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Gabriella Lengyel

THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

My purpose in this paper is to discuss the role of literature in teaching English as a foreign language at the beginning and intermediate levels. I shall first consider the traditional practice and then what I think would be a better approach. My remarks will be based on my experiences as a high-school teacher in Hungary as well as on my knowledge of teaching practices in other countries. I may mention certain problems that are not universal. However, since students—regardless of their origin—do not basically differ in intelligence and their attitudes towards study, and since teachers in one country are not considerably less qualified than in another, most of the problems I shall treat are presumably common all over the world.

The subject that is usually introduced at the high-school level is officially entitled "English Language and Literature." Although there is nothing unusual about this title, it turns out to be a telling one. An analysis of the items this subject encompasses gives rise to at least two questions that its teaching poses: 1. What is meant by "literature", and 2. where does language end and literature begin?

In traditional teaching practice, literature has been given a belletristic interpretation. This approach in foreign-language teaching may date from the period when the schools were expected to give the students a firm basis in grammar, reading, and translation. However, those who then received a high-school and university education could afford private tutors who were native speakers of the foreign languages taught at school. Thus the spoken language was acquired outside school, very often in the country where it was spoken. At the same time foreign-language teaching could afford having strictly academic goals, confining itself to the treatment of literature as *belles-lettres*. Even though times and circumstances have changed considerably, this treatment of literature in EFL classes has survived throughout Hungary. While the emphasis is on enabling the student to communicate in the foreign language, the textbooks being used contain numerous passages from literary masterpieces many of which have nothing to do with the present-day spoken language—as if only teaching literature could justify teaching a foreign language. This attitude is also attested by the fact that only the first

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two years are devoted to the teaching of foreign-language skills in the strict sense. Literature is usually introduced during the third year of language instruction. Those who are aware of how unsatisfactory this practice is have often wondered why literature in the traditional sense should be introduced at all during the first four years of language instruction, and whether it is desirable to deal with it at the intermediate stage.

In my opinion, the problem of teaching literature in the target language at the high-school level has not been given enough attention in professional publications.Those who have written on the topic in general can be roughly divided into three groups: 1. literary scholars arguing that literature must be included in the curriculum of EFL teaching; 2. angry applied linguists arguing that literature should be excluded from the curriculum; and 3. those trying to strike a healthy balance between these two extremes. Strangely enough, high-school teachers of foreign languages—probably awed by the prestige of foreign literature—seldom let their voices be heard. Instead, they are trying to achieve the impossible—i.e., to turn their students into literary scholars in four years.

John F. Povey[1] discusses the issue of literature in TESL programs. He is concerned about the foreign students who are "struggling with inadequate English to handle the survey courses for freshmen." (The word "struggle" is properly descriptive of most Hungarian highschool students when they are made to read works of classical English literature.) Though Povey is aware of the existing problems, he thinks that the linguistic difficulties presented by literary texts have been exaggerated. He presumes that ESL students are greatly aided in their literary studies by English-language television programs and merely by living in an English-speaking country. I have no quarrel with Povey's statement. However, when considering his four general aims in the teaching of literature, EFL teachers abroad must at least keep in mind that their students do not have the advantage of living in an English-speaking country. Unfortunately, in traditional teaching practice—and especially in the inspectors' offices—these kinds of general aims are assumed to be feasible in any circumstances. Povey's first "aim" reads as follows (I am putting "aim" between quotation marks because, strictly speaking, what he calls "aims" are results or benefits of teaching literature):

"Literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax. It will often represent in a general way the style that can properly stand as a model for the student."

It is true that literary masterpieces give "evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage." Unfortunately, however, certain passages from acknowledged masterpieces have very little practical use in foreign-language teaching. As a case in point, let me cite a textbook that is being used in Hungarian high schools. In order to give the students a notion of fourteenth-century English society, it presents the portrait of the

[1] John F. Povey, *Literature in TESL Programs: The Literature and the Culture, TESOL Quarterly*, 1. 1, 40–46. 1967.

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Franklin from the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The passage—which the students are expected to understand and translate—contains numerous unfamiliar words and expressions: "felicity", "in hearty style", "to be a man of weight", etc. We also teach a sonnet by Shakespeare, a passage from *Macbeth*, poems by Robert Burns, and extracts from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels. As a result, I now and then hear my students use the following sentence openings: "to the best of my knowledge", "if my memory does not fail me", "to my mind", "I cannot but feel"—expressions that are acceptable in certain contents but ludicrous in discussions of trivial topics. Further, my students sometimes speak of "heaving a big sigh" and "descending the stairs to the salon." The problem is less serious, of course, if the teacher is a native speaker of the target language or has a very good command of it. Thus he can correct not only grammatical errors but also inconsistencies and infelicities in usage, tone, and level of formality. Under average conditions, however, most students cannot use literary vocabulary without often violating the rules of usage and cultivating a kind of archaic style. In order to avoid this, we could use abridged and simplified passages and works. By abridging and simplifying them, however, we would destroy precisely those features that make them literary masterpieces. Thus we would be better off with documentary writings and good expository prose on everyday topics. It is questionable whether a student can learn "complex and exact syntax" through the traditional exposure to literature. As Donald M. Topping[2] notes: "If our purpose is to teach a control of standard Elnglish syntax, including compound and complex constructions, then we are doing our students a terrible disservice by asking them to imitate those archaic writers who practice awful violations by modern standards of the syntactic rules." He also doubts whether reading literature in the target language will improve the student's speaking, listening, and writing ability to the point where he would actually use the literary language. For my part, I do not think that the student is expected to go this far, anyway. Reading literature in the target language will certainly enrich the learner's passive vocabulary and in this way also increase his understanding. Undoubtedly, he will also become more sensitive to literary styles in general and different ways of using the language. However, Toppings is right in noting that the student must have a firm linguistic basis before venturing into the realm of literature. A premature exposure to the language of literature can only confuse him as to the use of lexical items and grammatical constructions.

Povey's second general "aim" is concerned with the cultural aspect of teaching literature:[3] "Literature is a link towards the culture which sustains the expression of any language. American literature will open up the culture of this country to the foreign student in a manner analogous to the extension of the native speaker's own awareness to his own culture." Undoubtedly literature reflects thoughts, feelings, and actions that are the products of the writer's culture. Still I would not assert that literature gi-

[2] M. Topping, *Linguistics or Literature : An Approach to Language, TESOL Quarterly*, 2. 2, 95–100. 1968.

[3] Povey, op. cit.

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ves—or purports to give—a realistic account of culture and society. (If it does, it is documentary writing rather than literature.) Literature is primarily an art; consequently, it reflects reality in an artistic way by reducing, ordering, and enhancing (but, in a factual sense, distorting) it according to the author's imaginative vision, the demands of his literary genre, and his writing ability. To isolate, define, and analyze the historical, social, or personal reality underlying any work of literature requires specialized knowledge and technique. I do not think that the foreign-language teachers should be responsible for the spreading of such knowledge and technique. Teachers of history and the social sciences are much better equipped to describe and compare foreign cultures and societies in adequate detail and with all the necessary qualifications. It is obvious that certain aspects of culture will inevitably be touched upon during the study of literature in a foreign—language class, and that literature may reveal these aspects more vividly, and memorably than scientific exposition ever could. The teacher, however, should warn students that this knowledge of both the literature and the culture is likely to remain limited at this level of study, and that they should refrain from hasty unwarranted generalizations about either. For a superficial knowledge of a foreign literature can lead only to false assumptions and false ideas (notably, stereotypes) about the society and culture it reflects and is addressed to. Other sources of misconceptions are differences in cultural heritage and background. This is why understanding the denotation of a word or expression is not the same as understanding its full range of connotations in the context of society and of culture. Expressions like "being on the move", "frontier spirit", and "the American dream" do not mean much to people who live in a small country and have perhaps spent all their lives in one place. Lengthy explanations would be necessary to clarify the connotations of these phrases to most Hungarian students. In other words, we would have to interpret the special language of a foreign culture in its language at a moment when the students' knowledge of that language is at a rather elementary level. It would be like defining an unknown term in unknown terms—a procedure which is, as we all know, unpedagogical.

Povey's third general "aim" pertains to an all-inclusive benefit:[4] "We must acknowledge the indefinable, though all important, concept that literature gives one awareness of human insight. In this respect great literature can be justified as one could assert the value of listening to a major symphony." I give qualified assent to this statement. Great literature undoubtedly gives us insight into human nature. Thus the effect a great work of literature has on competent and sensitive readers in equal to that of a major symphony on similarly qualified listeners. Still there are significant differences between understanding music and understanding literature. If a purely musical work can be said to express anything, it expresses emotions by means of natural and conventional symbols of sound that represent the nature, intensity, and flow of these emotions. Thus a piece of music, transcending frontiers and languages, is readily comprehensible and

[4] ibid

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enjoyable to qualified listeners throughout an international but common musical culture. Literature, on the other hand, expresses more than mere emotions, and whatever it expresses is conceptualized by the words and sentence constructions of a specific language. If a literary work exceeds the linguistic knowledge of its readers, it is neither comprehensible nor enjoyable to them. And if they have to devote much effort to deciphering its language, they cannot really enjoy it as a work of art. Consequently, one cannot understand and enjoy foreign literature without a very good command of the language while one can both understand and enjoy the symphony of a foreign composer without training in music.

Povey's fourth "aim"[5] in teaching literature in the target language is the promotion of creative writing in that language. He mentions India and Nigeria, where writing fiction in English is not unusual. I would be curious to know the idiomatic and stylistic quality—and hence the value (beyond expression as therapy)—of this prose fiction written by students at the intermediate level in these two countries. In any case, we cannot generalize from the experience of these two countries, where exceptional historical circumstances have resulted in the wide-spread use of English as the language of higher education, commerce, and politics. (Indian English, in fact, is sometimes classified as a dialect of English—though it may in the course of time cease to be one if it is replaced by Hindustani as the *lingua franca* of the Indian subcontinent.)

Teaching literature in the target language—as it has been done traditionally—does not satisfy any of the parties involved. It gives the teacher an especially hard time, since he struggles in vain to explain a literary work to his pupils in words they can understand. This struggle is similar to the process of translating the lecture of a well-known scholar into a child's language. It also frustrates the pupils who can neither understand the work nor express their thoughts about it. Finally, it defeats the aim of the writer who, according to Bradford Arthur,[6] assumes that his reader "will be able to understand the literal meaning of the words that he is using. To be sure, the reader may from time to time run across an unfamiliar word, but this should not slow him down... The author also assumes that his reader will be able to understand the structure of sentences used in the story... More subtle, but nonetheless important, are the assumptions that the author makes about his reader's understanding of culture." If the student can meet these requirements, the reading of literature can be an end in itself. If not, it is neither language nor literature learning. And if a teacher persists in trying to teach language and literature at the same time, he may end up teaching neither of them effectively. Thus the most important question to answer is: How soon shall we start teaching literature? EdgarWright[7] states in this connection: "No student should be pushed into literary work until he has sufficient linguistic knowledge to understand, enjoy, and appreciate the literary text that he will be studying."While everybody can agree with

[5] ibid

[6] Arthur Bradford, *Reading Literature and Learning a Second Language, Language Learning*, 18. 4, 199–210. 1968.

[7] Edgar Wright, *The Other Way Round, TESOL Quarterly*, 2. 2, 101–107. 1968.

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this statement, it does not give us any clue as to what constitutes sufficient linguistic ability. Whose linguistic ability should be accepted as the norm? How many years of study are needed for acquiring the necessary background for the study of literature? I think the last question is impossible to answer, since there are numerous subjective and objective factors to affect the process. Among them are the motivation and aptitude of the pupils, the knowledge of the teacher, teaching aides, the facilities at school, etc. One possible solution would be to draw the line on the basis of the number of class meetings per school year. Accordingly, in Hungary, we would end up with three different groups:

1. those students who have about 68 class meetings per school year,
2. those students who have about 99 class meetings, and
3. those who have 198 class meetings.

The last group is the so-called "English-section class." In the case of the first two groups, the question should be, not *how soon* literature should be taught, but *whether* it should be taught *at all*. Personally, I would be inclined to say "no", since I consider it more important for the students' future needs to teach them practical, everyday expressions that they can use in their further studies. They discuss foreign writers in their native-language classes, anyway. With the English-section class, the situation is different. In two years this group covers the material that the other two groups do in four years. It is true that literature makes up one part of the material; yet the members of this group have more opportunities to acquire the spoken language than the mere number of class meetings may imply. After the first two years there is always a considerable improvement in their spoken English. During the first three months of the third year students are able to master the more complicated grammatical structures and the use of phrases rather than individual words. Their composition skills also improve, so that they are able to express ideas in simple but understandable language. At this point they could be introduced to modern authors. However, even if we introduced changes while keeping the traditional framework, the problem would be far from being solved. We would still be teaching literature in the reverse order: proceeding (say) from Shakespeare to modern writers—a progression which is historically correct but pedagogically unacceptable.

In order to do away with the confusion the traditional treatment of literature has brought about in EFL teaching, the following changes are necessary: 1. a redefinition of literature in EFL teaching, 2. the formulation of clear-cut criteria for selecting the teaching material, 3. instruction in suitable teaching methods at all levels of teacher training as well as at workshops for in-service teachers, and 4) the introduction of new texts at all levels of language instruction.

In redefining literature in EFL teaching, a new terminology would be desirable. Thus the term "reading material" interpreted in the broad sense would leave us much freedom as to what we consider appropriate at a given level of language instruction.

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Furthermore, it would be necessary to redefine the content and the difficulty of reading material at each level by taking the students' knowledge of the language as well as our teaching objectives into consideration. Consequently, the longer the period of time for language study the more definitions are needed. At the very beginning, the style level of reading material could be defined in James Heaton's words[8] as "a style level which resembles that of spoken English". Later the definitions as well as the selected passages should gradually reflect the distance between spoken and written language. Literary and scientific styles would represent the last stage in the continuum. Each stage should be carefully documented, or the study of the highest forms of written language will never become more than an exercise in translation. The number of stages we treat would be decided by reference to the number of class meetings we have for the teaching of English per week. Consequently, some classes would never be introduced to what Joos calls "the frozen style" while others would go all the way.

In selecting reading material we should observe at least the following criteria: 1. the number of class meetings the students have per week as well as their future needs, 2. their age and sex, 3. the complexity of grammatical structures and the complexity of ideas, and 4. whether the material presents universally shared experiences and esthetic values.

The number of class meetings students have per week is a very good indicator of what purpose the language serves in their lives. Thus two meetings per week mean that they specialize in another subject and therefore expect to learn enough to make themselves understood as tourists. They also expect to acquire the basic techniques of translation which will prove to be useful in their further studies. Students who have three meetings per week have practically the same expectations. However, students who study English in special classes (6—12 meetings per week) have significantly different objectives and needs. They have taken up the language in order to major in it at the university or to use it as a major tool in their further studies. In both cases they want to communicate in it fluently, as well as to read it with ease. For them a full program must be planned. Since students differ in their objectives and expectations, the same books should not be used in all classes. Doubling or reducing the time for language study only takes care of quantitative aspects.

The students' age does not cause special problems within a class; students going to the same class are of the same age. But as W. S. Fowler[9] points out, the students' sex must be taken into consideration: "...the story should not be too specialized or it will bore one sex or the other in mixed classes." Thus we are better off with materials that appeal to a certain age group rather than a certain sex.

[8] James Heaton, *Selection and Editing for Beginning Literature*, Elt, 13. 1, 6–64. 1968.

[9] W. S. Fowler, *Literature for Adult Students of English as a Foreign Language : 1/ Prescribed Books in the Lower Examination* ELT, 16. 1, 84–90. 1971.

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Complexity of grammatical structures and that of ideas do not always go hand in hand. A relatively simple story can be very difficult to read because of its style or grammatical structure. (*Alice in Wonderland,* for example, is not easy reading) while profound thoughts can be expressed in simple language (Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea,* for example). Thus selecting passages from *Alice in Wonderland* for beginners is as unpedagogical as attempting to teach difficult sentence constructions and the characteristics of a complex style by reference to *The Old Man and the Sea.*

Ideas that students cannot relate to emotionally will not challenge them. Consequently, such ideas do not provide a good topic for class discussions. On the other hand students will find it easy to discuss works written on common topics, whether the treatment is national or international. I have also observed that students are more interested in learning new words to discuss new concepts than in learning new lexical items to discuss issues that they feel are typically Hungarian.

Methods of teaching literature in foreign-language classes have not been given due attention in scientific research and hence in teacher training. Most practice teachers of foreign languages are expected to teach reading material with special attention to new grammatical devices and new lexical items. Those who feel that a passage requires special treatment borrow categories and methods of literary analysis from their teachers at the university level. Discouraged by the poor results, however, some of them use the literary pieces to practice translation; or they teach new grammatical devices and lexical items but read and discuss the passage in the students' native language. Again, others read the passage in the original language but discuss it in the students' native language. (In my experience, there is nothing more discouraging and ineffectual than the continuous alternation between the native language and the target languages, and I shun this practice like the plague and encourage practice teachers under my supervision to do likewise.)

The number of class meetings per week as well as the students' future needs should decide what kind of material should be used; i.e., whether we should employ lessons written by applied linguists and language teachers or introduce expository prose and literature first in the broad and later in the belletristic sense. Since I do not think that literature belongs to the curricula of other than special foreign-language classes, my proposed selection of material is meant for them.

In Hungarian high schools, I would introduce the teaching of literature in the target language during the fourth year of language instruction (there being at least six classes a week and no more than 15–18 students in one group). By this time the students have acquired a fair knowledge of English and American literature in their world-literature classes taught in their native language. Naturally, in this class, they have dealt with English and American literary works that are masterpieces in the strict sense of the word. For this reason alone, these works should not be included in their English reading material at this stage. Instead, I would emphasize the cultural aspect and introduce stories in the chronological order in which a child who is a native speaker of English would encounter them. Such an order would not conflict with the principles of contemporary

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criticism, which—according to George V. Santoni[10]—"would allow us to choose literature for our courses without following the chronology of history."

Bradford Arthur[11] suggests that in presenting a story we should take into account the way a child learns them in his native language; even though he may not understand some words, he will be able to understand the story as a whole. The child—or the foreign learner—finds nonverbal clues very helpful in understanding any story. These clues can be sound effects, pictures, acting out, etc. For this reason, using dramatized versions of children's stories is very instructive. Such material is easily available and does not present copyright problems. Naturally, the teacher has to decide how far he can let the students guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, and when it is necessary for him to give an explanation. Also, he must not forget that, while the native speaker is not conscious of the familiar lexical items in the story, the foreign learners are conscious of the lexical items and grammatical structures they have already learned. Thus, even with the help of nonverbal clues, their chances for guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words are somewhat limited.

Children's stories have at least two properties that make them very useful in foreign-language teaching: 4. they use everyday expressions, and 2. they provide ample repetition. To illustrate the latter point, Bruce Pattison[12] mentions *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Though it does not contain any unfamiliar words for fourth-year students at high-school, this story affords a good exercise in the use of the present perfect tense. (This is especially important in the case of Hungarian speakers, since Hungarian lacks this semantic and grammatical category.) The story is replete with such rexpressions as "Who has been sleeping in by bed?" *The Pokey Little Puppies* is an ideal text for reviewing the use of English prepositions: "They went as far as they could, over the bridge, up the road, through the meadow and under the fence." *Winnie the Pooh* is too "sophisticated" for children under ten years of age who cannot appreciate the subtle irony underlying the portrayal of ultimately universal human qualities and weaknesses. This, as well as Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant,* is a fascinating reading even for college students. (One summer I had a group of foreign adults who wished to learn Hungarian from the Hungarian translation of *Winnie the Pooh*.)

The next step could be the introduction of short poems in the target language. Discussing poems in the foreign language is all the more desirable; for, as Santoni[12] points out, in poetry "internal coherence and significance depend solely (I would say "chiefly") on the language, whereas the coherence and significance of a novel may depend also upon chronology, plot, characters, information about society, etc." The poems to be introduced could range from nursery rhymes to poems written by well-known poets. For pedagogical reasons, these poems should neither be too old nor too modern. In the first case, they would contain too many unfamiliar words many

[10] Georges Santoni, *Methods of Teaching Literature, FLA,* 5. 5, 432–441. 1972.

[11] Bradford, op. cit.

[12] Bruce Pattison, *The Literature Lesson, ELT,* 18. 2, 59–62. 1964.

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of which are no longer used; in the second case, the strange associations and the use of symbolism, as well as other poetic devices, would make understanding very difficult. Thus we would have to select mainly twentieth-century poems. Teaching Shakespeare, the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, or the beginnings of American poetry should be an objective at the advanced college level.

The teaching of poetry demands much time and patience as well as the knowledge of appropriate techniques on the part of the teacher. In discussing a poem the teacher should proceed step by step in order to make sure that the students understand each idea expressed in it. Translation into the native language cannot by any means be a substitute for the original text—not even as a time-saving device—since it destroys the poem. Listening to poems recited by actors develops understanding and a "feel" for rhythm and intonation in the target language. The memorization of poems should always be preceded by selective listening, since reciting a poem, without knowing how to do it properly, does more harm than good.

At this stage of foreign-language teaching, passages from modern plays seem to be in order. Reading plays (especially modern ones) certainly belongs to a foreign-language program; for, despite, artistic shaping and pointedness, they exemplify and approximate the vernacular as it may be used by flesh-and-blood people in real life. For practical reasons, I would exclude absurd drama because its language eschews conventional workday communication, which we are trying to teach in the foreign language. Also, since it would be impossible to study a whole play because of the shortness of time, selecting passages from plays that the students have studied in their native-language world-literature class or seen in film versions seems to be the best solution. Knowing the whole play, the students would not find a passage out of context; they would also be aware of its cultural and social implications. Before teaching each passage, a short summary of the play in the target language is helpful.

For some reason, short stories have always been the favorites of foreign-language teachers. Two common arguments for including them in the reading material are that 1. the students prefer them to special language lessons, and 2. they are not time-consuming. The latter argument also implies that, since a short story can be treated as a separate unit within a relatively short time, the completion of the unit gives the students a sense of having taken a significant step towards their final goal. Psychologically, this argument is undoubtedly valid. Yet, looking at the ways short stories are being used and abused in foreign-language classes, one wonders whether they are really so useful.

Partly because of the shortness of time and partly because of the level of difficulty, many textbooks present short stories in abridged versions. Unfortunately, as James Heaton points out, short stories are commonly and inappropriately abridged on the basis of 1. the number of unknown words and 2. their length. This approach ignores the fact that syntactic constructions, content, and cultural implications create at least as many problems as the length of the story or the number of unknown words. Obviously, an abridgment carried out according to these quantitative criteria is likely to distort or destroy the very features that make a short story great literature. Thus if

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short stories belong to the curricula of EFL teaching—as I think they do—we must find ways to work with unabridged editions.

The students' inability to understand and to discuss unabridged short stories in the target language indicates either that the short stories selected are not appropriate for their level of language proficiency or that they have not been prepared linguistically for the study of sophisticated literature. Mistakes concerning the selection of materials can be easily corrected. Insufficient linguistic knowledge on the part of the students —provided that the teaching material is logically structured—is a more serious problem indicating either that the individual teacher has been negligent or that the students are not able to cope with the requirements of a higher and noticeably more complicated level of language study. This may happen if the students are admitted to the foreign-language class without discrimination. Under normal conditions, however, they should be able to understand certain short stories after having finished the study of certain passages from plays.

Short stories selected for foreign-language classes should be relatively short and within the students' grasp of ideas and language (in the sense of both vocabulary and syntax). If a short story fails to meet one of these three criteria, it should be excluded regardless of its literary merits. For practical reasons, works by twentieth-century writers seem preferable.

The introduction of short stories would mean the end of the literature program in high school. Long poems and novels belong to the curriculum of foreign-language majors.

Literature in foreign-language teaching serves our purpose best at the high school and beginning college levels if it is viewed not as an end-in-itself but as a means to develop language skills. Thus all the written and unwritten laws of language instruction should be observed here, too. The most important law to observe is that new lexical items and new grammatical structures should not be taught together with actual explication, stylistic analysis, or esthetic appraisal. It is desirable that the students be introduced to new vocabulary and new points of grammar prior to the study of a piece of literature. Thus there must be close cooperation between the planners of language lessons and grammatical drills, on the one hand, and those who select the readings material for the classes, on the other. This kind of cooperation has been conspicuous by its absence. Indeed, there has not been enough cooperation even among people who plan the teaching materials for different levels. Thus a grammar that is being used at a higher level may not sufficiently build on those that were used at the lower levels.

A literary passage should first of all be treated as an arrangement of linguistic forms that convey meaning to those who are familiar with the formal and semantic rules of the language. Consequently, a linguistic-semantic interpretation should be the first step towards the discussion of the work as a piece of art. This is not at all easy to realize; there will always be impatient teachers and students who would like to rise up to the level of "pure" ideas by short-changing their verbal expression. One can only agree with Santoni's remark: "Impatient students skip preliminary procedures which would

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allow more thorough comprehension in order to reach the level of ideas or to formulate opinions of an esthetic nature. Thus ideas and opinions may quite often be weak, imprecise, nebulous, having no solid foundation and expressed probably in... the students' native language." After a literary work has been explicated, it must be interpreted in the context of real life. In attempting such an interpretation we must build on the students' life-experience, cultural background, and value system as well as on universal values. Finally, we may discuss the work on the level of whatever abstract ideas or esthetic merits it may have, but we must do so on a level the students can understand and operate upon intellectually and linguistically. We must not look, at all cost, for symbolic meanings and hidden values because there might not be any. We should especially refrain from illegitimate speculations about the writer's intention apart from what the work clearly and demonstrably means. Overzealous teachers have destroyed many good stories during classroom discussions by asking the students to figure out what the writer was thinking during the process of composition. In other words, they perpetuate in their practice the intentional fallacy which has been pointed out and condemned in the theory of literary criticism. (Upon reading an outlandish critical speculation about what he thought to do in one of his works, János Arany, an outstanding nineteenth-century Hungarian poet, wrote only one remark in the margin: "The devil thought this...")

The role of the teacher during discussions of literature is far from easy. When and how should the grammatical mistakes be corrected? If he interrupts the student, he destroys the train of thought and thus disturbs the discussion; if he waits until the student finishes, he violates the rule of immediate reinforcement and by doing so lets the class absorb the mistakes. I do not know of any magic techniques in this respect. As a general rule, I think the teacher should be firm about his students' following the rules of grammar; he can be liberal and give the students much freedom in the interpretation of ideas. After all, a work of art may legitimately mean slightly or greatly different things to different readers, depending on its complexity of meanings and on the readers' categories and methods of analysis.

In summary, I recommend that we teach literature to foreign-language students at the high-school level only in special classes. The material we use should be carefully selected lest, trying to teach both language and literature, we end up teaching neither of them. Also, teachers at both high-school and university levels should try to work out better techniques. Thus high-school teachers would have better results and university teachers fewer mistakes to correct.

[13] Santoni, op. cit.
[14] ibid

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