



Ulm-Chartes – anglais

2019-2020

In Ulm and Chartes, no set texts in English. It is literature, texts that I choose, first and foremost because I like them and because I'm hoping to make you like them too.

I remind you that the BEL exam consists in the literary commentary on a contemporary text (published after 1850) and the translation into French of a passage from this text. For the Ulm orals, it is a poem or an essay or an extract from a novel or a play, which might date all the way back to the 15th century and be written by any English-speaking author of whatever origin. (preparation: 1 hour, presentation: 20 mn, questions: 10 mn).

For both exams, you are allowed to use the Oxford Concise Dictionary and I want you to buy a copy if you don't have one yet. For the Chartes orals, it is contemporary fiction, a text of around 500 words (preparation: 40 mn, presentation: 10 mn and questions 10 mn). No dictionary.

It is a bad idea not to do any English at all during the summer holiday. English is not a school subject, it is a language and if you stop using it, it deteriorates dramatically. Yet speaking English must remain (or become) something pleasant, exciting and rewarding. Some students tell me that they watch films or TV series in English and they think that it is enough to make their English perfect. I beg to differ. Watching all that stuff will of course improve your English in the long run, but unless you are exceptionally gifted, it will take ages.

So here is my advice. Select a short passage (between one or two minutes) from your favourite film or series and listen to it at least ten times in a row, every day, for two weeks, until you know it by heart and then you do the same with another extract and so on. This will really improve your accent and your fluency and will make you acquire reflexes. Again, the emotional dimension is of primary importance and it is preferable to choose a scene you really enjoy or an actor or actress you really like. Alternatively, you can find short oral documents, with transcripts, on Cyber Room 407.

I have also sent you a list of words which must be able to pronounce perfectly, for they are very common words. It is an exercise, or a game if you prefer, in which, after listening to the attached mp3 file with my mellifluous voice reading those words, you will be asked to match each word with the phonetic symbol on the left-hand side. Good fun guaranteed for all! The thrill of your long summer months, I'm sure.

You must also read literature. It must be pleasure reading. If you start a book and find that after, say, fifty pages, you still don't like it, just give up and get another one. I want you to read at least one novel (preferably two) and I will ask you which one you've read and I will make sure that you are telling the truth.

Here are some novels I like with brief (and personal) guidelines:

The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim, Jonathan Coe (very English and hilarious),
East of Eden, John Steinbeck (epic, ironic, tragic, deeply moving, best novel I've ever read and I've read it six times),
Water Music, TC Boyle (epic and hilarious),
The Great Gatsby, Francis Scott Fitzgerald (me),
Nice Work, David Lodge (hilarious),
The New Confessions, William Boyd (historical, hilarious, can't put the book down),
In Cold Blood, Truman Capote (I read it in my early 30's, non-stop, barely eating anything and not sleeping for 24 hours),
The Remains of the Day, Kazuo Ishiguro (tragic, the unreliable narrator),
The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, Carson McCullers (tragic),
Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell (dystopian and depressing),
The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood (dystopian and suicidal),
Sophie's Choice, William Styron (historical and suicidal),
A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters, Julian Barnes (weird, hilarious and thrilling),
The Go-Between, L.P. Hartley (magnificent, romantic, depressing),
David Copperfield, Charles Dickens (the best novel ever, but I still prefer *East of Eden*),
Waterland, Graham Swift (sexy, weird, a difficult read but worth the try),
The Inner Circle, TC Boyle (very sexy and hilarious)
Drop City, TC Boyle (hippies, hilarious, high, hi love it),
A Prayer for Owen Meany, John Irving (doesn't it ring the bell? One of Irving's best novels, together with...)
The Cider House Rules, John Irving (and...)
The World According to Garp, John Irving (he wrote a lot of other novels, which are good, but not as good as those three in my opinion)
The Road, Cormac McCarthy (father and son, post-apocalyptic, gripping, rather depressing, excellent)

Don't hesitate to contact me for more advice or feedback or when you've read all the books above. I always answer emails and I expect you to do the same. If you get no answer within 2 days, it means I didn't get your mail for some reason. Have a nice holiday.

Philippe Ernoult