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Dear Readers,

Those of you who follow the BETA E-Newsletter regularly will easily find the common thread in this issue – all the articles have a strong practical focus, and have been published in the newsletter over the last four years.

As usual, we start with an engaging read by Bill Templer. Throughout the years, Bill has been leading us on a fascinating journey though American short fiction, suggesting ways to use it to teach both English and global issues. Once again, enjoy Bill’s exploration of *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry (first published in issue 31).

Next, we continue with the lesson plan that won the 8th round of BETA Competition – Reneta Stoimenova’s ‘It Can Take No Tech to Kill a Mockingbird’, published in issue 27. It is followed by several articles by teachers based outside Bulgaria: Emilija Stojanovska’s account of how her work as a mentor enriched her classroom (issue 22); Renate Krivec’s recipe for developing her students’ writing skills (issue 20); Niovi Hatzinikolaou’s description of her use of authentic materials to make lessons more efficient and fun (issue 20); and Andy Thatcher’s ‘Creative Liberation through Creative Limitation’ with lots of ideas for teaching writing (issue 12).
In the final article of this issue, Christopher Buxton compares Bulgarian and British war poems and reminds us of the potential of poetry for boosting language skills (issue 26). The poetic mood continues in the poetry corner, where David Singleton offers us a few moments of delight with his *Gnosis*.

In the concluding pages, you can find details about forthcoming ELT events, and the e-newsletter contribution guidelines.

This issue marks the end of my work as BETA editor. The BETA E-Newsletter has been a labour of love, and I hope it has been useful. Heartfelt thanks to Bill Templer, whose expertise, passion and determination have been an example to follow, to Tanya Bikova for all her energy and dedication, and to Sylvia Velikova, a true friend with whom I shared this journey. Also, warm thanks to those of you who have sent interesting, meaningful contributions and thus enriched the newsletter landscape, and to all who have been with us throughout the years!

Happy reading!

Zarina Markova

Issue Editor
Teaching a Touching Tale about Three Artists: O. Henry’s “The Last Leaf” (1907)

Bill Templer

Bill Templer is a Chicago-born educator, a trained Germanist, sociolinguist and translator, with teaching + research interests in ELF, American Literature, Social Justice Pedagogy, Jewish History and Minority Studies. He has taught English and German at universities in 10 countries over several decades, including those in Shumen, Veliko Turnovo and Svishtov. Bill is active on the GISIG/IATEFL Committee (gisig.iatefl.org), within TaWSIG (www.teachersasworkers.org), and is on the Board of www.jceps.com. He is based in eastern Bulgaria. Email: templerbill@gmail.com

http://goo.gl/s3WHjq

http://goo.gl/ctHpV

Introduction

Among the most popular and moving short stories by O. Henry (William Sidney Porter, 1862-1910) is “The Last Leaf” (1907). It is a tale about friendship and self-sacrifice among struggling artists in Greenwich Village in New York City during the ‘Gilded Age’ around 1900, with a characteristic O. Henry ‘surprise’ ending. This is one of the first short stories by any writer to be set in Greenwich Village, the famous neighborhood of artists and writers in Lower Manhattan. The tale is also the single
story by O. Henry that has led to the most cinematic versions of an O. Henry tale, both in Hollywood (1952) and more recently, available on youtube. O. Henry was very interested in ‘unpredictability’ in our lives, what seems ‘random,’ how it occurs – 100s of his stories hinge on an unexpected sharp turn of events. I will refer below to this “impact of the highly improbable” (Taleb 2010), an intriguing philosophical, existential and also ‘epistemic’ question: i.e. what can we know?

O. Henry’s tale is available online in the original (2,375 words) and also in a greatly simplified version in VOA Special English (1,500 words), both of which will be introduced here. Teachers should read this brief article about the story for orientation, and this introduction. O. Henry moved to New York in 1902, and wrote over 360 short stories there until his death, many set among the ordinary people of New York City at the time. He is likely the only major American fiction writer who spent three years in penitentiary for a quite minor crime. While in Ohio State Penitentiary (1898-1901), writing stories, he adopted the pen name O. Henry, perhaps from Ohio State Penitentiary. Many have called for his pardon, the charge of ‘embezzlement’ of ca. $800 seems ludicrous. As a young man, William worked as a licensed pharmacist in Greensboro/N.C., knowledgeable about illness, perhaps reflected in this tale. The VOA version tests for Flesch-Kinkaied Grade Level at 3.95 and Flesch Reading Ease 84.10, average sentence length of 9.73 words, quite simple—check with this excellent readability tool. By contrast, the original tale is Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 5.40, Flesch Reading Ease 78.91, average no. of words per sentence 12.68. But the core difficulty in the original is the literary lexis.
Mr. Pneumonia

Central to the story is the personification Mr. Pneumonia, a disease that ravaged both rich and many poor in New York and across the United States a century ago (see below). This is a tale about pneumonia, its dangers and victims, still today a killer in the flu epidemics that arise each year, most recently in Australia and New Zealand 2017. That has been the worst flu epidemic those countries have seen in many years, and perhaps a dark harbinger of what is expected in Europe later this year and into 2018. It raises the local question: what do students (and their teachers) really know about Mr. Pneumonia, who strikes ‘at random’?

Working with the Tale

1. Ask students first to look at the image above of an old bearded man. They can discuss in groups of three. What is he doing? Why could he be doing that? What time of day could it be? What do they think the story could be about? They can also describe the second image of the leaf detached yet clinging.

2. Also discuss with students what they know about pneumonia. Perhaps some have a story in their own family or among friends and neighbors.

3. Show students this animated Bedtime Story adapted from the story, in very simple English. It gives the basic plot, and could serve as an introduction even before reading and listening to the story. They can also watch this video summary of the story. Perhaps it is best not to reveal the ‘surprise’ ending too soon.
4. Introduce the story with the simplified VOA version, reading the first sections and also listening to the reading on MP3 provided at the site. There is a detailed lesson plan that teachers can use or adopt: you can decide how to proceed. The lesson plan is based on the CALLA approach, which teachers can familiarize themselves with if they have no experience with that. It has five elements: Prepare / Present / Practice / Self-Evaluate / Expand, also works with a range of metacognitive and task-based strategies explained in the lesson plan. Here several vocabulary flashcards teachers can use and expand on inventively.

5. Students at higher intermediate level can also read the original version, and listen to a reading of that version. Here another illustrated version with a reading.

6. Here some questions and answers re the story; utilize with the lesson plan.

The Characters

The story has three characters, two young female artists Johnsy and her friend Sue, and an older immigrant artist, Mr. Behrman, who lives downstairs of them. How long have Johnsy and Sue known each other? Where do they come from in the United States? What has attracted them to New York, and why Greenwich Village? They met by chance, where and how (see original tale)? What is Johnsy’s problem? Do the women have family nearby, or perhaps a boyfriend? What is their relationship with Behrman? Does he have any family, a wife, a son or daughter? As you read the story you will see he speaks a strange ‘immigrant’ English. Where could he be from? Is he a successful painter? Do they live, like many artists, in relative poverty, perhaps isolation, loneliness? There is another important character in the story, the doctor. What role does he play?
Ask students to look at the still photo below from the 1952 Hollywood film of the story, starring Anne Baxter as Johnsy and Jean Peters as her friend Sue, both famous actresses. What can we see? What is on the wall? Anne Baxter (Johnsy) is lying in bed, looking away – at what? What is the totally ‘improbable’ and unexpected ending of the tale? Does the story have a ‘message,’ ethical or other?

http://goo.gl/1y9XKA

The Impact of the Unpredictable

Ask students to ponder the role of chance, randomness and the unpredictable in this story. It is also a huge fascinating factor in our own lives, and in human history on the planet (Taleb 2010). For example, Sue and Johnsy meet by chance, i.e. happenstance, at a restaurant. As the original tale notes: the girls “found their tastes in art, chicory salad and bishop sleeves so congenial that the joint studio resulted”—i.e. they by chance discover that they share as young lonely artists their rather ‘random’ tastes in painting, simple cheap food and full-sleeved blouses. Sue is from Maine and Johnsy from California, the two furthest states from each other in the continental 48 states. This difference is important because Johnsy is unaccustomed to the harsh cold winters of New York. Sue, from Maine, is hardened to sub-freezing weather. This will play an ‘unexpected’ role in the
story. They find an apartment, by chance. By chance, downstairs lives an elderly artist Behrman. Johnsy falls ill, again by fateful chance, with pneumonia. The doctor tells Sue: “She has one chance in - let us say, ten,’ he said, as he shook down the mercury in his clinical thermometer. ‘And that chance is for her to want to live.’” So this is the dimension of ‘chance,’ what is fortuitous. For the doctor, her survival is dependent on her basic will to survive. There are other unpredictables in the story, but the truly ‘improbable’ is the tale’s startling end, the ‘leaf’ that does not fall from the vine, thus ‘saving’ Johnsy’s life (and in effect taking Behrman’s life as he falls fatally ill). This ending is a total ‘outlier,’ “as it lies outside the realm of regular expectations, because nothing in the past can convincingly point to its possibility” (Taleb 2010: xxii). O. Henry, of course, explains this “leaf,” it is the product of Behrman’s decision, making it explainable after the fact. Otherwise, with no explanation, it might become a kind of ‘miracle,’ perhaps the work of a ‘guardian angel.’ Taleb analyzes such events that are rare, highly improbable and with an extreme impact (yet retrospectively ‘explainable’ by human reason) as ‘Black Swans.’ He observes: “A small number of Black Swans explain almost everything in our world, religions, to the dynamics of historical events, to elements of our own personal lives” (Taleb: ibid.). Ask students to ponder how the unpredictable plays a role in their own personal lives, in fact in some ways on a daily basis: accidents, chance encounters, totally new ideas. Daily news is full of such Black Swans, like hurricanes, wildfires in California and their terrible destruction, wars no one could predict, terrorist attacks, on and on. But in terms of the role of chance, randomness and unpredictability in human life, we ourselves are all unique beings, the product of chance marriages between people who became our parents. This is not a Black Swan in the strict sense, but indeed reflects the role of chance in much of what we are, and do, and hope to achieve. Teachers can also ponder this about their lives. As Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2010:
xxiii) stresses: “Look into your own existence. Count the significant events, the technological changes, and the inventions that have taken place in our environment since you were born and compare them to what was expected before their advent. How many of them came on a schedule? Look into your own personal life, to your choice of profession, say, or meeting your mate [...] How often did these things occur according to plan?” The events in November 1989 in Bulgaria were clearly an iconic ‘outlier’ and Black Swan Event. This also raises basic questions about what is ‘knowledge.’ As Taleb (ibid.) contends: “Black Swan logic makes what you don’t know far more relevant than what you do know.” We navigate in a kind of fundamental “epistemic opacity” (Taleb, ibid.: 302). He notes: “An epistemocrat is someone of epistemic humility, who holds his own knowledge in greatest suspicion” (ibid.).

Comparing the Two Versions

Here the beginning in the simple version: “Many artists lived in the Greenwich Village area of New York. Two young women named Sue and Johnsy shared a studio apartment at the top of a three-story building. Johnsy's real name was Joanna.”

Here the first sentences of the original’s beginning, much longer: “In a little district west of Washington Square the streets have run crazy and broken themselves into small strips called ‘places.’ These ‘places’ make strange angles and curves. One Street crosses itself a time or two. [...] So, to quaint old Greenwich Village the art people soon came prowling, hunting for north windows and eighteenth-century gables and Dutch attics and low rents. ...”
O. Henry’s very literary beginning describes the strange streets of Greenwich Village, many unlike streets anywhere else in New York City, curving even back into themselves here and there. So this special architecture of the cityscape there, the old streets, many with cobblestones (as still in some Bulgarian cities, like Shumen), attracted artists, in fact from the 1860s, to settle there. The simplified tale continues: “In November, a cold, unseen stranger came to visit the city. This disease, pneumonia, killed many people. Johnsy lay on her bed, hardly moving. She looked through the small window. She could see the side of the brick house next to her building.”

The original is much more elaborated: “That was in May. In November a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia, stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with his icy fingers. Over on the east side this ravager strode boldly, smiting his victims by scores, but his feet trod slowly through the maze of the narrow and moss-grown ‘places.’ Mr. Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman. A mite of a little woman with blood thinned by California zephyrs was hardly fair game for the red-fisted, short-breathed old duffer. But Johnsy he smote; and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead, looking through the small Dutch window-panes at the blank side of the next brick house.” No real view at all: but by chance a vine is growing up that wall, and plays a fateful role in the tale.

Students can compare the many differences in the description, the very literary vocabulary of the original, verbs like ‘smite,’ ‘trod’ and ‘strode,’ adjectives such as ‘quaint,’ ‘chivalric,’ nouns like ‘zephyrs,’ ‘duffer,’ ‘mite.’ Working in small groups, students can note what ‘hard,’ low-frequency words have been eliminated or rephrased in the VOA rendering. Ask students who are advanced beginners and
perhaps at lower intermediate level to search for seven words in the original story whose meaning they don’t know. O. Henry enjoyed using many similes, metaphors, frequent figurative language; most such figurative expressions have been removed in the simpler downshifted version. Teachers with students at advanced elementary (A-2) or low-intermediate level (B-1) can concentrate on the fine simplified version of the story, since the original is lexically quite complex.

**Discussion Points Galore**

Looking out the window at the blank brick wall and dying vine, its leaves falling, Johnsy begins to identify with the plant as a kind of icon of her own situation. She thinks she will die when the last leaf falls. It is some kind of supernatural sign. This seems foolish in the eyes of the doctor, Sue, and especially old man Behrman, but they understand it is hard to convince Johnsy that is a silly notion. Her mind has been affected by the illness, she just wants to die. She says: “I'm tired of waiting. I'm tired of thinking. I want to turn loose my hold on everything, and go sailing down, down, just like one of those poor, tired leaves." She is resigned to dying and very weary of her illness. Perhaps students know of people who believe in various ‘signs’ that something will happen, a kind of popular superstition about what we can know, ‘supernatural epistemics.’ Or something that if you do it, will bring you ‘bad luck.’ The tale has a message about the ‘will to live,’ which we all need. As a pharmacist, O. Henry knew the limitations of the ‘pharmacopoeia’ to heal.

O. Henry does not tell us much about the immigrant ‘failed’ artist Behrman. He seems to speak a kind of Germanized English. He may stem from Germany. He cannot sell any paintings and perhaps drinks too much gin, alluded to by mention of the smell of juniper berries he exuded. His family name is also a quite common
Jewish family name, sometimes spelled Berman. O. Henry probably knew this, but he mentions nothing about this poor older immigrant’s background. How does he survive if he cannot sell what he paints, or cannot in fact paint much at all? In the story, Sue sketches to sell drawings to a magazine for a few meager dollars and asks Behrman to pose, he finally agrees. In some way Behrman may silently adore the girls as if they were his own two daughters. In the end, saying nothing, he goes out into a cold and rainy night to paint a small leaf high on a brick wall, risking his own health and even his very life. It becomes his final act as a man and as a failed artist, almost a kind of self-sacrifice. What was his motivation? What has been his great dream? Did it in the ironic and tragic, totally ‘unpredictable’ end come true?

Another focus is Behrman’s earlier life. How did he live before the two girls came to live upstairs of him? Did he have a family? Students could write an imaginary ‘autobiography’ of Behrman, perhaps working in groups of three. Was he from a German background, or perhaps Jewish, even a speaker of Yiddish? Why did he emigrate to New York? He has a “Michael Angelo’s ‘Moses’ beard.” This is the statue O. Henry refers to. Although O. Henry could not know, a famous Polish-Jewish painter, Abraham Adolf Behrman (1876-1943) would later gain fame in the 1920s and ‘30s in Poland, and was murdered in a Nazi concentration camp in 1943. Here his striking painting of a ‘Jewish bride’ (1914). One of the biggest Jewish publishing houses in the U.S. is Behrman House. These are associations readers in New York may have today, as did readers a century ago, I am sure.

Students can imagine Johnsy’s life in California before she moved to New York, or Sue’s in Maine. What was it like? How did she decide to become a painter? What is her great dream? They can also imagine or write about what happens after the story ends. Does Johnsy realize her dream to become a successful painter? Does
she go to Italy to paint? Such ‘dreams’ often lead to so many unpredictable events in our own lives and in literature. Do Sue and Johnsy stay together? Johnsy could write a letter to a friend describing her ordeal and ‘incalculable’ ‘1-in-10’ recovery.

Cinematic Adaptations

Teachers can alert students to the various versions of the story in cinematic adaptations, most accessible online. The best-known is in the Hollywood film “O. Henry’s Full House” (1952), based on five of his stories. ‘The Last Leaf’ is dramatized from min. 34:45 to 54:20. There are numerous differences from the original tale, but basically it remains the same. Students can discuss the evident differences. For example, Johnsy is pictured having a quarrel with her boyfriend at the very beginning, and she runs out of his apartment into the cold and stormy night, where she then falls ills with pneumonia. There are three other versions students can watch, enjoy and compare: first perhaps this directed by Matt Gatlin, very close in dialogue and text to the original version. Then there is another version by writer/director Kathleen Weir, set during the great 1919 flu pandemic in New York and across the world. A student film version done in California was recently put online. Students will like another wise animated version of the story from India, inspiring to make ‘one last try.’ There are other versions, including even a very well-produced Mormon ‘Easter parable’ (1984) online — for my own sensibilities far too Christianized, the failed painter as self-sacrificing Savior.

The film “Falling Leaves” (silent, 1912), directed by Alice Guy Blaché, also set in New York City, was partially inspired by O. Henry’s story. Trixie tries to cure the fatal TB (consumption) of her beloved sister Winifred by hanging leaves in the fall garden; then by mere chance she meets a bacteriologist, Dr. Headley, passing by
the house, who can cure her. In the final scene, Winifred may be falling in love with Dr. Headley, and he with her. Ms. Guy Blaché was the first truly famous and influential female film director, who worked in France and the U.S. Here a brief overview on this great filmmaker. Today US showbiz bemoans the striking lack of female film directors. Students can watch “Falling Leaves” and discuss what is being said, what can be seen, the power of silent film to galvanize speaking. Here a slapstick silent film by Alice, “A Sticky Woman” (1906), mayhem in a post office.

**Applying Lexical Frequency Analysis**

Useful for teachers and learners is a frequency analysis from lextutor (see the Appendix) of the original story, there are 163 lexemes (word families) above the K-2 level [], making for much new more difficult vocabulary, including 36 K-4 lexemes, 17 K-5 words, 22 lexemes K-6, 12 lexemes for K-7 and for K-8 level, and even 5 lexemes each for levels K-10, K-11 and K-15. By contrast, the lextutor analysis for the simplified version has only 21 lexemes above K-2 level, including three words at K-6 and two at K-8 level—a huge contrast to the original tale.

Teachers and students should learn to use the lextutor.ca tool for difficulty analysis with a great variety of texts. K-1 comprises the 1,000 most frequent lexemes (corpus-based, here BNC and COCA). Students can also test single lexemes for their level. For example, ‘chivalric’, ‘shaggy’ and ‘swagger’ in the original version are K-9 lexemes; ‘gnarled’ is K-10, ‘quaint’ and ‘jew’s-harp’ are K-7, ‘twang’ (a drawn-out vowel in pronunciation, referring to Sue’s Maine accent) is K-11, the lexeme ‘duffer’ meaning a stupid person is K-15, its synonym ‘dunderhead’ is K-22, as is the odd lexeme ‘flibbertigibbet’ for a silly, terribly talkative person, very low frequency as a lexeme. You can test any single word.’
Exploring O. Henry, His Fiction and Beyond

Students can read about William Sydney Porter, alias O. Henry, his life and work. The Complete Works of O. Henry are online, start browsing. Here another site with biography and 100s of the author’s stories. Here a brief biography. A standard study is Current-Garcia’s (1993). The Hollywood film “O. Henry’s Full House” (1952) is based on five of his stories and can be explored a bit with students, introduced by John Steinbeck. Here O. Henry’s famous collection of tales set in New York The Four Million (1906). A number of O. Henry’s stories are available in VOA Special English, and most of his tales can be found online in the original. He is still a popular writer, and his stories are read in many school syllabi in the U.S. Some students might be encouraged to concentrate on his stories, a good way to learn English by such ‘narrow reading’ of work by a single author (Krashen, 2004) that is actually very broadening. Fresh, inventive approaches to literacy pedagogy are badly needed here in Bulgaria in TEFL and teaching Bulgarian (Novinite, 2016), including far more free voluntary reading (FVR), and extensive reading (Templer, 2012). Ordinary learners, especially in Bulgaria, often from very low-income, modest backgrounds, deserve more options, especially through independent EFL reading, in my view also in native L1 Turkish and Romani, ‘ethnic FVR.’ Templer (2014) introduces one of O. Henry’s most famous stories about Christmas. Templer (2016) discusses a simple X-mas tale “Kin” by the social reformer Jacob Riis, a classic mini-fiction (661 words) about New York poverty on the street at Christmas in the 1890s. Templer (2017) presents another story by O. Henry set in NYC. More generally, here are numerous classic very short stories for American high school students. Many authors’ works are here [not just U.S.]. They can whet students’ appetites for story brevity. There’s an annual O. Henry Award for best short story.
Expanding Into the Historical World

(1) What was and is Greenwich Village, a major spatial focal point in New York and U.S. cultural history? Students can explore the article. Allusions in the story to “Dutch attics” and “small Dutch window-panes” are to NYC’s ‘Dutch’ colonial past.

(2) Gentrification in parts of New York has led to extremely high prices for buying an apartment in Greenwich Village today, for example, where prices can average $23,000 per m². This means that a small 45m² apartment may cost $1,035,000, over a million dollars. Perhaps even something like the studio in the ‘squatty’ 3-floor building that Johnsy, Sue and Behrman lived in over a century ago. See also this overview of real estate in the West Village and NYC today. Students can learn more about the dimensions of gentrification. They can read an article on its effects, numerous downsides. Here the situation in Philadelphia.

(3) Mr. Pneumonia. O. Henry probably knew from direct experience the 1889-90 ‘Russian flu’ pandemic, when many Americans fell ill, developed pneumonia and perished. Pneumonia in the ‘Gilded Age’ was widespread among the poor in slums and tenements across the United States, not just in New York City. The worst flu pandemic in modern history ravaged in 1918-19 across the planet, a super-Black Swan Event, infecting some 500 million persons, of whom some 10-20% died (perhaps 100 million all-told). In the United States, between 500,000 and 675,000 are believed to have died, often from fatal pneumonia. The disease ‘Spanish flu’ appeared in Queens/New York in March 1918, and one of its earliest victims was the grandfather of President Donald Trump, the hotel manager Frederick Trump, who fell suddenly ill in late May 1918 while out walking with his 13-year-old son Fred (Pres. Trump’s father) and died the very next day, aged 49. A serious
influenza pandemic is ‘predicted’ for winter 2017-18 in Europe and N. America following the huge flu epidemic in Australia/NZ. In Britain, the NHS fears “the worst flu season” since 1945, very harsh January 2018 to come. Also be prepared in BG: vaccination, avoid touching metal on buses, soapwash all coins. Beware! But remember: much illness is basically unpredictable, random. We cannot know when and where we may be exposed to a virus or bacterium and if we may fall ill.

References

## Appendix (Lextutor data)

### Original Lextutor THE LAST LEAF

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→163 words [word families] above K-2 (2,000 most common lexemes)
# VOA Special English version

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<th>Freq. Level</th>
<th>Families (%)</th>
<th>Types (%)</th>
<th>Tokens (%)</th>
<th>Cumul. token %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-1 Words</td>
<td>310 (82.67)</td>
<td>394 (82.08)</td>
<td>1334 (88.34)</td>
<td>88.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Words</td>
<td>42 (11.20)</td>
<td>44 (9.17)</td>
<td>61 (4.04)</td>
<td>92.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-3 Words</td>
<td>8 (2.13)</td>
<td>8 (1.67)</td>
<td>11 (0.73)</td>
<td>93.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-4 Words</td>
<td>7 (1.87)</td>
<td>7 (1.46)</td>
<td>12 (0.79)</td>
<td>93.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-5 Words</td>
<td>1 (0.27)</td>
<td>1 (0.21)</td>
<td>5 (0.33)</td>
<td>94.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-6 Words</td>
<td>3 (0.80)</td>
<td>3 (0.62)</td>
<td>6 (0.40)</td>
<td>94.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-7 Words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-8 Words</td>
<td>2 (0.53)</td>
<td>2 (0.42)</td>
<td>7 (0.46)</td>
<td>95.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ 21 words [word families] above K-2
It Can Take No Tech to Kill a Mockingbird

Reneta Stoimenova

In the wake of the 2016 Plovdiv conference and in tribute to Harper Lee, the news of whose sudden death reached me during the preparation of the teaching activity that follows, I would like to share with all those whose heart is in literature my 1st-prize-winning lesson in the 8th round of BETA competition.

Apart from the tape recorder, the teaching strategy deliberately features no technology at all, as can be seen from the youtube video I have uploaded to show the individual stages (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMle5gcZnxE). As well as a non-tech literature lesson, the activity is also designed as open practice, highlighting group work. What you actually need is a working audio device and that one personal Colin Firth that will make you do the rest 😊.

LESSON PLAN

Teacher: RENETA STOIMENOVA

Age of students: 17-year-olds
Level: C1
Lesson: American literature: TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

Teaching aids and materials:
1. Sources: The National Endowments for the Arts Big Read site at: http://www.neabigread.org/books/mockingbird/
2. To Kill a Mockingbird, Reader’s Guide, The Big Read (available at the American Corner)
3. To Kill a Mockingbird, CD, Audio Guide, The Big Read (available at the American Corner)
4. Billie Holiday’s song “Passion Fruit” in interpretation of Nnenna Freelon (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnbsSuybOU0)
5. Harper Lee’s framed picture (see video)
6. Framed picture of the map of the USA (see video)
7. Colour pencils and paper
8. Cultural realia representing different ethnic/religious practices, in my case it was hats, such as:
   a) a Jewish kippa
   b) a Turkish folk cap
   c) modernistic cap sewn from a hand-woven cloth from the Bansko area
   d) a Rastafari hat
9. Handouts - five groups of reading comprehension questions on the articles about:
   a) Harper Lee – short bio
      http://www.neabigread.org/books/mockingbird/readers-guide/about-the-author/
   or
b) Introduction to the book
http://www.neabigread.org/books/mockingbird/readers-guide/

c) The Great Depression

d) The Jim Crow South
http://www.neabigread.org/books/mockingbird/readers-guide/historical-context/

e) The Civil Rights Movement

10. A set of listening comprehension questions on track #2 from the CD in 3.

11. Homemade American breakfast biscuits and the respective recipe.

12. The eponymous film

For individual preparation of the teacher:

13. USA’s Southern States:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antebellum_South#Antebellum_era_.281781.E2.80.931860.29

14. Causes of the Civil War:
http://www.historynet.com/causes-of-the-civil-war

15. Black Leaders During Reconstruction:
http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/black-leaders-during-reconstruction

Background of the learners:

Twenty Mitropolit Andrey Foreign Language School 12-graders, with intensive study of English as a first foreign language, in their American literature class.
Main aim:
The aim of the lesson is two-fold:
1. To introduce the students to Harper Lee’s modern classic To Kill a Mockingbird in the light of the moral of the book viewed from the cultural and historical perspective of 20th-century America.
2. To showcase the basic principle of group work to fellow colleagues teaching English as well as other subjects; the lesson was announced as open to the wider public and to all interested in American culture, as the lesson took place outside of school at the American Corner in Targovishte’s Regional Library.

Besides, the lesson was planned as interdisciplinary for it involved music and drawing in some of the tasks, and for the specific historical and geographical information in the introduction and the comments of the teacher between the tasks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT Stage / Procedure</th>
<th>WHY Objectives</th>
<th>HOW Interaction pattern</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction to the topic by the teacher in a way provoking interest on the part of the students.</td>
<td>1. To become aware of the level of information the students have about either Harper Lee or the book. It instantly became clear that the class had no information whatsoever about either of them. 2. to provide basic information about the topic and why we should talk about the book.</td>
<td>A whole-class activity on the pattern of asking a question / receiving an answer and a short lecture delivered by the teacher.</td>
<td>5 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Division of the class in 5 groups, each with handouts</td>
<td>1. To work in groups in order to learn to analyze and Group-work activity.</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 min.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. To get closer to the spirit of the book.
2. To add a livelier accent to the course of the lesson.

Teacher asks questions about the type of hats and explains what they are. Also, he/she may explain why it is desirable to deliver the findings of the group with a 1 min.

1. To summarize the key points of information in a given text by agreeing on the final product of discussion.

2. To extract factual knowledge about a topic acting as a building brick in the general construction of the idea about 20th century America and the place of Harper Lee in it. As it appeared that the students had no preliminary cultural knowledge about the topics of discussion, they had to create the overall picture by gradually putting together the information derived from each reporter.

3. In keeping with the spirit of universal humanity of the book, the teacher exhibits a set of different ethno hats and explains that each group reporter should choose a hat, put it on his/her head and thus speak about the findings of the group.

<p>| about the topics for discussion in 9 above plus a respective set of <strong>reading comprehension</strong> questions; each group should choose a speaker to report on their set of questions for discussion. | Slow jazz (Nnenna Freelons’ Blueprint of a Lady) as a background. |</p>
<table>
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</table>
| 4. Reporting of the findings of the 5 groups by individual reporters chosen by the group; short clarifying comments by the teacher at the end of each report. | To learn about the main topics of discussion:  
- Harper Lee as an author  
- The plot of the book  
- The Great Depression  
- The Jim Crow South  
- The Civil Rights Movement | Individual oral reports by students.  
25 min. |
| 5. In relation to the last 2 topics of discussion and especially in regard with the segregation law of the South, the teacher writes 3 key words on the board (fruit, hanging, tree) and tells the students that they should draw their group picture using the images created by the given words while listening to Billie Holiday’s song “Strange Fruit”. The prop words are part of the lyrics of the song. | 1. To exercise the ability to comprehend listening material and express it in a certain non-verbal form.  
2. To add a creative and more personal perspective to the understanding of the book. | Group-work listening and drawing activity.  
3 min. |
| 6. Explaining the general picture derived from the song. Setting the homework assignment: Guess how close you have been to the book by watching the film at: [http://www.moviesub.net/watch/tokill-a-mockingbird-1962/3962.html](http://www.moviesub.net/watch/tokill-a-mockingbird-1962/3962.html) The lesson ends with a treat to | The film starring Gregory Porter will conclusively shape the rough notion about the book formed by the students during the lesson and can serve as a starting point for a follow-up discussion on the Listening Comprehension task attached to this lesson plan. The biscuits give additional | A whole-class activity through questions and answers.  
1 min. |
homemade American breakfast biscuits, so typical of the 30s in which the novel is set, and a recipe about how to cook them. cultural flavor to the atmosphere of the event.

The key stages can be viewed on the Youtube video of the lesson:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMleSgcZnxE

Media coverage:
ДА УБИЕШ ПРИСМЕХУЛНИК И В ТЪРГОВИЩЕ: http://www.flsma.info/

APPENDIX

Reading Comprehension Questions (5 groups):
1. Full name and date and place of birth
2. Details about father
3. The author’s personality as a child
4. The author’s favorite subject at school and whom she wanted to look like
5. University studies and activities at the University of Alabama
6. Her life in New York
7. The title and the publication date of her book

1. What is the Great Depression?
2. Time of occurrence
3. Causes of the Great Depression
4. When did Harper Lee experience the Great Depression?
1. Name of the book and author
2. Main characters you can deduce from the text
3. The 2 plot lines of the book
4. Themes discussed in the book

1. What is the law of Jim Crow?
2. Which particular states did it appear in?
3. Why was it called “Jim Crow”?
4. Which famous group of organized mob violence does the article mention?
5. Describe briefly the case of racial injustice that has a close relation to the plot of Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mockingbird”?

1. What is the Civil Rights Movement?
2. What are the fundamental democratic rights?
3. When and how did the Civil Rights Movement in America begin?
4. What measures did the Southern states take to prevent the black population from voting?
5. How were Afro-Americans segregated (separated from the white population)?
6. Who is the leader of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s?
7. When and how were the civil rights of all Americans established?
Mentoring: Via Sharing and Support to More Informed Teaching

Emilija Stojanovska

In this article I share my experience in the world of mentoring and how it influenced my teaching practices.

How it all started

Last year, I had an opportunity to be part of a mentoring project organized by the British Council Macedonia and the Faculty of Philology Blaze Koneski, Macedonia. I worked with three fourth-year student teachers and had six lessons with each of them: during the first one I was observed by a mentee, the next two lessons included co-teaching, and the last two classes were given by the mentee herself.

How it all went

Even though I had only six lessons with each of the student teachers, the process of mentoring meant much more than that. My mentees and I met frequently before and after the lessons so that we could talk through the lesson plans and
the activities. We discussed why a certain thing could go wrong or why a specific activity could be the best choice. We looked upon these meetings as opportunities to share our views and ideas and think outside the box. Despite the fact that I have been teaching for almost eight years and I am quite confident in my work, I never disregard other people’s opinion. So this communication with the mentees was as fruitful for me as it was for them.

I would like to share a few examples of how this project helped me diversify my teaching:

1. Whenever I had to revise or teach new vocabulary I would use flash cards to present the words, ask students to listen and repeat, maybe put the cards on different walls around the classroom and ask the students to stand up and point to the pictures/words. Or sometimes I would ask them to ‘walk to the elephant/ run to the lion/ swim to the zebra’ etc.

Then one of my mentees came up with this wonderful activity called: Paper Ball Game. She printed pictures of the key words on a simple piece of paper and put a number next to each picture. She arranged the papers on the floor and asked the students to stand in a circle around the pictures. Once they were in position she gave them a paper ball and asked the students to throw the ball to one of the pictures. The students were expected to say the word corresponding to the picture as many times as the number written next to it indicated. This proved very effective for both practising pronunciation and new vocabulary.

2. When it comes to games I am always keen on using them as often as possible. One of my favourite games is the Memory Game. I used to ask my students to
work in pairs or small groups and play the game on the desk in front of them. I would walk around the classroom to monitor them, but, as all students do, they would cheat and use their mother tongue more often than the target language.

Just then, another of my mentees managed to take this game to a new level by including the whole class and making it a whole class competition. She divided the class in two groups, put all of the words and pictures on the board and the game started. All of the students were involved and were eager to win more points so that they could win the competition.

With this, I realised that each activity can be done more interactively and that there would always be new ways of using old ideas. I have used these two games ever since and my students love them.

Another positive outcome of this project was the valuable bank of teaching materials, resources, interactive posters and worksheets I came to possess. I always go with the policy that teachers should not teach the textbook, but the language, so I tried to show this to my mentees, too. I wanted them to see that they are capable of creating their own materials and making them interesting for the students without even looking at the book. I have nothing against textbooks, but I am against the traditional way of teaching, when the teacher enters the classroom, gives the number of the page in the book and asks students to read, fill in the gaps or complete a matching activity. I like it when teachers are innovative and turn a simple activity from the book into an amusing task that the students enjoy. Luckily, I worked with very inventive student teachers who managed to create lovely teaching materials that I use every day.
Last but not least, the collaboration with my mentees brought back the enthusiasm in me and built up my confidence as a teacher. From the very beginning of my career, I approached my work full of enthusiasm and eager to work hard and contribute as much as I could to make the lessons enjoyable and pleasant for my students. I spent a lot of money on toys and other teaching materials and went to work carrying bags full of items I would use for my lessons. More often than not, I was welcomed with disheartening comments from some of my colleagues, especially the older ones. They would say: ‘Let her be, she is at the start of her career, she’ll come round.’ or ‘No one will ever thank you for your efforts’, ‘Why bother for the same salary’ etc. At first, I did not pay much attention to these remarks, but as time went by I really started questioning myself if I was doing the right thing and if those people were not right. However, the work with my mentees and their appreciation showed me that my efforts were all worth it and that I should continue with my work and never allow anyone to shake my confidence.

Being a mentor

I looked upon mentoring as a very challenging job because I thought it was completely different from teaching. We all get our teacher education at university and then improve ourselves in the classroom. But my first experience as a mentor showed me that, even though I had wonderful initial training, putting theory into practice was something different. The pressure of being a good mentor was really high because I was the one the student teachers talked to every day or they planned their lessons with. Even a single word from me could shake their confidence and could lead to loss of interest in the job. On the other hand, a caring approach could make them love the job even more and inspire them to
become good teachers. So, I had to struggle with this daily, being careful what to say, and not imposing myself too much on them. In the end, I have to say that I am very pleased with the way I managed my job as a mentor. I got positive feedback from all of my mentees, but one of them was really significant to me. It came from a student teacher who had a very bad experience in the classroom, who was petrified of conducting a lesson and was certain she was going to fail even before she began her teaching practice. The biggest reward for me was at the end, when she came to me to say that this had been one of the best and most memorable experiences in her life and that she was sorry the project had come to its end. Her sincerity stimulated me to continue developing as a teacher and mentor.

What I have learnt

All in all, I look upon this project as a unique type of professional development. Not always do we get the opportunity to take part in conferences, seminars and workshops due to financial problems or lack of time. Or even if we do, we treat such participation as an extra burden and we are not very keen on working extra hours. My involvement in the mentoring project helped me realise that working closely with somebody else could be very beneficial and valuable for both sides.

I would conclude this article by encouraging you to dream big and not let anyone shake your confidence. Accept every challenge you are offered and share your ideas because everyone can learn from you and you can learn from everyone!
The Recipe for Writing a Film Review

Renata Krivec

Introduction

As a teacher of the English language, I sometimes feel as if I were on a mission to help my students improve their listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. Among them, teaching someone how to write has proved to be the most challenging one. Not only because of the act of writing in general, which has become so limited and used for specific purposes only, but mainly because of the complexity of the writing process itself – it needs preparation, careful planning and a lot of thinking. Stages, which students like to skip. Knowing that I would have to guide my students through them, step by step, I chose a task based on watching films, a popular activity which students encounter almost on a daily basis. Apart from being favourite for the vast majority of my students, it has lots of other advantages. Students are motivated because they are aware that they will be involved in an activity they know from their lives and is close to them, therefore they should be able to focus on the process of writing a film review. They take a more active role and the level of their engagement should increase as well. In this way, writing a film review should not be a daunting task, should it? Let me present my recipe for writing a film review.

Renata Krivec is a teacher of English and German working in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She is interested in exploring students’ motivation and perception of the language. She has been involved in various national and international projects related to language teaching and learning. She is a Cambridge English examiner, her interests are films, music and travelling. Email: renata.krivec@gmail.com
Starter

British Council Learn English Teens website (see references) is a good source of materials that can be used when learning how to write a film review. I used the exercise sheet that offers an introduction into the topic and provides an example of a film review based on the film *The Hunger Games*, Part 1. An exercise on distinguishing facts from opinions was also included and turned out to be a very useful one for my students. There are other practical exercises as well and you can access them if you follow the link in the references. After completing the exercise sheet, students needed to write their reviews following the instructions below:

1. Start with the title of the film.
2. Write the type of the film and when it was made.
3. Explain the story, but do not explain the ending.
4. Write your opinion.
5. Write whether or not people should watch it.

All the above activities were completed in one lesson.

Main course

During the following lesson, I told my students that they were going to watch a film, but I did not tell them which one. I decided that they were going to watch *The Lorax* by Dr Seuss, the original version from 1972 (see references). My reasons for choosing this film were numerous; it is a film which my students had not known; it is a great story, which covers current economic and environmental issues; the language used is full of rhymes; and it only takes half an hour for viewing.
As a warm up activity before watching the film my students had to draw according to my instructions. I used the first person narrative and described the physical appearance and character of the Lorax. Unique images of the character were created by the students. I include one of them as an example (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Drawing of the Lorax, by Julija Ferenc.](image)

Afterwards, we watched the film. As a follow up activity, students wrote their film reviews by using the instructions given in the Starter section of this article.

Enjoy your meal!

**Dessert**

In the successive lesson, a discussion about the film followed. I guided my students towards a debate on environmental awareness. They expressed their opinions on the topic in another activity – they created memes. These humorous and thought-provoking images were a great way to finish up the writing process as a whole. I include two examples of memes created by my students (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).
Conclusion

Every chef adapts a recipe to his or her taste. We, teachers, should always bear in mind who our students are when we plan a lesson. We should think about our students’ knowledge, abilities and needs when we decide which methods to follow and which activities to include. Feel free to create your own recipes for writing a film review. Be creative and choose the activities that will keep your students motivated and engaged; put yourselves in the role of a film director and say: ‘Action!’

References


The film The Lorax: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSSrYnc1yQs

Memes: http://memegenerator.net/
The Use of Authentic Materials in the Classroom

Niovi Hatzinikolaou

Authentic materials, realia, real life situations ... Perhaps these concepts are common in most of EFL teaching methodology books. But what exactly do we define as authentic? According to Gower, Phillips & Walters (2005), the term authentic describes ‘anything that a native speaker would hear or read such as theatre programmes, newspapers, songs, news broadcasts, films on video etc.’ (Gower, R., Phillips, D., & Walters, S. 2005: 82).

Research has shown a series of advantages for employing authentic materials in our classroom. However, instead of listing them in this article, I prefer to share my personal experience of using authentic materials with different ages and levels of students and give an overview of the outcomes.

Authentic materials can be cleverly exploited or adapted to meet the needs of different age groups. For example, teenagers normally love listening to songs of popular music bands, and watching episodes of their favorite TV series or films of their preferred genre. An adult student, on the other hand, may benefit more
from reading a newspaper article, listening to a news broadcast online, or reading a magazine of professional interest in the target language.

However, the choice of authentic materials to be used in a lesson depends a lot on the type of motivation, whether instrumental, integrative or somewhere in between. Teenagers are usually exposed to American or English popular culture through music and films. They have a genuine interest to make sense of a world that excites them. If a foreign language is the barrier, they will be willing to break it. As a result, bringing aspects of a culture they identify with in a lesson and helping them to gain a better understanding of what interests them will work wonders.

I, personally, use lots of songs in my lessons whether it is for teaching purposes, or just for pure fun. However, I have decided that it is more interesting to leave it to the students to choose the songs they like (last year they came up with a list of songs by popular artists like Adele, Arianna Grande, Taylor Swift etc). A typical task is to remove certain words from the song and ask students to guess what is missing before listening to the song. Students always enjoy this process, especially if they are already familiar with the theme of the song and have some background knowledge. An easier task is to provide the missing words and ask students to fill in the blanks.

What I find more creative, though, is post-listening tasks. Sometimes I do not want to spoil the fun, so I have students listen to the song or, even better, watch the video clip. They then scan through the lyrics and we have an open discussion about the story behind the song. For vocabulary enhancement, I ask students to scan the lyrics quickly to find all the phrasal verbs or all adjectives describing
someone. I may also give synonyms or definitions of unknown words in the song and ask students to match them. Students will naturally get involved in these tasks because they are interested in the content and the message of a song they love. Adults’ interest and involvement in tasks based on authentic materials is quite different. Adults often learn a foreign language for an immediate goal that is to communicate at work or while travelling, to get a job abroad or add a language skill in their CVs. Not surprisingly, they appreciate tasks which are meaningful to them and resemble situations they might encounter in real life.

I once had an adult student who wanted to brush up her English so that she could travel to the UK and visit close relatives. She had a basic level of English, but still was too intimidated to use the language for everyday tasks abroad. We had a unit on theatre and cinema with some basic dialogues for buying tickets at a box office. I decided then to bring an authentic theatre guide I got from the UK with a list of all running theatre performances. I asked her to actually go through the guide, see what was on, and choose a performance she would like to go to. Real pictures, real schedules, real places .... She was excited that at the end of our lesson she had called me more than four times to book tickets for her favourite plays. Of course, she had to spend some time to get used to the theatre guide as the coursebook guide was a lot more simplified and clear. However, she gradually gained a lot of confidence, which helped her overcome her worries about functioning in a real-life situation.

I have a couple of more examples of bringing in target language materials to make a lesson more purposeful. But as a general last comment, I would like to say that the key for success in using authentic materials is to be able to meet students’ needs and interests to show them that coursebooks are not the limit. Language is
culture. There is a lot out there which is fun or useful and our students are close enough to be able to cope with it independently.

References

Creative Liberation through Creative Limitation

Andy Thatcher

One of my favourite teaching moments comes up each time I run one particular activity. In this, which I have run with both adult and teenaged learners, students are asked to dramatise a folk myth using sentences of no longer than five words. Because I like my adult students to work still harder, I add that the speaker must change with each new sentence. Each time, a student will challenge me as to why I have placed these restrictions on the group: this activity is harder than it might sound. Each time, I give the same answer: because it focuses the mind.

Western creative practice has inherited many myths from Romanticism. One of these is that the creative mind must be unfettered and free to express itself spontaneously and individually. Such a myth regularly occurs when the subject arises of formatting fiction for commercial sale, which is a primary function of any good literary agent or editor. Writers are deemed, by many, to be above such petty concerns. And yet consider the case of classical Islamic art, which, unable to use physical form, developed a decorative style which continues to influence and inspire. Similarly, consider the
haiku in all its various forms. Whether following the Western 5-7-5 syllable count or using the Japanese dictionary of acceptable seasonal haiku terms, or kogi, its compact form has delivered works of profound and globally-enjoyed beauty.

This is because limitation forces one to be creative: it activates our facility for problem-solving, an aspect of human creativity even more fundamental than a capacity for empathy, intellectual reasoning or visualisation. As such, I do not give my students opportunities to express themselves creatively, so much as give them problems to solve.

For example, I regularly teach sessions on writing about a place, a cornerstone of powerful fiction. I begin by asking students to write about a place where they felt a strong emotion, but to describe it without articulating either the emotion or what happened to the student. Instead, they must describe the place in such a way as depicts the emotion; for example, the light could be warm, or the seats comfortable, if the description is of a positive emotion. The pieces are then read out in small groups and the group members must then guess at the emotion and, where possible, the event which happened there. I have taught this to hugely diverse students – both native-speakers and not – and the activity always succeeds and has, on occasion, resulted in the students becoming emotional themselves. This is precisely because students are not allowed to write freely. The activity forces them to make careful decisions about their writing, reflect more deeply on their experience, and focus on communication. In other words, it is precisely how professional writers are able to engage their readers and setting limits allows student writers to experience this for themselves.

“Write about your holidays” is the archetypal start-of-year writing activity across...
the world and teachers will no doubt be familiar with the varied, frequently disappointing responses that it delivers. Aside from student reluctance and reticence, being given such a blank canvas is an intimidating thing: all those many weeks to choose from. “Write about something that went wrong during your holidays” gives a student much more to work with, as does “Write about something unexpected that happened during your holidays.” This immediately narrows the canvas. You might then really up the game by asking the writers to start each new sentence with a different first letter. They might moan, they might challenge, but I guarantee that they will produce better work. And, perhaps secretly, they might even enjoy themselves.
Dimcho Debelyanov and the English Poets of the First World War

Christopher Buxton

In 1914, without any clue as to the reasons – apart from “some Archduke getting shot in the Balkans” - my grandfather became a soldier. His sole motivation: “to fight for King and Country”. One year later Dimcho Debelyanov was a soldier in the same war, but on a different front. At least he knew why he was fighting – for the lost Bulgarian homelands of present-day Macedonia and Thrace. But whatever the motivation, my grandfather and Dimcho Debelyanov were embroiled in a mad war in which a whole European generation was needlessly sacrificed. But out of this war the greatest poetry emerged.

*If any question why we died,*

*Tell them, because our fathers lied.*

This is what a repentant Rudyard Kipling wrote after the death of his only son. Kipling as a stalwart patriot had used all his connections to get his son into the army at the outbreak of war, in spite of the latter being at first disqualified for his very poor eyesight. Throughout the First World War, the average life expectancy
of junior officers was 11 days – let us not think about a young man with inadequate eyesight, leading a squadron towards the machine guns.

*My friend, you would not tell with such high zest,*

*To children ardent for some desperate glory,*

*The old lie: Dulce et decorum est*

*Pro Patria Mori*

(a sweet and fitting thing to die for your country)

This is how the famous poem by the most celebrated British war poet, Wilfred Owen finishes. He died days before the end of the war, on the Western Front. With the exception of the disastrous Gallipoli campaign, the attention of the British press was concentrated entirely on the Western Front. It was as if the British, French, Bulgarian and German soldiers who struggled on the so-called Thessaloniki front had not existed. On the few occasions the English press did get around to writing about this front, they wrote off the soldiers as *Thessaloniki gardeners*: i.e. they did nothing there except dig holes in the ground.

This was far from the truth. In the mountains around Bitola and to the west and east, long lines dug into the bare rock, forcing a harsh stalemate. Soldiers died from malaria en-masse. But the British learned to treat their brave opponents with respect, calling them Johnny Bulgar.

Dimcho Debelyanov played the role of Johnny Bulgar. The great poet who had lived on the edge of society, describing himself as an outcast, a solitary pine tree sentry, a faithful son to the faithless night, declared in *Orphan Song*:

*If I die in this war*
regret will sting no-one

I shall depart this world
As I entered it – homeless
Tranquil as the song, which
Shores up needless memory.

It is a real injustice that Dimcho Debelyanov does not appear in any collection of war poets, published in the English-speaking world. He is a worthy comrade to all the rest of the better known poets from Britain, Germany, France and Russia. Dimcho Debelyanov, like his colleague Wilfred Owen, wrote a poem about a meeting with a dead opponent:

Той не ни е вече враг – Now he’s an enemy no more
Живите от враговете – the stormy wave has swept away
бурна ги вълна помете – those of our surviving foes
нейде към отсрещния бряг – to pitch up on the opposite shore.
Ето, в хълтналия слог – In the broken briars there
легнал е спокойно бледен – he lies pallid and at peace,
с примирена скръб загледан – staring with measured grief
в свода ясен и дълбок – at the sky vault deep and clear

In the poem *Strange Meeting*, Wilfred Owen dreams of a meeting in some dark underground tunnel with an enemy soldier that he had killed that day. At the end of the poem his one-time opponent says:
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now . . .

(More translations of Dimcho Debelyanov can be found in my anthology of classic Bulgarian poetry, *Flowers don’t grow singly*, available from Amazon.)
Gnosis

David Singleton

We live in an unperfected sphere.

We have been carelessly crafted
By processes or entities
Which are in ignorance:

Ignorance of themselves,
Ignorance of us,
Ignorance of purpose.

And so each path of promise
Loses itself in impenetrable briars
Before the first milestone has been passed.

Each beckoning shore
Is fathoms deep in slime
Before the pearl without price can be gathered.

Each flight of love,
Taking the sun too close,
Ends before night in a strewing of scorched débris.

Somewhere beyond life's frenzy
The stillness of the Light or of the Void
Awaits.
Meanwhile, what can we do
But wander this rough-hewn world,
Applying whatever consolamentum we can call upon
To each other's perfect fear?

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