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### Can Literature Teaching Be Functional for Students?

#### Summary

The essay discusses the dilemmas of literature teaching as first raised by student unrest towards the late 1960s because of the inefficiency and lack of interest of the established forms of literary studies and literature teaching of the time, and the later resolutions of these dilemmas towards the end of the century. The process of long-term experimental examination of the existing alienating forms of studies and teaching started when the criticism of students came to be supported by some of the most distinguished professors of literature.

The second section centres on some more successful efforts to surpass such inefficient old forms of literature teaching with the major shift from teaching data about literature to the discursual analysis of texts and to promoting students' competence of critical understanding of literary texts and the functioning of language.

The third part deals with trends in literature teaching within the framework of English literature as anticipated by the new Slovene curricula for English as a foreign language and the preparation of teachers for it. It emphasises the importance of the intercultural dimension of teaching according to the new curricula and the rich possibilities for the understanding of intercultural contacts in the process of reading literature in English.

### Ali je pouk književnosti lahko funkcionalen za študente in učence?

#### Povzetek

Razprava govori o dilemah pouka književnosti, ki so jih ob koncu šestdesetih let preteklega stoletja odprli študentski nemiri v nekaterih deželah razvitega sveta z opozorili o nezanimivosti in neučinkovitosti ustaljenih oblik študija in pouka književnosti, rešitve zanje pa so prinesle šele temeljite spremembe pouka ob koncu stoletja. Ko so se študentskim kritikam pridružili nekateri najvplivnejši profesorji književnosti, se je pričel dolgotrajni proces analitičnega in eksperimentalnega razčlenjevanja obstoječih oblik študija in pouka.

Drugi del prikaže nekatera najuspešnejša prizadevanja za preseganje neučinkovitih in že zastarelih oblik književnega pouka z osrednjim premikom od podatkov o književnosti k razčlenjevanju samega besedila in k razvijanju sposobnosti za kritično razumevanje umetnostnega diskurza in širšega delovanja jezika.

Tretji del spregovori o razvojnih težnjah pri književnem pouku v okviru poučevanja angleške književnosti po novih slovenskih učnih načrtih in o študijskih pripravah učiteljev za tak pouk. Poudarja pomen medkulturne razsežnosti tako zasnovanega pouka in bogate možnosti za razumevanje medkulturnih stikov, ki jih ponuja branje angleških umetnostnih besedil.

# Can Literature Teaching Be Functional for Students?

## 1. Introduction

In the middle of student revolts in the late 1960s a virulent debate about such functions of literature teaching that would be acceptable to students opened among the teachers of literature. Specifically, the protesting students called attention to the uselessness and boring nature of the established transmissional literature teaching. The support for student criticism came, unexpectedly, from their professors. At the colloquium 'L'enseignement de la littérature', held in Paris during 22<sup>nd</sup>–29<sup>th</sup> July 1969, Roland Barthes delivered his famous address "Reflections sur un manuel" analysing the inefficiency of literary textbooks consisting of information about authors and periods along with short extracts from their texts. Asking a provocative question about the impact of such teaching in adult life, Barthes offered the following answer:

If we restrict ourselves to an objective inventory, we would answer that the part of literature that continues into adult life as lived today is this: a few answers in crossword puzzles and television quiz shows, posters announcing the hundredth anniversary of an author's birth or death, some paperback titles, some critical allusions in a newspaper we are reading for a wholly different purpose, to find something other than those allusions (Barthes 1997, 71).

Such teaching – in his opinion – reduced literature for grown-ups to childhood memory because it did not help to develop literary competence (Culler 1975) and stimulated no interest in literature.

The question of what texts to teach, as opened by the ever stronger questioning of the literary canon, was thus not the only one to trouble teachers of literature and scholars. In the past few decades they had to face more radical questions: Why to teach literature and how to teach it to ever more disinterested students, who prefer visually supported and more easily accessible narrative of film, who are not interested in canonical texts, who are not willing, or even unable, to make the effort necessary to read longer literary texts on their own, and who have at their disposal more information about literature, individual authors and their texts on the internet than can be offered in the classroom. Those teachers who have been aware of the new circumstances of literature teaching have tried to establish new functions of literature teaching and to justify the study of literature. This endeavour is far from easy after the end of reading and *The Death of Literature* (Kernan 1990) have already been announced and the situation has to be viewed from the perspective of *After the Death of Literature* (Schwartz 1997). It has become obvious that the value of teaching literature is not at all self-evident, and that the teaching itself can have a negative/alienating impact on students. The questioning of existent practices and the search for more efficient methods have therefore become a practical necessity. If the answers were easy to find and persuasive for students of literature, not only for their teachers, the debate about literature teaching would not continue from decade to decade, from conference to conference, in countless books and essays. The very virulence of the debate

testifies to the urgency of demonstrating the more generally acceptable functions of literature teaching in the circumstances of decreasing interest in literature and in reading. Some authors have even found the reasons for the loss of interest in literature in the inadequate methods of teaching and studying literature (cf. Sell 2001, 2 and ff.).

The increasing questioning of literature teaching along with the demand for a more student-centred literary studies from the late 1960s spread along with student unrest. Several authors in Germany and elsewhere came to empathise with student demands with essays published in *Neue Ansichten einer künftigen Germanistik. Probleme einer Sozial- und Rezeptionsgeschichte der Literatur Kritik, der Linguistik, und Kommunikationswissenschaft* (Kolbe 1973) and other texts. They advocated necessary changes in literary studies by referring to the importance of readers'/students' own reading as later analysed by the best known German proponents of *Rezeptionsästhetik*, Robert Jauss (1982) and Wolfgang Iser (1978). The following years saw the publication of countless studies criticising existent practices and searching for new possibilities of legitimising literature teaching with more student-centred approaches. The probing of questions concerning literature teaching in the United Kingdom and the United States ranged from the radical criticism of Peter Widdowson's analysis of English studies in *Rereading English* (1982) and the selected papers of the Essex conferences *Literature, Politics and Theory: Essays from the Essex Conferences 1976-1984* (edited by Frances Barker 1986) to detailed descriptions of possible student-centred approaches in Robert Scholes' study *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of Literature* in 1985. The total output in this field defies any overview.<sup>1</sup> The predicaments of literature teaching have been the subject of several conferences and collections of papers, as for instance *Literatures in English: New Perspectives* (1990) and *English Literature and the University Curriculum* (1992), both edited by Wolfgang Zach. The authors of essays in the latter collection share one common concern: "a fundamental insecurity about the function of literature in the modern world and in the university curriculum" (Zach 1992, 11). The efforts to come to terms with the teaching of literatures in English continue in the papers collected in *Innovation and Continuity in English Studies* (2001) by Herbert Grabes for IAUPE (the International Association of the University Professors of English), and the situation in other languages is analysed in *EuroLit. Les études littéraires en Europe* (1996) edited by Wenzlaff-Eggebert.

The analysis of the deficiencies of the traditional teaching of literature gained additional impetus from the blossoming of reader-response criticism in Anglophone countries and *Rezeptionsästhetik* in Germany in the 1970s, which called attention to the centrality of the reader's own response and production of textual meaning, conceptualised by Iser as the "actualisation" of the literary text, and later as a "textual world" by the linguistically oriented criticism. The newly revealed importance of the reader for the construction of meaning changed the perception of the function of students' own meaning in the teaching

<sup>1</sup> The publications in the field are too numerous to be read; the following are just some of the studies I have found interesting on different problems: Bergonzi 1990; Brown Ruoff & Ward, eds. 1990; Elbow 1990; Fish 1995; Graff 1992; Greenblatt & Gunn 1992; Rursch 1994; Scholes 1998; Schwartz 1997.

of literature. On the basis of accumulated new evidence about the reader's own contribution to the construction of textual meaning<sup>2</sup>, students' own readings gradually came to be regarded as the most relevant starting point for classroom discussion (see also Sell 2000, 22). As a consequence of this shift the authority of a teacher's own reading and interpretation no longer had priority in the classroom, and the teacher-centred approaches to literature teaching gave way to student-centredness as the basic principle of interactive teaching. What is more, empirical research provided abundant evidence about the importance of students' own emotional and intellectual involvement in the reading. It also called attention to the fact that the expectation that students should share teachers' reading and/or interpretation constitute the most frequent reason for students' refusal of literary reading and literature (cf. Gejlon and Schram 1991; Hunt 1991; Morgan 1993; Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith 1995; Mial and Kuikinen 1995). Such radical changes were not welcomed by all teachers, especially not by those teachers who did not feel secure enough without relying on authority, so the debate continued in an almost continuous flow of studies revealing the failures of the traditional literature teaching and proposing changes based on the new findings about literary reading.

## 2. Search for Solutions

Among the numerous efforts to define more efficient and student-centred possibilities of literary studies, Robert Scholes' work *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of Literature* (1985) merits special attention for both its clear criticism of harmful attitudes on the part of authoritative literature teachers and its description of new possibilities of student-centred approaches. Believing that the reverential attitude of the romantic aestheticism to literature is no longer appropriate in an age of verbal manipulation, when students need critical strength to resist the continuous assaults of mass media, Scholes proposes that "teaching literature" must stop and "studying texts" start (ibid., 16):

Now we must learn instead to help our students unlock the textual power and turn it to their own uses. We must help our students come into their own powers of textualization. We must help them to see that every poem, play, and story is a text related to others, both verbal pre-texts and social sub-texts and all manner of post-texts including their own responses, whether in speech, writing, or action. The response to a text is itself always a text. Our knowledge is itself only a dim text that brightens as we express it. This is why expression, the making of new texts by students, must play a major role in the kind of course we are discussing (ibid., 20).

Scholes' concept of teaching students productive reading and literary competence necessitates a redefinition of the teacher's role. That is how he describes the new role:

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<sup>2</sup> Attention has been drawn to different aspects of the reader's contribution to meaning construction. S. Olsen (1978, 96) points out the necessity of the reader's recourse to her/his extraliterary experience at different levels of reading: "It is a common feature of literary works that they invoke the reader's knowledge of non-literary aspects of the world." W. Iser (1978, 38) sees the reader's contribution in the fact that "the actual content of (reader's) mental images will be coloured by the existing stock of his experience." E. Hirsch calls attention to the highly active mind of the reader "who is now discovered to be not only a decoder of what is written down but also a supplier of much

Our job is not to produce “readings” for our students but to give them the tools for producing their own... Our job is not to intimidate students with our own superior textual production; it is to show them the codes upon which all textual production depends, and to encourage their own textual practice (ibid., 24–5).

Studies along similar lines emphasise that the most important part of teaching literature *qua* literature is teaching response to literature (Short and Candlin 1988, 179) and that, accordingly, teachers of literature must be equipped with insight into the forms and functions of texts in order to teach students how to bring to life the meaning potential of texts (Van Peer 1988, 267). Several studies demonstrate how to teach and help students to discover not just *what* a text means, but also *how* it means: Ronald Carter’s and Paul Simpson’s *Language, Discourse and Literature* (1989), Ronald Carter’s and Walter Nash’s *Seeing through Language* (1990), Henry Widdowson’s *Practical Stylistics* (1992), and Mick Short’s *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose* (1996), to name only a few of them.

The old approaches and practices have continued in spite of such intense efforts to stimulate a student-oriented teaching. In the 1990s specialists in literature teaching still found much to be desired in the field. Writing for a special issue of *College Literature*, significantly entitled The Politics of Teaching Literature, Zavarzadeh and Morton (1990, 56) would like their students to see that their understanding of texts is a result of their situatedness in a complex network of gender, class, and race relations and to learn to ‘read’ the dominant social systems and its texts against themselves. In his Introduction to the Special Topic issue of *PMLA* devoted to The Teaching of Literature, Martin Bidy believes that teachers and mentors should take the responsibility for alleviating the institutional pressure to *master* material at the expense of being affected by texts and strongly recommends the introduction of an explicit pedagogical concern at the centre of professional and literary exchanges (1997, 23).

Robert de Beaugrande (1995, 100) addresses his criticism to the entire educational system permitting transmissional teaching and consequent insensitivity to students and their particular needs:

... literature has been widely co-opted by educational systems as a narrow-minded exercise in memorizing the trivia of authors’ biographies or historical schools, identifying quotations, pasting erudite labels on literary ‘devices’, and, within rigid authoritarian setting, giving the ‘correct interpretation’ certified by textbooks, teachers, and traditional literary scholars. The predictable result has merely been that ordinary people are made to feel incompetent to participate in literary communication in creative, self-actualizing ways, and they proceed to abandon their interest in literature altogether.

In 1999 *College Literature* devoted another special issue to The Profession of Literature at the End of the Millennium complaining once again about the slow improvement in literary studies from the end of the century perspective (Myrsiades 1999, 1; Schwartz 1999, 5; Cioffi 1999, 82). The model of a fully developed psychoanalytically oriented methodology of literature teaching paying exclusive attention to students’ personality as presented by Bracher

(1999, 127) however seems far from realisable. The desire to come to terms with the questions concerning literature teaching thus continues unabated in the present century. *PMLA* for May 2002 published the essays of twelve professors trying to answer the two related questions: “Why Major in Literature – What Do We Tell Our Students?” These essays try to find understandable justification in students’ acquisition of critical reading skills, or rather, in improved linguistic and textual competence amounting to students’ better understanding of signifying practices. The latter should result in beneficial knowledge of how to come to terms with the complexities of contemporary existence.<sup>3</sup> Their argument seems to indicate that the traditional *prodesse* (to instruct) prevails over *delectare* (to delight), which has become the domain of visually supported narratives. However it is hard to see the value of their recommendations since the details of how to teach and what to teach in terms of literary competence or even cognitive benefits of critical thinking are scarce. Thus all the questioning concerning literature teaching along with the attempts to design more efficient curricula on the basis of the achieved understanding of the situation cannot be said to have resulted in restoring literary studies and literature teaching to the credibility it used to enjoy. In spite of all the accumulated knowledge about the importance of student-centred teaching some teachers obviously continue to use the inefficient transmissional literature teaching. This poses the question:

**Why is the transition to more student-centred approaches so slow?**

First of all discussing and designing change is easier than implementing it because teaching practices are always backed by considerable inertia of teachers who are not aware of the out-datedness of their approaches and are, accordingly, not willing to change them, especially not for a more demanding methodology. Some teachers may have a problem realising that “literature is not something given once and for all but something constructed and reconstructed, the product of shifting conceptual entitlements and limits” (Greenblat and Gunn 1992, 5; cf. also Eagleton 1983), i.e. a socially agreed concept about a particular social practice with changing functions in changing social circumstances. The change of what was “once conceived as a ‘work’” and is now conceived “in most fields of literary scholarship as a ‘text’”, i.e. the change that has caused the critical shift of focus “from the forms of the signified to the processes of signification” (Greenblat and Gunn 1992, 3), contributes to make literature teaching a considerably more demanding and responsible profession. Last but not least, a part of the answer to the slowness of the change seems to lie in the students who, as the addressees of the teaching, should share the beliefs of teachers and be willing to study harder, i.e. to read with greater interest. For the communication necessary for efficient literature teaching, both parties in communication, the students and the teachers, should be willing to participate. It is simply not enough if teachers are persuaded of the importance of literature. As long as students

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<sup>3</sup> By way of example: C. Crosby (2002, 493) writes that “[W]e introduce students to the complexities of language as made evident in metaphors and other tropes (at the level of the word); we demonstrate how literary texts elaborate arguments through figurative language and the structuring process of narrative...” R. D. Pope (2002, 503) argues: “the study of literature provides a superb way to think about the world; to study societies, one’s own and others; to improve one’s capacity to express ideas concisely and effectively; and to gain access to a shared knowledge that is constantly used in allusions in every field of daily life.” And A. Seyhan (2002, 510) reports: “As literature professors and advisers, we have all along impressed on our students the role of literature in understanding the human condi-

do not share their persuasion and do not value literature the latter simply cannot have any value for them. It will rather be perceived and experienced as imposition of outdated values. Students who have not come to value reading of literature on the basis of their own experience will never develop a lifelong interest in it. The possible benefits of reading literature should never be taken for granted but should rather be made as explicit as possible by descriptions/ definitions of new **functions**, as well as by detailed discussion of particular texts. Additionally, the discussion of parallel texts – a novel and its filmed version – should sensitise students to the limitations (along with the advantages) of visually supported narratives and emphasise the challenges of the written text and its characteristic demands for active linguistic interaction in meaning production. The importance of the latter for students' cognitive development should also be discussed. The persuasion of students presupposes arousing their interest and stimulating their active participation with lots of positive support, offering them a suitable challenge together with a vote of confidence and involving them in setting their own goals. Expecting the best from students and attributing to them the capacity to meet such expectations are the best ways of stimulating positive attitudes to reading and literature.

To be effective for the students of today, the persuasion of them must also proceed from their current situation and move away from, or at least update, the traditional defences of the importance of literature in Arnoldian terms. Why people used to read and what benefits they expected in very different circumstances is of little, mostly only historical, interest for the students facing a radically changed globalised world. Thus new justifications of literary reading and study should be stressed, as for instance the possibilities of literary reading to reveal and make understandable the multiple uses and functions of language in forming and maintaining human relations, in representing different realities, and in discursal possibilities of realising such functions in ways beyond the visually supported narrative of films (cf. Grosman and Rot Gabrovec 2000, 18 and ff.). A better knowledge of such possibilities is an explainable and also acceptable necessity for students who, immersed in a constant twenty-four hour flow of language, have a limited understanding of its functioning because of their underdeveloped language awareness which is not sufficient for coping with current uses of language. At the same time their literacy is decreasing because of the proportion of visually supported narrative demanding little immediate cognitive processing and circumstances demanding a higher literacy for meaningful survival. In such circumstances students' ability to construe and understand their own experience by means of organised narrative learnt through reading is also decreasing. They have little or no knowledge of the possibilities of a better understanding of the constructedness of their social reality through language (Berger and Luckmann 1967) by self-reflexive analysis of their own concepts as involved in reading and comprehension. They often experience the contact of several cultures in ever more multicultural societies as puzzling. Critical scrutiny of such contacts and their consequences in literary texts makes possible the development of an intercultural awareness for the understanding of such situations. Last but not least, profounder textual understanding as acquired in this way is preliminary for all higher levels of perceiving and critically analysing the formal (aesthetic) qualities of literary texts on the basis of language as used in literature.

The problems of students should be seen in the light of their own circumstances, for instance their daily exposure to the media of mass communication that “constantly and emphatically parade a plurality of ways of life and thinking” and thus, unrestricted by any fences of geographical or cultural borders, promote pluralism (Berger and Luckmann 1995, 38). The experience of the structural crisis of meaning resulting from such pluralism is particularly strong for the young who have not been encultured in their first/native culture. Growing up in a world in which there are neither common values determining actions in different spheres of life, nor a single reality identical for all, the young find it more and more difficult to tell how they should lead their life when the unquestioned validity of the traditional order is shaken (*ibid.*, 29–30). Modern pluralism thus undermines the taken-for-granted residing in the realm of unquestioned, secure knowledge. In this way everything, the world, society and personal identity are called ever more into question (*ibid.*, 40). The range of options grows beyond imagination, one does not need to choose only what job to take and whom to marry, but can select the gods from a range of possible options, change one’s religious allegiance, one’s citizenship, one’s life-style, one’s image and even one’s sexual *habitus* (*ibid.*, 45). The world of countless alternatives and ever present pressure to choose from them is more difficult to understand with all the changes resulting from pluralism, which can only be understood with a well developed intercultural awareness. Only with such an awareness and resulting tolerance can individuals and communities hope to live side by side peacefully, whilst directing their existence towards different values. Both the necessary intercultural awareness and tolerance can be promoted through interculturally oriented discussion of literary texts paying special attention to dissimilarities in similar concepts that would otherwise pass unnoticed or be assimilated to students’ own culture.

Making sense of such a complex world calls for high literacy. To help students develop such literacy and literary competence teachers must never forget that students’ own readings, opinions, questions and interpretations are the only acceptable basis of classroom discussion. They must stimulate students’ articulation of their opinions by attentive listening, by voicing their respect and appreciation, and by finding all possible ways how to elicit such responses and by strictly avoiding stifling student responses with their own opinions. The fatal impact of the teacher’s own introductory explanation of the text is best analysed by Betsy Keller (1997, 63):

If the teacher begins the class by lecturing, the students must temporarily suppress their responses and impressions and may conclude that the experience they just had with the text is meaningful only insofar as it prepared them to receive the teacher’s (superior) judgement and analysis.

Since students may find speaking about literature a situation of danger, that is, of revealing their “incorrect” or otherwise “inappropriate” readings and opinions, great care must be taken to stimulate their self-esteem and persuade them of their ability to speak about literature in socially acceptable ways. They should not only understand that discussing literature can and should be an enjoyable activity, but also have the experience of being able to do it and be respected for it. This is why classroom discussion should avoid scholasticism (Sell 2001, 2) and any approaches of teaching and discussion that alienate students.

Teachers must further be aware of the differences between their reading experience and those of the students' as based on their different knowledge of their reality and different reading. They must make sure that the readings of students are expressed prior to any attempts to upgrade their understanding of the text. Introductory discussion in small peer groups makes it possible for students to see the differences in their understanding and so to learn about the processes of meaning production and about the polysemy of texts. Seeing the different readings of their classmates also reduces students' anxiety about the 'correctness' of their own. For longer texts Slovene students are usually asked to create their own action lines, reading logs or reading diaries at home so as to feel more secure in mastering the text prior to classroom discussion in which they first compare such notes about their readings and opinions in small groups and only later report about their findings in classroom discussion. Their reports serve as the basis for negotiating the common action line representing (characteristic) shared readings of the entire class and showing the outstandingly perceived segments of the text as well as the neglected ones. If the teacher is sufficiently attentive to the perspective of students and also to the heterogeneity of their responses, s/he will at this point be able to help the students discover the unnoticed and/or assimilated elements of the text, to consider various possibilities of reading and interpretation, and to see their specific comprehension problems, achieving all this without resorting to prolonged lecturing about it. In discussing the differences among students' responses, the text's various ways of inviting such responses through its particular uses of language can be revealed to build up students' literary competence. The latter is promoted especially by the examination of the motives for such differences among students' responses that can illuminate the idiosyncratic elements in their readings and stimulate self-reflective reading.

On the basis of such discussion students can also be asked to examine already available interpretations of and various critical statements about the discussed text, as published in critical studies and various periodicals, to find out which of such statements seem to have the greatest explanatory power for them or are relevant in other ways. In arguing their own choices from presented critical statements, students come to see various possibilities of dealing with different aspects of literary texts, and through arguing for their own readerly and critical preferences achieve a better understanding of their own reading and the factors which influence it. Learning about various possibilities of interpretation and about critical approaches, they also improve their own critical competence and become critical of the opinions of others. They can extend their own reading through trying to see the text from the point of view of both fellow students and the authors of existing criticism. When several groups of Slovene students of English were requested to choose from a list of critical statements about a discussed text and give their reasons for their choices and/or preferences, their answers revealed great interest in critical possibilities and in other people's readings.<sup>4</sup> Discussion of various (already published) critical statements and interpretations of a text introduces students to different possibilities of analysing texts and corresponding critical approaches, as well as contributes to their acquisition of the words and terminology as used in speaking about literature.

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<sup>4</sup> The first results of my experiments with students and their choices of various critical statements on the basis of their decisions concerning their explanatory power and "ability" to help them connect with various novels and poems

### 3. Intercultural dimension of reading literary texts

In the light of such possibilities also students' own positioning and its influence upon their reading can be problematised, as for instance when they read a foreign text in intercultural contexts. Such contexts often generate unpredictable differences in reading emerging from individual combinations of different languages and cultures that are important for student-centred teaching. Such changes, however, often remain unnoticed and are underestimated simply because they become visible only when and if special attention is paid to them. Only those teachers who encourage their students to express their opinions and puzzlement and take the trouble to find out what disturbs them, what is beyond their comprehension, what goes against their expectations and makes them uncomfortable in any possible way, may hope to see the differences among the readings/meanings actually produced in the classroom and to understand their students' feelings about and attitudes toward the text read in an intercultural position. The discussion of such differences is important for students' better understanding of the text in its own terms and, as we will see later, for the reflection about their culture-bound reading perceptions which is prerequisite for the development of their intercultural awareness.

At this point it may seem that student-centred literature teaching aiming at the development of their critical thinking and literary competence is too demanding to be realistic. It is true, literature teaching in accordance with all above-listed recommendations is much more demanding and may even be strenuous at first for both the student and the teacher. However it is not impossible and, when put into practice, it is much more rewarding for both, teachers who can see positive results instead of students' resistance and students who are learning to read critically on their own no longer entertain prejudices against the discussion of literary texts. What is more, such interactive teaching of literature is not possible at the level of university study of languages and literatures only, it has been rather successfully introduced in Slovenia in secondary schools to the satisfaction of both teachers and students, when they come to see its long-term benefits for reading about different cultures finding their artistic expression in English and for the possibility of autonomous upgrading of their knowledge of language.

The new curricula designed after Slovene independence in 1991 promote student-centred approaches in literature teaching both in the mother tongue and in foreign languages at all levels of instruction. The teachers of Slovene have embraced the new orientation towards enabling students at all levels for autonomous reading and contact with literary texts and have provided interesting theoretical support (see Krakar-Vogel 1991, 1993, 1994; Saksida 1995; and Kordigel 1995). At the level of tertiary studies some teachers have gone a step further. Thus Miran Hladnik (2002) recommends emancipated analysis of authors and texts without previous division into artistic and trivial, or rather 'eternal' and 'temporary' texts, the discussion of the literary system as a whole, and the use of contemporary technologies for the analysis of texts. And Marko Juvan (2002, 18) advocates new approaches to the writing of literary history ranging "from verbal indications of awareness that the writing of history is a construction of one of the possible models

of the past, the technique of multiple voices and fragment montage, to the shaping of an open, hypertextual literary historical archive which would be amenable to constant change.”

Besides strongly supporting new student-centred approaches (see Grosman 1995; Maver 1995; Hribar 1995) the teachers of English literature published several studies developing original student-centred approaches which promote comparative critical attitudes for Slovene students of English (Mozetič 1992, 1995 and 1995a), and stimulate students’ critical interests and active interaction with texts and more creative contribution in the classroom (Grosman and Rot 1997; Grosman 1999; Grosman and Rot Gabrovec 2000). As a matter of fact the author has only been able to find one article advocating the old transmissional way of literature teaching on the basis of short extracts with story summaries and information about the author (see Jurak 1995). Thus when the new curricula for English had to pass nation wide discussion, all the teachers of English unanimously supported their new concept of literature teaching. This concept stresses the reading of integral texts with the aim of making it possible for all students to acquire the necessary reading ability in English and corresponding literary competence, along with the cultural knowledge necessary for the understanding of the text and a different culture. Conceived in this way, literature teaching also supports the development of intercultural communicative competence in English that is the overall objective of the new curricula. The emphasis on the cognitive functions and broader benefits of reading literature in English at the same time makes literature teaching more persuasive for the students. The implementation of the new student-centred teaching of literature in English is supported by all curricula explicitly describing students’ acquisition of reading skills and literary competence as a prerequisite of cultural knowledge and the necessary intercultural awareness.

To be able to read an integral text in English (or any foreign language) without frustration and also to be ready to speak about it critically, students should first learn that texts can be mastered at the level at which their discussion ceases to be embarrassing by using various strategies, as for instance by close reading, by special ways of returning to the text in the light of their own thematisation, and by simply making reading logs, action lines or reading diaries. Having reached their own reading, they next learn to differentiate between the printed text as intersubjectively available to all of them and their subjective response, or rather ‘actualisation’ or ‘textual world’. When they feel safe in their mastery of the text, they can be confronted with the different readings of their fellow students and so come to see that different readers produce/ construe different meanings of the same text. In this way they can gain some insight into the processes of reading as necessary for the understanding of one’s own subjective production of textual meaning. Such knowledge is also necessary to reduce their fear lest their readings are not ‘correct’ or in accordance with what the teacher expects them to understand; as a consequence they also feel free to contribute to the classroom discussion of the text. Though such a teaching of response is more time consuming than the teaching of information about literature, most teachers of English find it more rewarding than the latter for a simple reason: because it makes the interaction in the classroom more lively and also sends several students, reassured of their ability to cope with literary texts on their own, to further reading of literature.

As a consequence of such positive experience also secondary teachers have started developing their own techniques of more student-centred literature teaching and have invented numerous new strategies of stimulating students' interaction with the text and with classmates after they have attended only the introductory seminars presenting student-centred literature teaching for the new school leaving examinations (Eržen and Fidler 2000). The students preparing to teach English are introduced to the student-centred approach in the time of their studies and discuss also the possibilities of its cognitive benefits, including autonomous maintaining of the acquired language and well developed intercultural awareness.

When student response is in the centre of teachers' attention, it is also possible to locate the impact of the particular intercultural context upon their reading literature in English. Reading in terms of their own culture and ideas of what is humanly likely, appropriate and acceptable some students often find fault with characters because they do not behave and act according to their ideas in their first reading. It is interesting to note that such responses to characters and their behaviour usually do not appear in the discussion of culturally and/or temporally very distant texts in reading of which students seem to be able to be constantly aware of their essential (cultural) differentness due to such distance and, accordingly, do not anticipate their readerly and human expectations to apply and so do not feel critical of the differences in characters' psychological make-up and their acting. In reading texts which seem closer because of their stronger personal resonance, students are more likely to criticise characters for their not behaving in accordance with their expectations simply because in such cases they pay less or no attention to their cultural differentness. Thus for instance such at first simple concepts as what is a friend in terms of how does a friend behave and what friendship means or what patterns of family relations are 'normal' come to disturb more attentive students who perceive the differences in comparison with their own expectations. Several young Slovene readers have come to criticise Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye* for his being overcritical and not at all a good friend and his parents for their lack of parental love. Along with more complex discussion of what various more abstract concepts such as 'rich' and 'riches' or 'democracy' mean in different cultures (and/or circumstances) such differences in reading perception provide a good starting point for the discussion of intercultural differences occurring not only at the level of the obvious but also at much less transparent levels, at which they may remain unseen and, accordingly, unanalysable and as such can constitute a source of intercultural misunderstanding. When analysed, however, such more subtle differences can lead to the development of students' intercultural awareness and consequent tolerance of cultural differentness.

Students can reach a closer understanding of Holden's predicament or any other character in an English text only when they come to realise that their specific perceptions of such characters' behaviour derive from their different – and culture-specific – concept of friendship, of what a friend is expected to be like, what kind of criticism is socially acceptable according to their own standards, what family seems 'normal' in their own circumstances. Only when they come to see that their own concept of friends and friendship among class mates, family

relations etc. do not apply to the texts from different English speaking cultures, can they come to see such characters not only from their perspective but also from a different, for instance an American perspective.

#### 4. Conclusion

To become interculturally sensitive, students must first become aware of the differences between their own concepts of human relations, for instance of friends and friendship, and the concepts as implied in the text under discussion. In other words, they should develop the necessary intercultural awareness for the appreciation of the less visible differences between the two cultures, their own and the American or English etc. To develop such an awareness they should be able to understand the differences in concepts of what at first seems to be the same thing, i.e. they should learn that what is described as lexical equivalence, or rather, the same meaning of the word denoting 'the same' object in two different languages (and their dictionaries), is seldom really equivalent, especially with such complex words as *friend* and *friendship* or words describing such social phenomena as *riches* which are relative to a culture/society. They should understand that words, as names for objects, are equivalent in lexical terms only at a very high level of generalisation (i.e. in dictionaries). In the reality of everyday use words have peculiar constellations of meaning related to a particular time and space of a specific culture. Students should realise that there are differences between the concepts in their mother tongue and in English, differences in sets of behaviour and in modes of their perception. In other words, that the meaning of the word *friend*, *rich* etc. is culture-bound and not the same in Slovene and in English, so they should not expect the behaviour related to it in their Slovene situation to apply elsewhere. Only when they come to see that English embodies a different set of beliefs, values and shared meanings, will they be able to reflect on both others and self, fictional characters' ideas and their own, and to understand their attitudes to other people.

To be able to fully understand the differences of another culture and its literary embodiment in a text, students thus need to become aware of their own cultural schemata along with their affective and attitudinal dimensions. Trying to see their own concepts and culturally conditioned schemata from the perspective of a different culture and its different concepts will help them to become aware of what seems 'normal' or even 'natural' from their own culture only and to accept the fact that other people have other concepts and schemata through which they understand their physical and social world and, accordingly, should not be attributed students' own expectations and judgements. Such an awareness makes it possible for the students to view texts in English from a dialogical perspective, their own and familiar vs. English or American and unfamiliar; it considerably enhances their language awareness and cognitive development leading to a higher tolerance of differentness. To reach such a level of advanced intercultural understanding, classroom discussion must start from students' own reading, since only their readings can show what elements of the text and concepts involved in its understanding need further examination. Follow-up reading instructions can then focus

on modifying and expanding their cultural filter in an organised and consistent manner and showing the complexity and importance of better intercultural understanding that makes it possible to see the different constellation of personal relations.

Basing literature teaching on students' response and establishing actual student responses are therefore particularly important when literature is taught in the intercultural contexts of foreign languages in which the differences in reading must be expected to increase because of culturally specific horizons of readers' expectations, their different intertextual experiences and concepts of reality, of human relations, of what (and how it is) tellable, or rather, should not be expressed in words. Such literature teaching that contributes to students' knowledge of the multiple uses of language and challenges them to see that there are multiple ways of viewing the world, people and their relationships and, at the same time, persuades them of the importance of meeting this challenge, can only be reached on the basis of a thorough discussion and understanding of students' own readings. That is why only such approaches are really functional and persuasive for the students. If the teacher is attentive to such readings and to their heterogeneity, the teaching of the same text will be a challenge raising different problems with different students for her/him also. Seeing the challenges of such reading and teaching can ultimately unite the students and the teacher in the realisation that there exist different possibilities of making sense of human life and different ideas about what matters in it. In our global yet still divided world this realisation as made possible by fully developed intercultural awareness is invaluable if we want to contribute to making our world a more liveable place for all peoples, a place with less hate and more empathy, if not love. Last but not least, this realisation is prerequisite to understanding and valuing cultural and linguistic diversity and living with it without unnecessary conflict.

When fully aware of the possibilities of the presented positive impact of literature reading and teaching, students can easily be persuaded of the importance of reading and of well developed/critical literary competence for making sense of their ever more complex multicultural world of countless choices. Through their own reading of literary texts they can come to understand how language is used in making sense of the world and their experience of it, and in the understanding of different cultures along with their own. In the light of such possibilities student-centred literature teaching has a definable and defensible function to perform in the world in spite of its ever more visually oriented culture.

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