应用语言学研习丛书

Teaching Literature in a Second Language

第二语言文学的教学

Brian Parkinson &
Helen Reid Thomas

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www.sflep.com

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图书在版编目（CIP）数据

第二语言文学的教学/帕金森（Parkinson, B.），托马斯（Thomas, H. R）著.
—上海：上海外语教育出版社，2016
（应用语言学研习丛书）
ISBN 978-7-5446-4322-1

I. ①第… II. ①帕…②托… III. ①第二语言—外语教学—教学研究—英文
IV. ①H09

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字（2016）第079551号

图字：09-2015-890号

www.euppublishing.com

出版发行：上海外语教育出版社
（上海外国语大学内） 邮编：200083
电　　话：021-65425300（总机）
电子邮箱：bookinfo@sflep.com.cn
网　　址：http://www.sflep.com.cn http://www.sflep.com
责任编辑：蒋浚浚

印　　刷：上海叶大印务发展有限公司
开　　本：700×1000 1/16 印张 13.5 字数 265千字
版　　次：2016 年 5 月第 1 版 2016 年 5 月第 1次印刷
印　　数：2 100 册

书　　号：ISBN 978-7-5446-4322-1 / H · 1978
定　　价：38.00 元

出版说明

对于中国这样一个英语教学大国，和语言教学相关的话题一直受到语言学界的关注。应用语言学作为一个涵盖范围十分宽广的研究领域，尤其受到我国学者及语言学方向师生的重视。本世纪初，外教社陆续引进出版了“牛津应用语言学丛书”、“剑桥应用语言学丛书”等国际优秀学术成果，因其内容权威、选择精当而受到外语界的好评。

近年来，应用语言学研究取得了很多新的进展，如何引导我国语言学方向的研究生快速便捷地了解这一领域的发展全貌和研究热点，成为我国语言学界老师面临的一个重要问题。有鉴于此，我们又从爱丁堡大学出版社、Multilingual Matters 等国际知名出版社精选了一批图书，组成“应用语言学研习丛书”，以更好地满足广大师生和相关学者的需求。

本丛书的各分册主题均为近年来应用语言学研究领域的热点话题，其中既有对所论述主题的理论回顾和梳理，也有对较新的发展和应用所做的阐释和分析，脉络清晰，语言简洁，共同反映了这一领域过去三四十年间的成果和积淀。

相信本套丛书的出版将为国内应用语言学研究带来新的启示，进一步推动我国语言学研究的发展。

Edinburgh Textbooks in Applied Linguistics
Series Editors: Alan Davies and Keith Mitchell

Teaching Literature in a Second Language

Brian Parkinson and
Helen Reid Thomas

Preface

This book is intended to help those who teach literature in a foreign language, whether in situations where literature is emphasised and language has a supporting role, or where the reverse applies, or at any point between these two extremes.

It is, however, concerned with the teaching of literature rather than with literary criticism or analysis; ideas from literary theory are touched upon, some are dealt with in more depth, but it is their pedagogic implications which are emphasised. A communicative attitude to teaching, and a concern with the realities of classroom process, inform a systematic consideration of objectives, teacher and learner roles, affective and cognitive issues and problems, syllabus choices, moment-to-moment classroom decisions and associated areas of research. Although the book contains practical ideas, the emphasis is on principles rather than on specific recipes or model lessons, and the aim is to inform teacher choice rather than promote a particular method. Although most of the examples are taken from literature written in English, with a few from German and French, it is hoped that the principles explored will be relevant to the teaching of literature in other languages.

Acknowledgements

1. Arthur Waley, *Chinese Poems*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1946 and The Arthur Waley Estate.
2. Philip Larkin, 'Mr Bleaney' in *The Whitsun Weddings*, Faber & Faber.
3. *Guidelines 5.1: Classroom Tests*, RELC, 1983.
4. B. Gardner, *The Terrible Rain*, OUP, 1983, by permission of Oxford University Press.
5. Alexander Scott, 'Continent O Venus' in *Latest in Eligies*, Caledonian Press, 1949. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders but if any have inadvertently been overlooked, the editor and publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This book has been written by two people who were for some years colleagues in the Institute for Applied Language Studies at the University of Edinburgh, where together they developed a course on the language of literature. As you read, it will become apparent to you that the authors occupy rather different positions on the language–literature continuum. We were slightly anxiously aware of this when we began to write, but it became increasingly clear as we continued that this, rather than being a limitation or an obstacle, was in fact one of the strengths of our collaboration. Like any co-authors, we have expressed different views on a number of occasions, but these have not been irreconcilable disagreements. Our practice simply reflects a difference of emphasis and approach to the relationship between the two poles of language teaching and literature teaching, between what Maley (1989) calls the use and the study of literature.

If we picture language and literature teaching as a continuum, we could say that Brian Parkinson occupies a position towards the language teaching end, and is most concerned with teaching situations where literature in the classroom has a primarily instrumental function, what is sometimes referred to as the 'literature as topic' or 'literature as resource' approach. Helen Reid Thomas' approach is situated closer to the 'literature as object of study' end of the continuum, where literature appears as an academic subject on the timetable, but with a focus on the language that is used in that literature. This partly reflects our respective backgrounds: Brian Parkinson's interest in English language teaching has its roots in a broader experience of modern language teaching, particularly German and French; Helen Reid Thomas' work has been more specifically concerned with ways of reading and teaching literature, recently to British undergraduates but also in India, Malaysia and Bulgaria, where literature in English is taught for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways, but all in a context where English is a foreign language.

The distinction between 'literature as object of study', which for brevity we will sometimes call 'Type A', and 'literature as topic/resource' (in 'language improvement' classes), which is our 'Type B', is more important in some chapters and sections of this book than others. Broadly speaking, sections 1.3.1, 1.5 to 1.8.1, 8.3.4, 9.3, 9.4,

and almost all of Chapter 2, seem to us more relevant to Type B teaching, while sections 1.4, 1.9 to 1.11, 7.3, 7.4, 8.3.3, 9.1, 9.2, as well as Chapters 4–6, seem more relevant to Type A, and the rest of the book equally relevant to both types. The distinction is perhaps most important when we are writing about reader response and about general objectives, both in the present chapter, and about assessment in Chapter 8.

The boundaries between the two types, however, should not be drawn too sharply. Many real-life teaching situations have features of both 'types', together with a measure of ambiguity and room for negotiation, and even when the 'types' are distinguishable, identical or analogous theoretical reasoning or practical procedures can sometimes be usable in both. For this reason we have deliberately not labelled chapters and sections as 'A' or 'B', or used these terms in the text, except very sparingly in places where we find the distinction especially important.

Exchange of ideas between the two types has become particularly extensive in recent decades. Borrowing by language improvement (Type B) teachers, especially EFL teachers, is well known and perhaps unsurprising: such teachers are often proud of their eclecticism, and the logic of modern approaches favours preparing for, simulating and borrowing from other types of classroom (for example, 'English for Academic Purposes') as well as the outside world. Less well known, but now quite common – and certainly advocated in the present book – is borrowing in the other direction. In all the Type A situations mentioned above (Britain, India, Malaysia and Bulgaria), strategies that have been developed in the 'communicative' foreign language classroom can be very relevant. In terms of classroom management, pair and groupwork can be used within the more traditional tutorial or seminar context; where teachers and students are required to concentrate on prescribed texts, this apparent limitation can be transformed by 'playing' with the texts, cutting them up, rearranging them, altering point of view and so on. A further advantage of this kind of approach is that learner independence is encouraged in that there is a shift away from the kind of teacher-dependent organisation which is so much a feature of the traditional literature classroom towards the active engagement of the learner in particular tasks.

Another unifying thread in this book is the concern of both authors with the metalanguage (that is, 'language about language') involved in the study of literature and with the language that emerges from classroom practice. There are sections specifically devoted to a discussion of classroom process and the language required for this. Likewise, particularly in the chapters that deal with the various literary genres of poetry, prose fiction and drama, you will find, as well as a small number of technical terms, language that may not be particularly technical but which enables us to talk and write with precision about literature.

Our main aim has not been that of bibliographic review. We have referred extensively to what others have written, but have selected and tailored such references to fit our objectives as stated in the preface. If you seek a guide to further reading, the literature review article Gilroy and Parkinson (1996) may be used to supplement this book in certain areas, especially within Type B.

1.2 THE PLACE OF LANGUAGE IN THE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF LITERATURE

Language is involved in the teaching of literature in two main ways:

1. The language of the texts themselves. This includes any special features which make them difficult for non-native language users – either difficult to understand at all, or difficult to 'appreciate' and respond to as widely and fully as might a native user of suitable background and experience.
2. 'The language of the classroom'. This refers to all the language used by teachers and learners in writing and talking about the texts and related matters. It includes language used outside the classroom but related to it: in the teachers' case mainly in the form of worksheets, in the learners' case mainly in the form of written homework, but in all cases also other, rarer types, such as self-recorded audio and video material.

These two subsets overlap with each other and with other relevant subsets, such as the language a given group of learners already knows at the start of the course, and what they need or want or hope to know, or others hope they will know, at the end.

Language is, of course, never more than part of the story, and its study can never be completely separated from the study of non-linguistic areas. In the case of texts, these include history, politics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, cultural traditions and other arts (and also, for 'performed' texts including theatre, film and so on, concrete aspects of staging and of performance generally). In the case of classrooms, areas to be considered alongside language include most of the above, especially sociology, psychology and politics, plus more narrowly educational and pedagogic theories. In a book about applied linguistics, albeit in a wide sense, such areas can only be mentioned in passing, but they are always present in the background. We have striven to remember, as should our readers, that much of what we regard as normal is socially contingent, might not apply everywhere today, and may be rare or unknown in a few decades' time as a result of technological, political or cultural changes.

1.3 FINDING ONE'S OWN TEXT: A BASIC POSITION

The following poem, in Reber (1986), provides a way into our general view of literature, and of reading, learning and teaching literature.

selbst in den fremdesten texten den eigenen text entdecken
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selbst in den fremdesten texten den eigenen text entdecken

Claus Bremer

The German sentence may be translated as something like: 'Even in the strangest [most alien, most "somebody else's"] texts, to discover one's own text'. The exact meaning of the typography must, for obvious reasons, be left to the reader to decide!

The idea of 'reader response' is crucial to most – dare we say all? – modern ideas in this field. It provides a striking example of the principle of convergence, when strands of thought and practical experience in widely different fields lead to the same or similar results at roughly the same time. In this case the fields are literary theory, general educational ideas and 'communicative' approaches to foreign language teaching. The common conclusion (though agreement can be exaggerated and terms borrowed inappropriately – see Hirvela 1996) seems to have two elements:

1. That response is (or can be or should be) individual, with no belief or reduced belief in 'right' and 'wrong' answers;
2. That response is creative, not just understanding the text, not even just 'appreciating' it, but doing something active with it, creating another text, perhaps even creating the original text.

1.3.1 Pedagogic justification of the basic position

The process of learning, and more generally those of reading and listening, and more generally still all perception through the senses, are increasingly understood to be active processes. We do not simply take in and store information, but seek it out and pass it through all kinds of mental filters. Less obviously, we constantly predict what we are going to see, hear, read and so on, and match reality with expectation, rather than let our minds be blank sheets on which anything can be written. If we see or hear something totally unexpected, we often cannot even begin to understand it for a few moments, until we have devised a schema into which it will fit. A few moments' introspection should confirm this from your own experience – 'mystery photographs' which you could not begin to interpret until you were given a title, or incidents when someone began to speak in an unexpected language, or on an unexpected topic, and the first few words or even sentences were totally lost. For reading, the argument is less obvious, as we can normally start again when we are confused – or throw the book away – but psycholinguistic experiments (see for example Bransford and Johnson 1972) have shown that readers do not feel comfortable with a text, perhaps do not even understand it, until they have a framework into which it can be fitted. If the same text is given to different groups with and without a title, or with two different titles, this can radically affect how much is understood, and what is understood. The problems are, of course, typically greater in a foreign language, and with a text which is culturally remote from the reader.

These problems, or rather some aspects of them, have long been implicitly or explicitly recognised by teachers of literature in a foreign language and materials writers. The traditional response has been preparation of content and 'pre-teaching' of language. The former term is fairly self-explanatory: information is given about such topics as the novel (for instance) from which an extract is drawn, other texts by the same writer, the writer's life, the historical and cultural background, and perhaps

even guidance on how the reader is supposed to judge the text: 'This is one of the greatest writers/poems of the twelfth century'. Pre-teaching means teaching selected language from the text – mostly vocabulary, sometimes a few grammatical or other features – before the learners are exposed to the text itself.

In modern approaches, there is still a place for preparation of content, though perhaps a reduced one: it is more 'communicative' to let learners find out what they can, or make guesses and confirm them later. The pre-teaching of language, though, is under serious theoretical assault, and widely condemned or discouraged by teacher-trainers, advisers and writers (though still common in actual classrooms!). The main reason is that giving too much information in advance makes the task inauthentic and inhibits the development of the skill of reading, which includes the developing of ways to cope with unknown language, whether by consulting reference books, making guesses and provisional hypotheses, or deciding that unknown elements are not important. All of these strategies, especially the last two, force the reader to be active, to create a provisional text of his or her own, which is constantly matched with the text on the page, but never is, and does not aspire to be, identical with it.

We shall see later more of what it can mean for the learner to become active, but it is worth saying at this stage that support for the notion of active learning does not imply a blanket approval for all 'modern' approaches in all situations. Pairwork, discovery learning, learners writing their own poems – all these can sometimes be the very opposite of truly learner-centred, and at conferences for teachers one now regularly sees presenters who have adopted these surface tricks but with no concomitant change in underlying philosophy. Conversely, teacher lecturing and other traditional teaching techniques are not necessarily antipathetic to learner centredness, especially where they fit learner expectations, though they should be part of a wider pedagogy which includes learning how to learn in different ways. The teacher can be a guide for a large part of the journey, but the last step always has to be taken by the learner.

We have emphasised reading and preparation for reading, but speaking and listening are equally or more important in most 'communicative' classrooms. Even unsophisticated teachers use literary texts as stimuli for discussion in the foreign language, sometimes with rather limited concern for the details of the text:

> Now that we've read *Die Verwandlung* [Kafka's *Metamorphosis*], tell your partner how you feel about insects.

Although literary and linguistic sophisticates mock such approaches, they may be better for language learning than the other (or one other?) extreme, a 'close reading' designed to guide the class towards an expert analysis pre-planned by the teacher. (One version of the latter, found in German teacher-training courses, is the *Tafelbild*, an elegant analysis of a text fitted into a diagram using all the spaces on the large, multi-surfaced German school blackboard: the teacher is supposed to compile this using ideas supplied by the pupils, but also to have a sketch in his/her pre-lesson teaching plan showing how the *Tafelbild* will look at the end.) Modern opinion

favours a compromise, in which learners are guided to look at the text in far more detail than in the Kafka example, but there is still room for genuinely unpredictable and personal response. This can include responses which have little to do with the text, and more with the learners' own lives, provided that they are offered and recognised as such. The principles of autonomy, responsibility for one's own learning and learner empowerment should also mean that there is room for learners to make, or participate in, other kinds of decision – to stop reading a boring text, to choose non-traditional text types (including films for example), to read with or without questions or exercises to follow, to concentrate on language or content or both, to come to class or to read at home, to write as well as read.

The last point returns us to the other element in Bremer's poem, and to the 'reader response' idea. If all reading involves creating one's own text in one's head, perhaps learners should go further and create their own text in writing – or possibly in sound, for unscripted (but perhaps recorded) oral performance? This again is a simple 'tip for teachers' which can be done, and often is, with no conscious theoretical basis, but there is also an impressive intellectual foundation for such procedures, mainly from Widdowson, as well as support from textbooks of varying quality.

Widdowson's approach is most fully developed in Widdowson (1992), though much of it is also present in his earlier works, notably Widdowson (1975). It starts with interpretation of a text, which he sees a very individual activity: he favours 'precision of reference ... in support of a particular interpretation [but] ... emphatically not precision of interpretation itself' (xii). There is no one correct answer, but this does not mean that anything goes. Moreover, learners should not merely analyse texts, but should use them as a starting point for creative activities, as 'the experience of poetry, and its educational relevance, depend on the reader assuming an author role' (xi). This may entail, for example, writing alternative poems and looking at differences between original and imitation.

Many practical books for EFL teachers (see for example Maley and Moulding 1985) and some mainly for English-L1 learners (such as Pope 1995) take a more or less Widdowsonian approach. Both these books are to be praised for attempting to demystify literature and for encouraging learners to express themselves, to value their own feelings and responses, to improve their language through risk-taking strategies. But both books (further discussed in section 2.4.9), and many others of the same kind, are perhaps at fault in not even considering the possible qualitative difference between recognised literature and students' (or textbook writers') own efforts, which is surely the other side of Widdowson's coin.

1.4 THE BASIC POSITION AND LITERARY THEORY

This is how Bernard MacLaverty's novel *Cal* begins:

> He stood at the back gateway of the abattoir, his hands thrust into his pockets, his stomach rigid with the ache of want. Men in white coats and baseball caps whistled and shouted as they moved between the hanging carcasses.
>
> (MacLaverty 1984)

As we read these very simple sentences, we immediately, almost automatically, begin to think, to ask questions, and to look for possible connections. Who is the 'he'? Possibly the Cal of the title of the book, though we can't be sure. What is he doing at an abattoir, apparently painfully hungry – looking for food? But why isn't he buying a pie in a butcher's shop or getting a takeaway, in that case? We may guess that he is poor, perhaps looking for employment. We may make inferences about his state of mind – perhaps that he is timid or unwilling to venture further. The baseball caps and white coats tell us that the setting is contemporary. And so we proceed to the next sentence ready to go on building up the world of the book, ready to confirm or revise our ideas as the text leads us.

This is a process which many language and literature teachers constantly make use of to develop reading and inferencing skills, sometimes actually introducing their own gaps into the text by missing out words, or in another way by the use of jumbled texts. We try to encourage our students to become active readers, to become engaged with the text, rather than retreating into passivity.

We now take for granted the idea that reading is an active process of engagement with a text. This idea has not, however, always been so commonly assumed: indeed, it was only in the 1970s, with the work of Iser in particular, that the critical movement which came to be known as Reader Response Criticism began to be widely recognised. In almost all literary debates, three elements relevant to interpretation are acknowledged: the text, the author and the reader. It is not the fact of the existence of these three elements that is at issue, but their relationship and the relative importance assigned to each. Reader Response critics, in contrast to their academic predecessors – the so-called New Critics – who had focused primarily on the text as an object, were interested in the relation between reader and text. They examined, often in minute detail, both the relationship between text and reader in terms of the process required by a particular text, and the place of the reader as the interpreter of the text. First they wanted to find out, by close examination of particular texts, how the reader is 'implied' or constructed in the text itself, and second, how real people read texts (the reading process) and what they make of them (the interpretation). To some extent developments in reader response criticism reflected the broad move in the sciences and social sciences (including the new discipline of sociolinguistics) away from the myth of objectivity towards the recognition that the observer (or reader) is inescapably involved in and has an effect on that which he or she observes.

The exploration of the reading process is associated particularly with the name of Iser (though the earlier work of Ingarden and Jauss is also significant in this context). Unlike most of the New Critics, who dealt almost exclusively with poetry, Iser worked largely on prose narratives; he tried to show how the text actually forces readers into becoming active, into creating the text that they are reading, arguing that every text contains numerous gaps, omissions and what he calls indeterminancies, where the reader has to fill in the gap or interpret what is indeterminant. This is precisely what we were doing as we read the opening sentences of Bernard MacLaverty's novel quoted earlier.

A rather more radical view of the role of the reader was that developed by Stanley

Fish (1980). His argument is that meaning lies, not in the text, but in the reader, that we should be concerned with the structure of the reader's experience rather than any structures available on the page. His view is that a poem (or any other sort of text) does not possess its meaning (or even multiple meanings) immanent in itself, but that the reader may read out of it whatever meanings he or she wishes. Taken to the logical extreme, this seems a recipe for interpretative anarchy; Fish, however, sets some boundaries to this dizzying prospect of endlessly multiplying interpretations by positing the notion of the interpretive community, which is, in effect, as far as he is concerned, the academic community. This in turn, of course, begs a number of further questions about readership (surely other people besides academics read novels and poetry) and authority. Nonetheless, in terms of our own pedagogic situation, we could adapt Fish's view of the interpretive community to mean the group of students in any classroom. That is to say, we are not seeking to encourage a solipsistic individualism in reading, but to develop individual responses, followed by a sharing and to some extent an accommodation of our varying interpretations.

Perhaps the most satisfying from the teacher's point of view is the approach typified by the work of Ricoeur (1981). Ricoeur sees the process of interpretation in three stages: first comes a thorough and detailed description of the text, its linguistic features and its broader structure, with attention to content as well as to form; this is carried out in as objective a manner as possible. Then follows the actualisation of the world of the text, that is, creating the text by engaging creatively with it in the process of reading. Finally, there is the stage in which the text is reflected on and existentially and personally appropriated. 'The work thus draws us into it, distancing us from ourselves, but only to deepen our self-understanding by reflecting aspects of and possibilities for ourselves that we might otherwise never encounter' (Kerby 1993: 92).

Many of us would recognise these three stages both in our own reading and in our teaching, though we might not follow Ricoeur's order. More probably, as Widdowson (op. cit.) suggests, we might read, respond provisionally and then perform the descriptive first part in a less rigorous way than Ricoeur appears to favour, but making close reference to the text in support of our particular interpretation. A lively example of how different ways of reading can be practised in a classroom situation is described by Verdonk in his stimulating account of a poetry seminar in a Dutch university (1989). He introduced his (fairly advanced) students to three different stylistic approaches to reading poetry, which they themselves then put into practice on a number of very different poems. Verdonk argues that this approach develops the ability to 'reflect on language', an ability which he is convinced has been somewhat neglected in the recent emphasis on a narrow interpretation of language for communication: 'the average student has learnt to talk quickly and very easily, which is in itself a joyful phenomenon, but I am afraid that this success has often been obtained with the sacrifice of the ability to reflect on language with patience and sensitivity' (242).

1.5 REASONS FOR OR BENEFITS OF USING LITERATURE

This section lists the main reasons for teaching literature offered in books for teachers plus two added by ourselves. These are not necessarily 'good' reasons – in our opinion or perhaps even those of the original writers – but we need to take account of all reasons, good or bad, which learners, teachers or those in authority might consider important. (The opinions and priorities of these three groups can be similar, but they are very often very different.)

The books from which we quote are nearly all aimed at Type B teaching. This is not an accident, as it is in such teaching that there is likely to be a real choice between literature and alternative topics. Some of the reasons are obviously relevant to Type A as well, but in this type issues of reason and benefit are inextricably linked with issues of definition, the 'canon' and so on, discussed later in this chapter.

The first reason is labelled 'cultural enrichment' by Collie and Slater (1987). They explain:

> It is true that the 'world' of a novel, play or short story is a created one, yet it offers a full and vivid context in which characters from many social backgrounds can be depicted. A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions: what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave behind closed doors.

The second reason, at least 3000 years old, may be called rhetoric. People study literature because it is supposed to provide a model of 'good' writing. In earlier times in Europe, and even now in some other parts of the world, large chunks of 'classical' writing were and are learned by heart, and the speech and writing of educated people was laced both with direct quotations from older authors and with imitations of their style: Milton, for example, writes a kind of 'Latin in English'. Modern EFL teachers are generally cautious about this 'reason' because it may encourage memorising without understanding, and Collie and Slater (op. cit.) point out:

> We would not wish students to think that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'How do I love thee?' is the kind of utterance whispered into a lover's ear nowadays!

Nonetheless, rhetoric is alive and well – it is widely taught to native speakers in the USA – and Collie and Slater continue:

> Reading a substantial and contextualised body of text, students gain familiarity with many features of the written language ... which broaden and enrich their own writing skills.

A third traditional reason for teaching literature is the idea of mental training. This idea was promoted by the critic F. R. Leavis (1943):

> It trains, in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensibility together, cultivating sensitiveness and precision of response and a delicate integrity of intelligence.