

Using *Chuang Tzu* in a British Literature Curriculum

INTRODUCTION: The section from the writings of *Chuang Tzu* is short and made up of several smaller pieces. I have tried to show how you might use these, as well as other of Chuang Tzu's writings, as a complement to a study of *Beowulf*. The five activities are:

- A. Translation issues
- B. The structure and theme of the poem as yin/yang
- C. Views on the role of kings
- D. *Beowulf*, *Grendel*, and the Butterfly.
- E. Understanding the Dragon

In an appendix at the end, I have suggested a few other places where Chuang Tzu might fit into a typical British Literature Curriculum, including *Hamlet*, William Blake, and the Romantic poets. Although I have attempted to provide some ideas and resources for this, these are not complete lesson plans, but simply ideas that a teacher may wish to try.

A. TRANSLATION ISSUES. Students are often not aware of the tremendous differences that exist among various translations. In this activity, they will compare and contrast translations of Chung Tzu and then translations of *Beowulf*.

Activities

1. Have students read Handout #1 on translations of Chuang Tzu. Lead a discussion on the differences among the various translations. (See Discussion Questions and Answers, below).

2. Have students, for homework, or in class if you have access to computers, find different translations of *Beowulf*. The best place to find these is

<http://www.jagular.com/beowulf/index.shtml> where Syd Allan has collected 87 translations of *Beowulf*, and has presented the same five passages as translated by each of the translators. (The

shortest and easiest to use is the translation of lines 1585-1590, where Beowulf cuts off

Grendel's head) You might want to preview the site and assign students to bring in different

authors' translations. Or, if computers or time are lacking, you can give them Handout #2, which

has several translations of the same passage. In either case, have students work in groups to

compare their various translations, and to choose one that they can agree on as the best. You

might want to review with them some literary terms: **alliteration, kenning, syntax, imagery,**

caesura, diction and ask them to make their decisions based on these criteria.

Discussion Questions and Answers.

For discussion of Chuang Tzu translation:

1. What is the greatest difference between the two passages about Cook Ding?

(in the first one the cook is showing how good he is, in the second one he is showing how a bad butcher acts; the first one is positive, the second negative; the first praises Cook Ding, the second criticizes bad butchers.)

2. In terms of diction, what are some specific differences that you notice?

Greatest subtlety	Some small niggling strokes
Completely satisfied	Hovering for a long time
Look all around me	Helplessly gazing this way and that
Careful	nervous
A clod of earth crumbling to the ground	A worm burrowing through the earth.
Size up the difficulties	A difficult business he finds.

3. What is the **tone** of the two pieces?

(smug, self-satisfied, boastful, confident vs. insecure, fearful, tentative, ashamed)

4. What do you think could account for the difference in the translations?

(one wants to show a positive example of skills, the other a negative example of lack of skills. At this point, you might want to read to them Burton Watsons’s footnote on this passage:

“Waley...takes this whole paragraph to refer to the working methods of a mediocre carver, and hence translates it very differently. There is a great deal to be said for his interpretation, but after much consideration I have decided to follow the traditional

interpretation because it seems to me that the extreme care and caution which the cook uses when he comes to a difficult place is also a part of Chuang Tzu's 'secret of caring for life.'"

5. After reading these two translations, what can you say about some of the difficulties in reading works in translation?

(the translators may have a bias, a translation is only one interpretation, and so on.)

Background and Resources.

For this activity, the most useful resources are two websites, one of which leads one to translations of Chuang Tzu, and the other to translations of *Beowulf*. They are:

<http://www.edepot.com/taotext.html> This site has links to many translations of Daoist works.

Scroll down until you see Chuang Tzu.

<http://www.jagular.com/beowulf/index.shtml> Syd Allan's collection of translations of Beowulf.

Connections to Other Literary Works

If your class is proficient in another language, you could arrange to show them the original of a poem or poems in that language and have them compare the original with an English translation.

Themes and Symbols.

This activity does not directly address these factors, although if one wanted to introduce the idea of symbol, you could certainly point to the knife (chopper) in the story of Cook Ding as a symbol of skill or craftsmanship, but also of longevity. Taoism was, in part, a search for immortality.

Cook Ding's knife, because of the fact that Cook Ding follows the Tao of Butchery, has achieved a kind of immortality.

Handout #1 Translations of Chuang Tzu.

I. **The Butcher.** One of the most famous parables in Chuang Tzu concerns Cook Ding, a skilled butcher whose talent was noticed by Lord Wen-Hui. When asked to explain his skill, he replied:

"Sire," replied the cook laying down his chopper, "I have always devoted myself to Tao, which is higher than mere skill. When I first began to cut up bullocks, I saw before me whole bullocks. After three years' practice, I saw no more whole animals. And now I work with my mind and not with my eye. My mind works along without the control of the senses. Falling back upon eternal principles, I glide through such great joints or cavities as there may be, according to the natural constitution of the animal. I do not even touch the convolutions of muscle and tendon, still less attempt to cut through large bones.

"A good cook changes his chopper once a year, -- because he cuts. An ordinary cook, once a month, -- because he hacks. But I have had this chopper nineteen years, and although I have cut up many thousand bullocks, its edge is as if fresh from the whetstone. For at the joints there are always interstices, and the edge of a chopper being without thickness, it remains only to insert that which is without thickness into such an interstice. Indeed there is plenty of room for the blade to move about. It is thus that I have kept my chopper for nineteen years as though fresh from the whetstone." (Translation by Lin Yutang)

Now, read the following translations of the next part of the cook's speech, and notice the difference.

1. Translation by Burton Watson.

"However, whenever I come to a complicated place, I size up the difficulties, tell myself to watch out and be careful, keep my eyes on what I'm doing, work very slowly, and move the knife with the greatest subtlety, until -- flop! The whole thing comes apart like a clod of earth crumbling to the ground. I stand there holding the knife and look all around me, completely satisfied and reluctant to move on, and then I wipe off the knife and put it away."

2. Translation by Arthur Waley:

"However, one has only to look at an ordinary carver to see what a difficult business he finds it. One sees how nervous he is while making his preparations, how long he looks, how slowly he moves. Then after some small, niggling strokes of the knife when he has done no more than detach a few stray fragments from the whole, and even that by dint of continually twisting and turning like a worm burrowing through the earth, he stands back, with his knife in his hand, helplessly gazing this way and that, and after hovering for a long time finally curses a perfectly good knife, and puts it back in its case."

II. **The Butterfly.** Another of Chaung Tzu’s most well-know writing concerns a man who dreams he is a butterfly. Note the differences in the two translations of the same excerpt in the chart below.

1. Translation by Lin Yutang

“Once upon a time, I, Chuang Chou (18), dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Chou. Soon I awaked, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man. Between a man and a butterfly there is necessarily a distinction. The transition is called the transformation of material things (19)

2. Translation by Burton Watson

“Once Chuang Chou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn’t know he was Chuang Chou.. Suddenly he work up and there he was, sold and unmistakable Chuang Chou. But he didn’t know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chaung Chou. Between Chuang Chou and a butterfly there must be some distinction. This is called the Transformation of Things.”

Lin Yutang Translation	Burton Watson Translation

Handout #2 Translations of *Beowulf*

1. Translation by Seamus Heaney:

Beowulf in his fury
 now settled that score: he saw the monster
 in his resting place, war-weary and wrecked,
 a lifeless corpse, a casualty
 of the battle in Heorot. The body gaped
 at the stroke dealt to it after death:
 Beowulf cut the corpse's head off.

2. Translation by Ruth P.M. Lehmann:

	The bitter hero
settled the score	when he saw Grendel
lying lifeless	on his lonely couch,
weary of warfare	since wounded before
struggling in Heorot.	Struck after death,
the corpse sprang	open at the cut sustained,
a savage swordblow	that severed his head.

3. Translation by Francis B. Gunnere:

Well paid for that
 the wrathful prince! For now prone he saw
 Grendel stretched there, spent with war,
 spoiled of life, so scathed had left him
 Heorot's battle. The body sprang far
 when after death it endured the
 blow, sword-stroke savage, that severed its head.

4. Translation by Ben Slade:

he paid him the reward of that,
the fierce fighter, in that he saw in repose
war-weary Grendel lying,
lifeless, as he had injured him earlier
in the conflict at Heorot --the corpse burst wide open,
when it after death suffered a blow,
a hard sword-stroke-- and then its head he cut off.

5. Translation by Burton Raffel:

But Beowulf repaid him for those visits,
Found him lying dead in his corner,
Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter
Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off
His head with a single swift blow. The body
Jerked for the last time, then lay still.

6. Translation by Lesslie Hall

He gave him requital, grim-raging champion,
When he saw on his rest-place weary of conflict
Grendel lying, of life-joys bereaved,
As the battle at Heorot erstwhile had scathed him;
His body far bounded, a blow when he suffered,
Death having seized him, sword-smiting heavy,
And he cut off his head then.

B THE STRUCTURE AND THEME OF *BEOWULF* AS YIN/YANG. This is a very short activity that compares one of the theories about the construction of *Beowulf* with the Daoist theory of yin/yang.

Activities:



1. Students have already read *Beowulf*. On an overhead or on the board, show students an image of the t'ai chi (or yin/yang) symbol.
2. Ask students if they know what this symbol represents. Make sure that they know that it represents the Tao, or the Way, and that it represents the idea the harmony of dynamic opposites in the universe: male and female, good and evil, black and white, young and old, and so forth. You could share with them the quote from Chuang Tzu: **Heaven, Earth and I were created together, and all things and I are one.**
3. On a chart on the board or on an overhead, ask students to list pairs of contrasting elements in *Beowulf*. These could include:

Youth	Age
Bravery (Beowulf)	Cowardice (Beowulf's warriors at the end)
Light (Herot)	Darkness (Grendel's mere)
Good Kings	Bad Kings
Christianity (God, Heaven and Hell)	Pre-Christian values (Fate, omens, gods)
Words	Actions

4. Show students the following quote from J.R.R Tolkien: "*Beowulf* is indeed the most successful Old English poem because in it the elements, language, meter, theme, are all most nearly in harmony." Ask them how the language and meter are also in harmony.

5. Review Anglo Saxon poetics with them, especially pointing out how the original work was composed of balanced lines, with a *caesura*. Tolkien looked at the structure of the composition, and saw the balance in the poetics: each line was made up of two balanced half lines. This is appropriate to the themes of the poem, because they deal with contrasting pairs, and the balance between them, just as there is a balance between the two half lines, separated by the *caesura*. Tolkien argued that the balance of the meter, connected by the alliteration, was the structural underpinning of a work and that this structure mirrored the themes of harmony and balance.

Background and Resources:

Tolkien, “The Monsters and the Critics” available in *The Monster and the Critics and Other Essays*. London: Harper Collins, 1997. ISBN 0-261-10263-X As far as I know, this essay is not available on-line, but it is in some anthologies of criticism on *Beowulf*.

For an explanation of the t’ai chi symbol, see Eva Wong, *Taoism*. Boston: Shambala, 1997, pages 124-126 or go to this website: <http://www.fengshui-magazine.com/taichi.htm>

Connections to Other Literary Works:

The idea of the connection between form and function is one that can be applied to all study of literature. The idea of the connection of all things in the universe connects quite easily to William Blake, the Romantic poets, and the American Transcendentalists.

Themes and Symbols.

The symbol of the t’ai chi is key to this activity, representing as it does themes of harmony and balance among everything in the universe.

C. VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF KINGS. Students will compare the role of kings in *Beowulf* with the writings of Chuang Tzu on Sage Kings.

Activities:

1. As students read *Beowulf*, ask them to pay particular attention to what the poem says about the role of kings, about good kings and bad kings. You could have students work in groups to write a short essay that displays their findings, or you could ask them to list the qualities of a good king in a class discussion. Some of their finding could include:

Bravery	Generosity	Ability to change fate	Leadership
Treasure	Giver	Cunning	Vengeful

2. Have students read Chaung Tzu’s section “How to Govern” (section 7), or, if this is not available to you, give them Handout #1, with excerpts from Chuang Tzu’s writing on being a Sage/King.
3. Lead students in a discussion of the differences between the view of the perfect king in *Beowulf* and the Sage King in Chuang Tzu.

Discussion Questions and Answers

1. How do the two texts differ in their idea of the importance of fame?
(*Beowulf* is based on the importance of fame, that a king’s deeds need to be spoken of and re-told; the poem itself was composed by a scop whose job was to publicize the deeds of kings and heroes, fame alone can make you immortal. Chuang Tzu says a wise king does not seek fame, that he is unconcerned with outward appearances, that hearing his praises extolled makes no difference at all to the way he governs.)
2. What is the main duty of a king in the two works?

(In *Beowulf* the king is to be active, a warrior, a leader, an example to others, a courageous man who leads his men in battle to gain treasure, which he shares with his *comitatus*, and to gain personal glory, which he pays a scop to tell and re-tell even after his death. In Chuang Tzu, the king's duty is to do nothing, to let things take their course, while he tries to cultivate stillness and tranquility and keep his mind empty.)

3. Given these two possibilities, which of the two types of king do you think will be more successful?
4. Which of these two kings would you rather have as your king>

(Answers to these last two questions will vary.)

Background and Resources:

A great set of links to web sites on Anglo Saxon England, including some on Anglo Saxon kingship, is < <http://www.suite101.com/subjectheadings/contents.cfm/13647>>

A very thorough web site on everything Anglo-Saxon can be found at <http://www.lauraloft.com/saxon/a-saxon.htm>

Connections to Other Literary Works:

The most obvious connection to Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which is much closer to *Beowulf* than to Chuang Tzu in philosophy.

You could also connect this activity to Plato's *Republic*.

Themes and Symbols:

The key theme here is that of the role of the king and the relationship between the king and his subjects.

Handout #1 Chuang Tzu on being a Sage King

Pu Yi Tsu said” ...Emperor Shun was no match for Emperor Fu Shi. Emperor Shun always tried to do good so that men would follow him. He was never able to distinguish between what a man is and what he is not. On the other hand, Emperor Fu Shi was calm and tranquil when asleep, and simple and direct when awake. Sometimes he would take on the spirit of a horse, and sometimes that of an ox. His wisdom could be trusted. His virtue was genuine. He was beyond distinguishing between what a man is and what he is not.

Chien Wu went to see the madman, Chieh Yu. Chieh Yu said, “What die Chung Shih tell you the other day>”

Chien Wu said, “He told me that a ruler should be an example to others, establishing law and order, ceremony, and measure, so that every man is influenced and is never tempted to break the law.”

Chieh Ys said, “This is subverting virtue! Trying to govern the world that way is like wading through the sea, digging a river, or making a mosquito carry a mountain on its back. When a wise man rules, is he concerned with outward appearances? When the mind is clear, then appropriate action follows. Let each man do what he can, that is all. Birds fly high in the sky to avoid being hit by stringed arrows. Mice make their homes deep under the secret mound so as to avoid being smoked out or dug up. Surely men have more sense than these two creatures.”

In answer to the question “Please tell me how to rule the world, a nameless sage replied, “Let your mind wander in the pure and simple. Be one with the infinite. Allow all things to take their course. Do no try to be clever. Then the world will be ruled!”

When a sage king rules, his influence is felt everywhere but he does not seem to be doing anything. His work affects the ten thousand things, but the people do not depend upon him. No one is aware of him, but he brings happiness to every man. He stands on that which is not known and wanders in the land of nowhere.

Do not seek fame. Do not make plans. Do not be absorbed by activities. Do not think that you know. Be aware of all that is and dwell in the infinite. Wander where there is no path. Be all that heaven gave you, but act as though you have received nothing. Be empty, that is all. The mind of a perfect man is like a mirror. It grasps nothing. It expects nothing. It reflects but does not hold. Therefore the perfect man can act without effort.

One that is born beautiful, even if you give him a mirror, unless you tell him so will not know that he is more beautiful than other men. But the fact that he knows it or does not know it, is told about it or is not told about it, makes no difference at all to the pleasure that others get from his beauty or to the admiration that it arouses. Beauty is his nature. And so it is with the love of the Sage for his people. But the fact that he knows it or does not know it, is told of it or is not told of it, makes no difference at all with to his love for the people or the peace that this love brings to them. Love is his nature.

D BEOWULF, GRENDEL AND THE BUTTERFLY. You may find it useful to have your class read John Gardner's novel *Grendel*, which re-tells the Grendel section of *Beowulf* from the monster's point of view. The following is a short activity you might do to prepare students for the shift in point of view.

Activities:

1. Have students read Chuang Tzu's parable about Chuang Chou, the man who did not know if he was a man dreaming he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was a man. There are two versions of this tale on Handout #1 for activity I A.
2. Ask students what point Chuang Tzu might be making here. (see Discussion Questions and Answers, below).
3. Ask each student to write as if he or she were a butterfly, and, in the butterfly's voice, describe one of the people in the room (student or teacher).
4. Call for volunteers to read their pieces.
5. Read them the following passage from Chuang Tzu on the notion that everything is relative:

“If a man sleeps in a damp place, his back aches and he ends up half paralyzed, but is this true of a loach? If he lives in a tree, he is terrified and shakes with fright, but is this true of a monkey? Of these three creatures, then, which one knows the proper place to live? Men eat the flesh of grass-fed and grain-fed animals, deer eat grass, centipedes find snakes tasty, and hawks and falcons relish mice. Of these four, which knows how food ought to taste? Monkeys pair with monkeys, deer go out with deer, and fish play around with fish. Men claim that Mao-ch’iang and Lady Li were beautiful, but if fish saw them they would dive to the bottom of the stream, if birds saw them they would fly away, and if deer saw them they would break into a run. Of these four, which knows how to fix the standard of beauty for the world? The way I see it, the

rules of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of right and wrong are all hopelessly snarled and jumbled. How could I know anything about such discrimination?." (See Discussion Questions and Answers, below).

6. Ask students how the story of *Beowulf* might be different if it were told by Grendel. (see Discussion Questions and Answers, below.) This should lead into a reading of Gardner's *Grendel*, and also leads to a good lesson on point of view and the reliability of narrators.

Discussion Questions and Answers:

1. (After reading the story of Chuang Chou.) What is the point of this parable? What is Chuang Tzu asking us to think?
(what we think is "reality" may not in fact be reality at all; the story says that we must be one thing or another, there must be some distinctions; the importance of perspective (he was happy when he thought he was dreaming he was a butterfly), the dichotomy of body and mind)
2. (After reading the passage about the relativity of all viewpoints.) Is there one standard of beauty in our world? Is it possible even for all humans, let alone all animals, to agree on anything? Is everything relative?
(answers will vary, depending on the level of awareness of other cultures that students have. Some may come from cultures with very different ideas of beauty than exist in the United States. Regardless of their comments, pay attention. They will probably talk about standards of beauty as they apply to women, not to men or to nature. You might want to ask them why this is so, and question whether that might not in itself be a cultural stereotype. Remind them that in the Anglo Saxon world women were valued more for their devotion to their husband

or lord, and their ability to bear children, than for any aesthetic standard. Beauty and art was more tied up in beautifully carved swords or ornate shields and helmets.)

3. How might *Beowulf* be different if it were told by Grendel?

(lots of possible answers here: some might say it would be gibberish since Grendel could not speak human language. Some might suggest that it would portray the humans as the evil ones, and himself as a victim of circumstances. Some might suggest that Grendel is really just a lonely monster who wants someone to play with. Some would say that he would mock the customs and beliefs of the humans.)

Background and Resources

Obviously, you would need to have a class set of Gardner's *Grendel* or, if that is not possible, you may want to photocopy a relevant section, such as Chapter 3, where Grendel recounts the history of men and the role of the poet, or Chapter 5, when Grendel goes and speaks to the Dragon.

Connections to other Literary Works

If you were teaching an AP course, you might connect the dream of the butterfly with *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka or *Rhinoceros* by Eugene Ionesco.

Themes and Symbols

An important theme is illusion versus reality. Another is the relativity of all knowledge.

F. UNDERSTANDING THE DRAGON

High school students often have a lot of difficulty understanding the philosophical principles that John Gardner uses in *Grendel*, especially in Chapter 5, where Grendel has an audience with the Dragon. It might help students understand some of the concepts in the novel if, before they read these concepts, they had a chance to discuss similar principles as presented by Chuang Tzu. Here are a few examples.

1. Chaung Tzu wrote: "If there is no other, there is no I. If there is no I, there is no one to perceive." Have students, in groups, discuss what these seemingly simple statements might mean. Then, have them read the following passage from *Grendel*:

"The world resists me and I resist the world," I said. "That's all there is. The mountains are what I define them as." Ah, monstrous stupidity of childhood, unreasonable hope! I waken with a start and see it over again (in my cave, out walking, or sitting by the mere), the memory rising as if it has been pursuing me. The fire in my mother's eyes brightens and she reaches out as if some current is tearing us apart. "The world is all pointless accident," I say. Shouting now, my first clenched. "I exist, nothing else." Her face works. She gets up on all fours, brushing dry bits of bone from her path, and, with a look of terror, rising as if by unnatural power, she hurls herself across the void and buries me in her bristly fur and fat. I sicken with fear. "My mother's fur is bristly," I say to myself. "Her flesh is loose." Buried under my mother I cannot see. She smells of wild pig and fish. "My mother smells of wild pig and fish," I say. What I see I inspire with usefulness, I think, trying to suck in breath, and all that I do not see is useless, void. I observe myself observing what I observe. It startles me. "Then I am not that which observes!" I am *lack*. *Alack!* No thread, no frailest hair, between myself and the universal clutter. (28,29)

2. The first chapter of the *Chuang Tzu* deals mostly with the relative nature of knowledge or understanding, a theme that the Dragon in *Grendel* also tries to impart. If you have access to *Zhuangzi Speaks: The Music of Nature* (Princeton University Press) photocopy and give students pages 2-6,8-9, 22-23. Or, choose passages from the first chapter of the *Chuang Tzu* such as the following:

The morning mushroom know nothing of twilight and dawn, not the chrysalis of spring and autumn. These are the short-lived. South of Chu there is a min-ling tree whose spring if five hundred years and autumn five hundred years. A long time ago there was a tortoise whose spring was eight thousand years. Peng Chu is a man famous for his long life. Isn't it sad that everyone want to imitate him.

Now, have students compare the diction and use of imagery in Chuang-Tzu's writing with the following passage, spoken by the Dragon in *Grendel*:

In all discussions of Nature, we must try to remember the differences of scale, and in particular the differences of time-span. We (by which I mean you, not us) are apt to take modes of observable functioning in our own bodies as setting an absolute scale. But as a matter of fact, it's extremely rash to extend conclusions derived from observation far beyond the scale of magnitude to which the observation was confined. For example, the apparent absence of change within a second of time tells nothing as to the change within a thousand years....there is no absolute standard of magnitude. Any term in this progression is large compared to its predecessor and small compared to its successor. (65,66)

**APPENDIX: SOME OTHER IDEAS FOR CHUANG TZU IN THE BRITISH
LITERATURE CURRICULUM**

I. *Hamlet*. A very apt companion piece to Hamlet's soliloquy in Act III, scene 1, and which may help students understand Hamlet's existential question better is the following passage from Chuang Tzu:

"How do I know that loving life is not a delusion? How do I know that in hating death I am not like a man, who, having left home in his youth, has forgotten the way back?"

"Lady Li was the daughter of the border guard at Ai. When she was first taken captive and brought to the state of Chin, she wept until her tears drenched the collar of her robe. But, later, when she went to live in the palace of the ruler, shared his couch with him, and ate the delicious meats of his table, she wondered why she had ever wept. How do I know that the dead do not wonder why they ever longed for life?"

"He who dreams of drinking wine may weep when morning comes; he who dreams of weeping may in the morning go off to hunt. While he is dreaming he does not know it is a dream, and in his dream he may even try to interpret a dream. And someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream. Yet the stupid believe they are awake, busily and brightly assuming they understand things, calling this man ruler, that one herdsman – how dense! Confucious and you are both dreaming! And when I say you are dreaming, I am dreaming too."

The following passage may work as a foil to Act V, Scene I (the graveyard/Horatio scene:)

When Chaung Tzu was going to Ch'u he saw by the roadside a skull, clean and bare, but with every bone in its place. Touching it gently with his chariot whip he bent over it and asked it saying, "Sir, was it some insatiable ambition that brought you to this? Was it the fall of a kingdom, the blow of an executioner's axe, that brought you to this? Or had you done some shameful deed and could not face the reproaches of father and mother, of wife and child, and so were brought to this? Was it hunger and cold that brought you to this, or was it that the springs and autumns of your span had in their due course carried you to this?"

Having thus addressed the skull, he put it under his head as a pillow and went to sleep. At midnight the skull appeared to him in a dream and said to him, "All that you said to me – your glib, commonplace chatter – is just what I should expect from a live man, showing as it does in every phrase a mind hampered by trammels from which we dead are entirely free. Would you like to hear a work or two about the dead?"

"I certainly would," said Chuang Tzu.

"Among the dead," said the skull, "none is king, none is subject, there is no division of the seasons; for us the whole world is spring, the whole world is autumn. No monarch on his throne has joy greater than ours."

Chuang Tzu did not believe this. "Suppose," he said, "I could get the Clerk of Destinies to make your frame anew, to clothe your bones once more with flesh and skin, send you back to father and mother, wife and child, friends and home, I do not think you would refuse."

A deep frown furrowed the skeleton's brow. "How can you imagine," it asked, "that I would cast away joy greater than a king upon his throne, only to go back again to the toils of the living world?"

II. **William Blake.** *“If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.”*

It may well be that the writings of Chuang Tzu work best with the work of William Blake, the most visionary and mystical of all British authors. I am going to suggest two activities that may connect Blake to Daoism. The first asks students to compare Blake’s “Proverbs of Hell” with selected lines from Chuang Tzu and to draw parallels between the two. The second suggestion asks students to compare one of Blake’s engravings with the t’ai chi symbol, leading into a discussion of the balance of good and evil in “The Tyger” and “The Lamb.”

Proverbs of Hell *by William Blake*

In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.

*Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead.
The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.*

*Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity.
He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence.*

The cut worm forgives the plow.

Dip him in the river who loves water.

*A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.
He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star.*

*Eternity is in love with the productions of time.
The busy bee has no time for sorrow.
The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock, but of wisdom: no
clock can measure.*

*All wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap.
Bring out number weight & measure in a year of dearth.
No bird soars too high. if he soars with his own wings.*

A dead body. revenges not injuries.

The most sublime act is to set another before you.

*If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise
Folly is the cloke of knavery.*

Shame is Prides cloke.

Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.

The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.

The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.

The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.

The nakedness of woman is the work of God.

Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps.

The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man.

The fox condemns the trap, not himself.

Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth.

Let man wear the fell of the lion. woman the fleece of the sheep.

The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship.

The selfish smiling fool. & the sullen frowning fool. shall be both thought wise. that they may be a rod.

What is now proved was once, only imagin'd.

The rat, the mouse, the fox, the rabbit; watch the roots, the lion, the tyger, the horse, the elephant, watch the fruits.

The cistern contains: the fountain overflows

One thought. fills immensity.

Always be ready to speak your mind, and a base man will avoid you.

Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth.

The eagle never lost so much time, as when he submitted to learn of the crow.

The fox provides for himself. but God provides for the lion.

Think in the morning, Act in the noon, Eat in the evening, Sleep in the night.

He who has sufferd you to impose on him knows you.

As the plow follows words, so God rewards prayers.

The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction

Expect poison from the standing water.

You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough.

Listen to the fools reproach! it is a kingly title!

*The eyes of fire, the nostrils of air, the mouth of water, the
beard of earth.*

*The weak in courage is strong in cunning.
The apple tree never asks the beech how he shall grow, nor the
lion. the horse; how he shall take his prey.
The thankful reciever bears a plentiful harvest.*

*If others bad not been foolish. we should be so.
The soul of sweet delight. can never be defil'd,*

*When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius. lift up
thy head!*

*As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs
on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys.*

To create a little flower is the labour of ages.

Damn braces: Bless relaxes.

*The best wine is the oldest. the best water the newest.
Prayers plow not! Praises reap not!
Joys laugh not! Sorrows weep not!*

*The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the
hands & feet Proportion.*

*As the air to a bird or the sea to a fish, so is contempt to the
contemptible.
The crow wish'd every thing was black, the owl, that every thing
was white.*

Exuberance is Beauty.

If the lion was advised by the fox. he would be cunning.

*Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without
Improvement, are roads of Genius. t*

Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires

Where man is not nature is barren.

*Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be
believ'd.*

Enough! or Too much

Selected Saying of Chuang Tzu:

The morning mushroom knows nothing of twilight and dawn, not the chrysalis of spring and autumn

The perfect man has no self, the holy man has no merit, the sage has no reputation.”

Name is only the shadow of reality.

The muskrat drinks only enough from the river to fill its belly.

Great knowledge is all encompassing; small knowledge is limited. Great words are inspiring, small words are chatter.

Once a man is given a body it works naturally as long as it lasts. It carries on through hardship and ease and, like a galloping horse, nothing can stop it. Isn't it sad?

Words are not just blown air. They have a meaning. If you are not sure what you are talking about, are you saying anything, or are you saying nothing?”

One man cannot see things as another sees them.

There is right because of wrong. There is wrong because of right.

A path is formed by walking on it.

Not making distinctions but dwelling on that which is unchanging is called clear vision.

Right is infinite. Wrong is also infinite.

Those who dispute do not see.

Great argument uses no words.

Great goodness is not kind.

Great integrity is not incorruptible.

Great courage is not aggressive.

The sage acts without choosing. He experiences ten thousand years as one age. (Compare this especially with Blake's famous lines from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: “To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the Palm of your hand / and Eternity in an hour.”)

If you hide the universe in the universe, there is no way to lose it. That is the ultimate reality.

How can I tell whether the dead are not amazed that they ever clung to life?

Enjoy the infinite – rest in it.

The pheasant in the marshes has to take ten steps in order to get one beakful of food, one hundred steps for one drink of water. Yet he doesn't want to be kept in a cage.

Learning is born of contention.

It is in emptiness that light is born.

There is happiness in stillness.

What was simple in the beginning becomes grotesque in the end.

When the mind is clear, then appropriate action follows.

Do not seek fame.

Do not make plans.

Do not be absorbed by activities.

Be aware of all that is and dwell in the infinite.

Wander where there is no path. (Compare to Blake's saying "I must create my own system or be ensnared by another's.")

Be all that heaven gave you, but act as though you received nothing.

Be empty, that is all.

Activities: There are several possibilities. One is to give the students both lists and ask them to make a list of sayings from each list that seem to agree with each other, and another with sayings that seem to disagree.

You could ask them to read both lists and try to come up with three general statements about the philosophy behind each work.

Ask them to re-organize each list, grouping similar sayings.

They could be asked to choose one statement from each list and explain why they agree or disagree with it. This could lead to them writing a personal essay.

For the second activity, you need to have a copy of William Blake's engraving "Michael Binding Satan." (Also referred to as "Michael Binding the Dragon" in some sources. You can find this on the Internet at http://webhome.idirect.com/~ravenque/images/blake/blake_tn.html



Ask the students to analyze the composition of the work, paying attention to color, contrast, shape, and movement. Ask them if the shape of the picture reminds them of anything. If no one answers, show them the t'ai chi symbol, then ask them to comment on the painting again.

Review with them the meaning of the t'ai chi symbol (the representation of the harmony or balance of opposites in the Universe.)

Now, have students read Blake's "The Tyger" and "The Lamb" and ask them to suggest ways in which these two poems also fit in with the yin/yang ideal. Much of Blake's work, and certainly *Song of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, demonstrate that good and evil, light and dark, male and female, and all contrasting pairs in life, are necessary and serve to make life complete. This is a very Daoist thought. Compare it with these words from Chuang Tzu:

Life and Death, ...existence and non-existence, success and non-success, poverty and wealth, virtue and vice, good and evil report, hunger and thirst, warmth and cold – these all revolve upon the changing wheel of Destiny. Day and night they follow one upon the other, and no man can say where each one begins. Therefore they cannot be allowed to disturb the harmony of the organism, nor enter into the soul's domain. Swim however with the tide, so as not to offend others. Do this day by day without break, and live in peace with mankind. Thus you will be ready for all contingencies, and may be said to have your talents perfect

He who is not conversant with both good and evil is not a superior man.

The Universe and I exist together and all things and I are one.

III. The Romantic poets. *The following quotes from Chuang Tzu may be useful as companion pieces when studying Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron,*

He who knows the activities of Nature lives according to Nature.

“My friend,” replied Tzu Chi, “... Ah! Perhaps you only know the music of Man, and not that of Earth. Or even, if you have heard the music of Earth, you have not heard the music of Heaven.”

“Pray explain,” said Tzu Yu.

“The breath of the universe...is called wind. At times it is inactive. But when active, every aperture resounds to the blast. Have you never listened to its growing roar?”

“Caves and dells of hill and forest, hollows in huge trees of many a span in girth; - these are like nostrils, like mouths, like ears, like beam-sockets, like goblets, like mortars, like ditches, like bogs. And the wind goes rushing through them, sniffing, snoring, signing, soughing, puffing, purling, whistling, shirring, now shrilly treble, now deeply bass, now soft, now loud; until, with a lull, silence reigns supreme. Have you never witnessed among the trees such a disturbance as this?”

“Well, then, “ enquired Tzu Ys, “since the music of earth consists of nothing more than holes, and the music of man of pipes and flutes – of what consists the music of Heaven?”

“The effect of the wind upon these various apertures,” replied Tzu Ch’i is not uniform. But what is it that gives to each the individuality, to all the potentiality of sound?”

The Universe and I exist together and all things and I are one.

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCES

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<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/taoism/cz-text1.htm> “The Chuang Tzu: Lin Yutang’s Introduction” A short introduction by a translator who borrowed from Herbert A. Giles.

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/taoism/cz-text2.htm#HAPPY> The Lin Yutang translation

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/taoism/index.htm> Great links to information on Daoism..

<http://www.coldbacon.com/chuang/chuang.html> Some chapters of the Burton Watson translation; includes other links, like Chuang Tzu. and T.S. Eliot.

<http://www.edepot.com/taochuang3.html> Translation by Patricia Ebray

<http://www.edepot.com/taochuang.html> Selections from translations by Lin Yutang

<http://www.edepot.com/taochuang2.html> Selections from translation by Burton Watson

http://www.digiserve.com/mystic/Taoist/Chuang_Tzu/index.html A selection of Chuang Tzu quotations by subject matter.

<http://hkusuc.hku.hk/philodep/ch/zhuang.htm> A scholarly study of Chuang Tzu

<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Taichi/chuang.html> A short scholarly article (Philosophy)

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/> East Asia for Educators from Columbia University, including some lesson plan ideas.

Books

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Using *Chuang Tzu* in a British Literature Curriculum

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