and taught. What seems to be needed is an additional dimension of both theory on the one hand, and the added precision and insight which a more systematic informed approach to the language (stylistics) could bring. Dawson (2005) gives the example of ‘voice’ as the key but under-theorized concern of many CW classes (finding the author’s own unique and individual voice as a writer) which seems rather a pre-theoretical idea, as if post-structuralism and related problematizations of identity had never happened. Stylistics, for its part, would help investigation of how a ‘voice’ is linguistically constructed and perceived by readers, and so can be varied from one work to another, from one purpose to another. ‘Creativity’ understood as ‘self-expression’ is part of the explanation for the suspicion of academics toward CW programmes as well as the defensive isolationist or exceptionalist positions often taken by CW programmes and appointees. The value of Theory for CW programmes as they first appeared was to open up issues of ‘writing’ and why some kinds or instances of writing are valued over others. The challenge, still not fully taken on, was to raise issues such as the notorious ‘death of the author’ in a linguistic turn in which neither Theory nor CW wishes to consider the possible contribution of linguistics. (Hall (2015a) addresses the issue of stylistics and Theory.)

What is beyond doubt is the large and seemingly increasing popular demand for CW education, a demand that universities, particularly arts and humanities sections, cannot ignore in the era of marketization when student fees are ever more crucial to their survival, even as governments and funding bodies ask for evidence of social inclusion and outreach and ‘impact’. Graeme Harper, for example, leader of CW at Oakland University in Michigan, editor of various CW series and textbooks as well as of the International Journal for the Theory and Practice of Creative Writing, reported numbers in the UK in an article for Text as 140 undergraduate programmes, more than 70 Masters courses and around 20 PhD programmes (Harper, 2003; cited in Dawson, 2005: 158). A real strength of CW historically is its link to progressive ideas of education and democratization to encourage every individual to contribute. All can (in literate modern societies) read and have an opinion on a literary work. At the same time, this is a paradoxical double challenge for CW programmes whereby intellectual respectability in educational contexts is difficult to attain if academic training and knowledge is not seen as very necessary. Yet at the same time, going down the road of more intellectualized CW provokes charges of distorting or skewing the kind of writing that gets produced in ultimately unproductive and limiting ways.

I would suggest that literariness is itself a valuable object of inquiry for students at all levels, whether initially approached through stylistics or CW, and the relation of literary or indeed any instances of creativity to language use are very much the concern of this chapter with many difficult and intriguing but very approachable issues to attract and encourage an inquiring mind. CW, like stylistics and LA more generally, can undoubtedly develop and sharpen reading and writing skills as well, however challenging this can be to prove definitively and empirically in a way that will always satisfy the inspectors.

One of the most highly valued poets in English syllabuses still – as well as for many educated readers – is the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. It is thought-provoking to read in biographies how Hopkins as a young boy loved to play with language forms with his family in parlour games. We can read some of these experimental
metalinguistic manipulations for ourselves in his notebooks that survive, as well as a very active interest in dialectal variation and neologism. His father was a regular contributor of crosswords to *The Times*, widely thought to be one of the most demanding and sophisticated of its genre then as now. Later, as the collected poems of Hopkins show, he deliberately wrote poems ‘in the style of’ Keats, Tennyson (who had done the same thing himself) and other prominent poets of the day, sometimes as parody, at others in all seriousness (White, 1992). In many ways he was giving himself a CW education before the idea as we know it today had been elaborated. The outcomes include some of the most creative and innovative experimental verse ever to be published to such acclaim – eventually. Such a degree of innovation was too hard for his first readers. Hopkins’ poetry is one of Jakobson’s favoured examples of the prominence and importance of language forms that draw attention to themselves in poetry. Indeed, his poetry often “communicates before it is understood”. Another great poet of that generation, Christina Rossetti, as a child joined or led family games including her later equally famous brother Dante, with acrostics and the like with a deliberate learning and use of genres with demanding rules, not just sonnets, but villanelles and others, forms clearly still in use in her most mature work (Marsh, 1995). The family habitually switched from Italian to English and back again. A later instance of a poet who could find such demanding constraints creatively enabling was Dylan Thomas, for example in the formally highly conventional and difficult but resonant and repetitive poem, ‘And death shall have no dominion’. Such revealing information from biographies and notebooks, drafts, versions and other working documents are ever more easily accessible, particularly with 20th-century writers and digitized archives. These make ideal sites for students to investigate and become more aware of literary text as process, and the finally rather contingent and provisional nature of documents once respected as final and perfect. “A poem is never finished, only abandoned”, in Ezra Pound’s well-known formulation.

In second language pedagogy, stylistics (Hall, 2015b) and creative writing (Spiro, 2004; 2006; Hanauer, 2014) are becoming standard and favoured approaches by educators at various levels (Hall, 2015b) in line with ideas from second language acquisition research of the importance of noticing forms, and then taking possession of them for the language user’s own purpose. McKay (2014) gives an excellent first overview of why and how to use literary texts with second or foreign language learners: “Because in literary texts form is essential to meaning, literary texts provide an excellent vehicle for developing students’ language awareness” (p. 499). Beyond linguistic affordances for learning and other advantages, McKay in the same chapter also points to the value of literary texts for raising learners’ wider awareness of ideology and cultural differences which need to be noticed and discussed in language learning classrooms.

Mansoor (2013) gives an example of CW in English classes in Pakistan building the confidence and fluency of second language learners, particularly with regard to their own variety of English, by using accomplished texts of internationally successful Pakistani English language writers.

**New Departures**

Literature itself is becoming less of an icon to respect passively from afar and more an on-going field of activities even as the ways in which it is studied are increasingly varied. Revisions, translations (literal or figurative), transformations and adaptations
can raise issues of the role and contribution of linguistic creativity to wider creative activities and performances. The internet prompts ever-more fluid multimodal language and communication awareness as well as making possible the study of recordings, transcripts, but also performances for YouTube or similar, blogs and the construction of websites, links and contributions to exchanges through social media. Versioning of classic or less established texts is just a few creative clicks away – as are boring or offensive failures. Both outcomes can become part of the reflective field of linguistic creativity and language awareness. Corpus linguistic technology can bring new and much better informed depth and breadth of analytic understanding to issues such as ‘deviance’, ‘standard’ language and repetition and variation, with software ever easier to manage. Thus new life is breathed into even the oldest of stylistic questions and insights into the workings of creative language use – the nature and value of genre, of formulaic literature and what constitutes a valid aesthetic experience for who.

Adaptations (Sanders, 2015) considers the ‘versioning’ by which (for example) the classic Victorian story *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* [1865] (Gardner, 2001) morphs from story to comic strip to internet game to dance to theatre and film and so on, with each new variation making new emphases and insights possible as well as closing down other possibilities deriving from other forms, all of which can prompt language awareness in both narrower and more wide-ranging senses. The point is not so much to evaluate as to study how form makes a difference to what can be said and done, how language use and communication is changing and where this leaves notions of literary creativity. Elsewhere Jenkins (2007) leads a movement to investigate ‘transmedia’ narratives, the idea that elements of a narrative are dispersed across differing media and collectively composed and elaborated in new ways being enabled by the internet in particular now:

Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story [and each can stand alone]. So, for example, in *The Matrix* franchise, key bits of information are conveyed through three live action films, a series of animated shorts, two collections of comic book stories, and several video games. There is no one single source or ur-text where one can turn to gain all of the information needed to comprehend the *Matrix* universe.

Jenkins, 2007

The way narratives on the internet work and are read is examined and claimed to be different but to hold great stylistic potential by Trimarco (2014). The point of looking at any or all of these innovations is that these new ways of storytelling and literature creation offer more engaging and motivating data for language awareness and creativity work in formal education as well as out. O’Halloran (2015) has shown the potential of ‘film poems’ for stylistic investigation, reflection and argumentation even as students can be very actively engaged in creating these texts. Janice Bland (Bland, 2013; Bland and Lütge, 2013) and colleagues have led workshops and other teacher and education events in Germany and other countries to show the potential of picturebooks, graphic novels, manga, and other new literacies and technoliteracies for English language learning with younger learners in particular. The nature of ‘literature’ and the paths for critical and
creative activity are changing, and arguably in exciting new ways. Only a few indications of such developments are offered here.

I return in closing to Guy Cook’s important challenge to those who would insist on the ‘ordinariness’ rather than the extraordinary qualities of literary communication. The function of literature in my experience, and that of many others who value it, is indeed to change and challenge our ideas and beliefs, or even to confront us uncomfortably at times with aspects of ourselves or our worlds we would probably prefer not to think about. Thus, to return to where we started, literature can be an excellent, even pre-eminent, vehicle for raising awareness of language and more through its creative practices.

Related Topics
Multilingualism; new media; form focused instruction; critical literacies; metalinguistics

References


