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Literary Texts in the Language Classroom: Aspects and Methodology

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Abstract
Despite continuous research, the use of literary texts in language classrooms still lives as a problematic question in the minds of a majority of language learners and educators. It is my conviction that literary texts can only become integral, indispensable, and enjoyable parts of the education process if research turns its attention to methodological suggestions that give concrete, tangible advice to teachers so that they can incorporate innovative theoretical and practical elements into their repertoire. Comparing the practical suggestions and innovative aspirations in writings of researchers from a number of countries, working with a variety of languages, I primarily focus on what specific approaches and methods emerge from them. Considering both insufficiencies and positive aspects of these texts, I suggest a set of perspectives and methodological possibilities, which will hopefully supply several tangible ideas for pedagogical practice.
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Introduction

The use of literary texts in the language classroom has been a recurring question in language pedagogy, and in recent years an increasing number of academic papers have been going beyond discussing the potential advantages of literary texts and instead offer concrete and tangible methodological advice for their use. It would be invaluable to shift the primary focus of research on such specific methodological advice as the reading of creative and literary texts is already a set requirement in educational documents (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2020; Kerettantervek, 2020; Nemzeti Alaptanterv, 2020) while daily practice often still struggles to meet this expectation and to integrate creative texts in adequate, useful and enjoyable ways. Numerous sources ignore this dilemma and their approaches make it seem as if the integration of literary texts automatically results in motivating and successful classroom work (Asyouf 2020; Holló 2019; Koutsompou 2015; Martín de León & García Hermoso 2020; Szénási 2012; Szita 2002-2012). However, those sources that consciously draw attention to the

problems of daily teaching practice point out that learners and teachers alike give evidence of uncertainty, dislike, or even anxiety towards work with literary texts. Researchers note reservations such as the overly challenging complexity of literary material (Lazar 1994; Alemi 2011; Crahay 2020; Blyth 2013; Floris 2004), and the distance between texts and learners' interests or texts and learners' cultural knowledge, which lead to aversion (Jimola 2017) or the misconception that creative texts are irrelevant to learners' lives and interests (Alemi 2011; Floris 2004). My own experiences in language teaching (especially among advanced language learners and considering the prior experiences of students at language faculties) show a similar picture.

The primary reason for this, in my opinion, is the lack of a clearly defined set of theoretical and methodological factors as a basis for classroom work with literary material, similar to the types of guidebooks readily available for other aspects of language teaching. Filling this gap would be essential, since literary texts, just like any other source material for language learning, offer not only a wide array of potentials but also specific challenges. While experiences gained from work with other text types are valuable and strategies, to a degree, transferrable, literary texts present additional challenges to learners and educators alike. One possible way of emphasizing this difference, according to Holló (2019), is applying the distinction between reader and writer responsibility (based on Hinds 1987) to text types. While writer-responsible texts require the writer to provide necessary information as clearly as possible, text types that favour reader responsibility leave more room for interpretation to the reader (73). User manuals, contracts, laws, or rules, for instance, are of the former and literary texts of the latter category. In other words, the interpretation of literary texts is an active meaning-making process, which goes beyond language level comprehension, and requires specific reading skills that students need to be prepared for.

Surprisingly, the fact that facilitating work with literary material poses specific challenges not only to language learners but educators as well is largely ignored in the literature on the subject. According to Varga-Mónok, assessing the language, style, content, and didactic potentials of texts, and the ability for deep and sensitive analysis of texts are the main criteria for teachers (Varga-Mónok 2021, 325–331). That is, the literary reading skills of educators and their ability to assess the pedagogical potential in source materials are basic requirements for adequate, meaningful work with literary texts. Thus, it would be essential to pay special attention to offering teachers concrete assistance in how to use literary texts in meaningful, variable, and successful ways, moreover, to help them integrate new ideas and methods into their extensive methodological repertoire, which would further enable them to make literary texts integral and essential parts of language learning.

Despite the gradually increasing number of articles offering practical advice, it still seems as if educators often feel unprepared in dealing with literary texts in the language classroom. In order to understand the reason for this, I scrutinized sources that explicitly aim to offer concrete practical advice in dealing with literary texts. Hoping to highlight good practices across languages and cultures, I chose to focus on sources written in several languages (English, Hungarian, German,

Spanish), dealing with the instruction of several languages (English, Hungarian, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese), and written by educators working in a variety of countries (Hungary, Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States of America, Greece, Belgium, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Nigeria). Each of the twenty-one chosen sources contains ideas and experiences worth considering; however, it is striking, that even sources offering innovative and useful advice, all too easily slide back into traditional patterns, primarily in terms of student-teacher roles and types of tasks.

This is particularly astonishing, considering that a majority of these sources at least mention Collie & Slater's *Literature in the Language Classroom*, a guidebook for language teachers from 1987, which makes the same observation. The book is primarily a bank of activities but contains a theoretical introduction that answers the most common questions and fears of teachers of the time, which are strikingly similar to the uncertainties of teachers today, 35 years later. However, all sources seem to be focusing on ideas in the chapter titled "Why", where Collie & Slater make a case for using literary texts in the language classroom. Their four, regularly quoted aspects are authenticity, language enrichment, cultural enrichment, and personal involvement. While these are crucial arguments for the use of literary texts, other equally central observations ought not to be disregarded. Some of the observations mentioned are:

> - Sometimes the teacher falls back upon a more traditional classroom role in which he or she sees himself or herself as imparting information about the author, the background to the work, and the particular literary conventions that inform the text.
> - At more advanced levels of work with literature, the teacher may resort to the metalanguage of criticism and this may distance learners from their own response and cause them to undervalue it.
> - Even if the teacher hopes to do more to sharpen students' response to the literary work, […] unless questions are genuinely open-ended, there is often a feeling on the part of the students that the teacher is slowly but surely edging them to particular answers that he or she has in mind. There is little room for either their own responses or their involvement during such sessions (9).

Their aim is not to suggest that such approaches are at all times to be avoided. All of the above-mentioned methods may align with a specific learner's or group's needs; however, the book highlights the fallacy of thinking that these methods are universally applicable. Even the twenty-one sources aiming for innovation often posit teachers as the sources of information while learner tasks in all phases of the reading process tend to be various forms of discussion exercises, as shown in detail later (Table 1).

This proves how essential and needed it is to offer tangible guidance to teachers, amalgamating methodological ideas and a variety of practices. My aim is not to imply that existing practices are to be devalued and discarded, on the contrary, I argue for a way of integrating the use of literary texts in a more natural, connected way into the successful patterns of language teaching. Collie and Slater (1987) point out as well that all teachers possess a variety of tools already since all

methods already used, e.g. role-play, improvisation, creative writing, discussions, questionnaires, visuals, etc. for livening up classroom work can be used with literary texts as well (9). Gillian Lazar (1994), too, emphasized that frequently used classroom practices can be successful with literary texts as well (123). The validity of these statements is evidenced by most sources as they frequently contain tasks like writing summaries, gap filling, etc. However, it cannot be ignored that to reduce the treatment of literary texts to such familiar exercises is to ignore their specific potential. Therefore, a kind of methodological variety is needed in order to go beyond basic comprehension tasks and offer learners the chance for meaningful expression and the negotiation of meaning.

Idoya Puig (2020) in her article makes a case for a variety of good practices and offers a broad range of source materials for a wide audience (19). I would extend this appeal: a variety of good practices is needed that showcase clear methodological considerations, and offer a large variety of forms and exercises in order to help all language teachers to find ways of creating processes aligned with their learners' specific needs. In this paper, I collected aspects I find crucial in two main categories: aspects of text selection and methods in practice. The categories and aspects listed here are in themselves not innovative and contain elements that all educators consider within teaching processes. However, my own experiences as well as the analyses of my sources suggest that literary texts are still inserted into the language learning process as foreign bodies, in connection with which both students and teachers struggle to use their otherwise successful strategies in optimal ways. Based on these twenty-one selected sources and my own observations and ideas, I aim to offer an approach that contains tangible advice to practicing language teachers on what to consider and how to integrate literary texts into the language learning process.

2. Aspects of text selection

The selection of proper source materials is evidently of central importance in language teaching. However, when it comes to literary texts, there are no textbooks or books of activities for selected texts readily available for teachers. It is important to note that according to my definition of literary texts, graded readers are not part of that category. Out of my sources, only two (Szénási 2012; Koutsompou 2015) make no distinction between graded materials and authentic literary texts, and while, admittedly, the same considerations and activities can be useful in both cases, I find it unwise to make no distinction between an authentic text and a material altered according to pedagogical considerations. Moreover, I argue that the fallacy of defining graded readers as natural and unavoidable precursors to authentic literary texts contributes to the difficulties of classroom work. Without disregarding the potential usefulness of graded readers, I claim there is a fundamental difference between them and the authentic literary material in terms of function and effect. Thus, the existence of graded readers does not fully prepare readers for interaction with authentic literary texts; therefore, a shift to allowing learners of all levels meaningful interactions with

authentic literary materials is crucial. However, while graded materials offer teachers help in terms of language level and a selection of comprehension and discussion tasks, in the case of authentic literary material, no such help is available neither in terms of text selection nor in terms of possible ways of working with the text.

Interestingly, the majority of the selected sources disregard the aspects of text selection altogether, and only a few give specific aspects that a teacher might adopt to help in their own work. Floris (2004) highlights language and cultural competency, the length of text, and student interests as crucial factors to consider. Alemi (2011) essentially uses the same categories, but names the latter two: time available and personal involvement. Alemi also emphasizes that proper text selection may minimize the difficulties of work in the classroom. Crahay (2020) merely states that simple texts must be prioritised (when working with beginners), which are playful and yet challenging. Szénási (2012) stresses the cultural aspect of interacting with literary material and justifies her own text selection by highlighting the material's potential in showcasing aspects of everyday culture in addition to being culturally significant products of the target cultures. Szénási also takes age-specific interests for granted (e.g. fairy tales for children). The most detailed set of selection aspects can be found in Varga-Mónok (2021), using the system set up by Feld-Knapp (2014) and adapting it to specific literary texts. Two sets of principles can be found in Feld-Knapp's writing that may be of use for teachers. Firstly, she creates a table of principles of text-analysis in order to help teachers unearth the potential of literary texts. The second table, also used by Varga-Mónok, is connected to the pedagogical potential of literary texts, listing aspects like target group, comprehensibility/readability, themes, length of text, cultural aspects, teacher and learner goals, points of connection, teaching methods, incentives to read (is the text interesting?), experiential learning, reception (Feld-Knapp 2014, 199).

My own set of aspects is not specifically designed as a synthesis of the above-mentioned principles; although, in my deliberations, I do attempt to keep in mind all criteria used by these sources. These are not intended as a closed set of principles, as all specific teaching circumstances might contain additional considerations; however, my goal is to mention a wide and sufficient range of aspects and factors in order to provide a stable, easy-to-use starting point for teachers' classroom work.

2.1. Framework: space and time

While many sources take into consideration time availability, none of the sources mention the importance of space, even though in terms of the practical realisation of activities it is crucial to be aware of the specific constraints and possibilities available for learners and teachers (e.g. do they have the possibility to stand up and move around?). The fact that this aspect is entirely ignored by sources indicates the limited variety of activities used as space can only be disregarded in case most activities only require verbal reaction or interaction. This further proves that change is needed and increased attention to other forms of expression is necessary.

In contrast, time is regularly discussed in articles, possibly because one of the main uncertainties among teachers is whether the limited time available for them is best used when working with literary texts. According to Lazar, many teachers view work with literature as a "timewasting distraction" (Lazar 1994, 116). Floris emphasizes the need for balance between workload in class and at home (Floris 2004, 5) and works with a poem due to its relative length. Alemi suggests short stories and views time availability as one of the main aspects of text selection. She even explicitly states that "Drama can be used in classes, but it will be difficult to act out a play in crowded classes within limited course hours" (Alemi 2011, 178). This attitude suggests that Alemi falsely supposes that dramatic works can only be worked with by performing the entire text with a group, which is not the case. A good example of that is Crahay (2020), who requires intensive creative writing work according to aspects of language use and communicative factors in connection with a dramatic work. Additionally, even sources not explicitly talking about time constraints and text length evidently prioritise supposedly shorter forms like poetry or short stories.

One particularly innovative approach is that of Reimão (2020) as she suggests the use of so-called *micro-contos.* These text types are known under many names (micro-fiction, flash fiction, short-short stories, etc.) and are "very short literary texts that are self-contained. This means that, unlike when using a novel or short story, the full length of the text can be addressed and explored during the class, leaving ample time for discussion and other activities" (52.). Due to their length, these texts rely largely on association and subtext; therefore, despite the relative shortness of textual input, in terms of content and learning potential, they require complex work. The "reader has to construct meaning from very few elements", and since the texts are "usually ambiguous [...] the reader must make decisions based on subtle linguistic elements to infer meaning or justify an interpretation" (54).

Using such self-contained short texts is an excellent option; however, it is crucial to note that text fragments may be just as useful and enjoyable; moreover, in certain cases necessary, not due to time constraints, but out of pedagogical considerations. Lazar (1994) works with only a few verses of a poem in one of her examples and only offers the full poem as additional homework. One of Szénási's (2012) examples focuses specifically on the first two pages of a longer prose work while Puig (2017) uses deliberately selected scenes of a play for classroom work. Despite such examples of using extracts rather than full works, none of the sources explicitly states this option, or what didactic aims such a choice might require regardless of the aspect of time available. On the one hand, there may be different goals involved in the close reading of an extract or the global understanding of a longer piece of text. Even more importantly, however, it is my conviction that using extracts ought to be a crucial step in the process of learning how to interact with literary texts. Regardless of length and complexity, the requirement to read and understand a full text cannot be expected to be the first step in this process. As with all other aspects of language learning, moving from smaller, linguistically simpler units towards longer, more complex ones must be the central guiding factor in connection with literary works as well. In order to achieve this, elements such as titles, sentences, or paragraphs must be seen as valuable resources containing in small units crucial el-

ements for the learning process. Consider the linguistic and interpretive possibilities of (in terms of vocabulary relatively simple) titles such as *Heart of Darkness* (Joseph Conrad), *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley), *This Side of Paradise* (F. Scott Fitzgerald), *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (Jeanette Winterson), *Silence is My Mother Tongue* (Sulaiman Addonia), *The Island of Missing Trees* (Elif Shafak). Titles like these let even beginner learners experience the kind of linguistic playfulness and ambiguity that language learners regularly encounter both in literary and everyday contexts. The chance to create similar titles can be one way of setting the foundation for a natural, creative attitude towards language use.

2.2. Learner competencies: language level and literary competency

While it is evident that sources used generally need to be challenging but not demotivating, in connection with literary material, this aspect continued to be one of the most controversial ones as most fears and uncertainties are connected to this. According to Lazar (1994), it is a common view that literary language "includes vocabulary, grammatical structures, and syntax considered too complicated to be included in the syllabus for learners at lower levels" and uses "literary devices difficult to unravel" (115). Other sources record similar doubts (Alemi 2011; Blyth 2013; Crahay 2020; Floris 2004). While considerations of language complexity are not to be dismissed, such simplistic arguments against literary texts disregard what a vast and heterogeneous category this is. General assumptions of "literature" as an entity are counterproductive especially when we talk of source materials. It is crucial to be aware that each literary text is ultimately unique in its combination of features along the lines of genre, time of writing, themes, age of readers, and other aspects. Therefore, assuming a homogenous literary language that is viewed as complex and difficult is misleading and stands in the way of productive work with literary texts.

A further assumption often linked to this thought of difficulty is that productive work with literary material can only be conducted after a certain level of language proficiency. This seems to be an underlying assumption even among educators searching for innovative approaches. Out of the twenty-one sources I examined in detail only seven (Bernal Martín 2012; Blyth 2013; Crahay 2020; Grossegesse 2015; Kouvari & Margaroni 2012; Lazar 1994; Reimão 2020) consider the possibility of using literary texts with learners of lower than B1 proficiency, and only Bernal Martín and Crahay offer specific examples of how to integrate literary texts from the start of the language learning process. According to Lazar (1994), a common view expressed by teachers is that even if learners at lower levels understand certain literary texts and form opinions of their own, they generally lack the language proficiency to express them (116). This view points to the lack of variety in methods used in the language classroom as it only seems to take into account verbal utterances, primarily in prompted discussions of key themes. Broadening the scope of activities allows learners of all levels a larger variety of self-expression and deeper analysis, and can help facilitate work with beginners as well. Lazar (1994) mentions associations, supplying titles, drawing or sketching interpretation of a text, and writ-

ing an ending for it as "ways of encouraging students to develop their interpretive abilities" (123). Particularly useful in my experience are the tools of drama-based pedagogy since for instance a freeze-frame or tableau activity can produce active, creative interpretations without verbal output. Further activities linked to these (like giving voice to certain characters within a freeze-frame or a tableau) can offer even beginners the chance for utterances that do not exceed their language capabilities but create complex interpretive moments. Additional interpretive tasks can be to create cover designs, express the mood of a scene, or extract by creating sounds with everyday objects, or, if available, instruments. Learners might also be told to consider the appearance and personality of a character and cast an actor they think would be most suitable to play the role. In other words, not only the specifics of the used text but also the activities learners are expected to participate in determine the overall language proficiency required for work with any literary material.

Furthermore, in terms of competency, the experiences learners have had in any language connected to literary texts and ways of interacting with them are to be taken into account. Reading, interpreting, and enjoying literary texts are acquired skills that need to be actively developed the same way all other language-related skills are – by taking into account previous knowledge and experiences, activating and developing them. Therefore, literary skill cannot be expected to automatically appear after a certain level, as it is not purely a reflection of language proficiency. As already mentioned, it is indispensable to allow learners a gradual improvement of their skills by providing regular interaction with smaller units of literary material from the start of the learning process.

2.3. Age and interest

Collie and Slater aptly point out that "one primary factor" when choosing a literary text to work with is "whether a particular work is able to stimulate [...] personal involvement" because "if it is meaningful and enjoyable, reading is more likely to have a lasting and beneficial effect" (Collie–Slater 1987, 8). Despite the central importance of a series of pedagogical considerations in all language learning situations, it would be a mistake to ignore that the primary function of literary texts is pleasure, regardless of genre or quality. Disregarding this aspect would defeat the point of using literary texts as ways of enrichment and motivation. "Enjoyment; suspense; a fresh insight into issues which are felt to be close to the heart of people's concerns; the delight of encountering one's own thoughts or situations encapsulated vividly in a work of art; the other, equal delight of finding those same thoughts or situations illuminated by a totally new, unexpected light or perspective: all these are incentives which can lead learners to overcome enthusiastically the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in less involving material" (Collie–Slater 1987, 8).

Common practice is to link interest with the factor of age and at the same time with gradually growing language proficiency: children's stories for young beginners and young adult novels for more proficient secondary school learners. This kind of broad generalisation, however, disregards several factors: specific inter-

ests of learners that may not align with age, and specifics of texts that may not align with genre expectations. Furthermore, it disregards all language learning situations where the process does not start in childhood, resulting in awkward situations where adult learners are expected to read authentic content for children, or sacrifice authenticity and only read graded texts. Therefore, it would be crucial to disentangle the interest-age-proficiency level and pay more attention to general methodological considerations that may be used to link those three factors in group-specific ways.

The category of interest, however, contains other complex topics as well that must be mentioned briefly. It is my firm conviction that interest is not a static quality certain learners possess and others do not. Therefore, any claim of learners not having a prior interest in literary works is utterly irrelevant in terms of success. As long as the activities and learning situations take into account the specifics of the learners and the process itself is created in a way that allows for active, meaningful work with the material, interest can be awoken for the process itself. Collie and Slater (1994) draw attention to this as well, stating that "an array of student-centered activities is particularly important when working with students [...] who may not as yet have developed a wish to read literature in the target language on their own initiative" (9).

Finally, the topic of interest can also be connected to the subtopic of cultural competency. Arguably, this might be better placed in the learner competencies chapter; however, I decided to link it to the topic of interest for one specific reason. Any reading situation is a meeting point between the reader's personal and social experiences, values, views, and the situations, thoughts, and cultural aspects offered by the text. These cultural aspects can be manifold: daily habits of the societies where the target language is spoken or other depicted cultures, social or personal values or lifestyles, habits, and customs of other ages, etc. These are all points of meeting in which learners need strategies to negotiate the distance between their views and those to be found in the text. Interestingly, some sources conclude that the literary material used in the classroom must contain themes in some way linked to the reader's country or culture (Carter–Long 1991; qt. in Alemi 2011). Developing this idea further, Alemi (2011) would go as far as to disregard all texts from writers in a given language that are not set within the target cultures, stating that "developing cross-cultural understanding is not the aim of using the short story in ESL classes" (178). This explicitly stated attitude in the selection process seems extreme as it directly opposes aspects of interculturality central to language learning today. Moreover, focusing exclusively on circumstances learners have experienced dismisses several genres learners often enjoy and works that in many cases form part of the cultural heritage of the target country (e.g. crime fiction/works of Agatha Christie).

Therefore, it is crucial to understand that Collie and Slater's (1987) observations on cultural competency are not to be understood as prescriptive but point to the fact that interaction with a text takes place on linguistic and thematic levels, activating cultural and personal factors. Thus, attention must be paid that a text should not pose too great a challenge in all aspects at once to avoid the task being

demotivating. A text covering familiar and engaging content may contain a higher level of difficulty on a linguistic level. However, when a possibly challenging meeting between cultures takes place, the discovery of something unknown, then the language ought to be more accessible. This also proves how crucial it is for the educator to be aware of aims and what those entail for the learners.

2.4. Pedagogical aims

Since considering the possible pedagogical aims of literary texts is the most commonly discussed aspect in connection with literary texts in the language classroom, I deliberately pay less attention to it here. Countless different approaches can be seen in the literature on the topic: transmitting aspects of the culture of the target language (daily cultural habits, cultural heritage), linguistic development, and personality development. In addition, it can be treated as a natural motivating factor, a basis for communication or work that might focus on the aesthetic aspects of literary texts. Some approaches even try to integrate all of these (e.g. Dalmau et al. 2012). The main reason I do not go into detail about these possibilities is that I am convinced that any aim can be valid as long as it is the right fit for the learners. A balanced, well-constructed learning process in my view involves all of these goals at one time or another, therefore, artificially allocating a hierarchy of importance for these aims is pointless. They are not intrinsic aspects of texts or constraints for text choice but are always dependent on the wider learning process and the specifics of the learners.

3. Methods in practice

My second main category is that of methods used to work with the chosen text, which is of equal importance to text selection. While methodological decisions are closely linked to all factors already discussed, and the choice of suitable practices cannot be unlinked from the specific attributes of a group, pedagogical goals, and constraints of time and space, treating this category as a separate, crucial entity emphasises the necessity of conscious consideration of methods used. This is particularly important to defeat the misconception that a well-chosen text will by definition motivate and engage learners. On the contrary, it is indispensable to find the right methods to draw out the full potential of texts and allow active, in-depth work regardless of prior interest in learners.

As mentioned before, teachers already utilize a large variety of tools that can be of use with literary texts as well. The goal should not be to overwrite existing, successful patterns, but to consciously build on them and integrate new methods into their ranks. This is particularly important with literary texts as their aesthetic qualities and their potential for emotional and intellectual involvement require an approach sensitive to such layers.

The twenty-one sources vary greatly in how they treat the methodological as-

pect of working with literary texts. Kouvari and Margaroni (2012), for instance, do not pay attention to ways of working with the text beyond making a case for using concrete poetry in the classroom. Szénási (2012), despite showing a high level of sensitivity in questions prompting interpretation, only highlights the importance of playfulness with children. This widespread misconception often results in teachers ignoring the importance of engaging activities with young adults or especially adult learners. My own experience as a drama teacher, however, taught me that the thirst for engaging activities, varying modes of expression, and a playful approach are not age-specific, and can benefit learners of any age or proficiency level.

Another aspect to be taken into account is the importance of considering all three phases of the reading process and taking into account the activities accordingly. These three phases are: before reading, during reading, and after reading. This is fundamentally similar to the approach modern language textbooks have to any topic, and so should be familiar to teachers. And yet, many sources pay no attention to these phases. Holló (2019) only gives ideas for activities after reading (summary, message of the short story, comprehension questions, discussion of personal and cultural habits). Similarly, Szita's (2002-2012) otherwise carefully and intelligently constructed worksheets only give activities for after reading (true/false exercises, grammar exercises, cultural aspects, style of writing, etc.). Such approaches suggest an attitude that takes the basic linguistic and thematic understanding of the literary text for granted, and a personal language challenge more than anything else. In Table 1, I compiled all activities suggested by the sources used, allocating them to the three phases, even if the given source only describes the process and makes no reference to the importance of the phases.

TABLE 1

Activities used in connection with literary texts

	Activities before reading	Activities during reading	Activities after reading
Content aspects	topic introduction: short discussion, guessing game, vocabulary, brainstorming (Alemi 2011)		- comprehension questions: discussion (Floris 2004; Holló 2019; Reimão 2020) - comprehension questions in writing: true/false, open questions, etc. (Szita 2002-2012; Puig 2017, 2019) - summary (Holló 2019) - two true and three false statements about the story (Koutsompou 2015) - order of events (Szénási 2012) - discussion of personality traits of the character based on the text (Dalmau et al. 2012; Puig 2017, 2019) - discussion of the background of characters, why they are the way they are (Alemi 2011)

Language aspects	- difficult vocabulary (Alemi 2011)	- underlining unknown words (Koutsompou 2015) - glossary (Szita 2002-2012)	- understanding language (Alemi 2011) - grammar exercises (Dalmau et al. 2012 ; Szita 2002-2012 ; Lazar 1994 ; Puig 2019) - search for vocabulary connected to a given theme (Dalmau et al. 2012)
Context	- information about the author (Crahay 2020; Puig 2017, 2019) - assessing previous knowledge (Koutsompou 2015) - anticipation guide (Jimola 2017) - historical and cultural background – internet search (Puig 2017, 2019) - radio programme and interview with the author (Martín de León & Garcia Hermoso 2020)		- more information about the text (Floris 2004) - information about the author (Szita 2002-2012) - discussion about the author's style (Szita 2002-2012; Puig 2017) - internet research (Dalmau et al. 2012; Szénási 2012) - discussion about cultural aspects of the time of story/writing (Dalmau et al. 2012; Holló 2019; Szita 2002-2012; Puig 2019) - discussion of the broader context of the story - argumentation (Floris 2004) - discussion of the broader context of the story – personal opinion and/or connection between the lives of learners and the text (Alemi 2011; Dalmau et al. 2012; Floris 2004; Koutsompou 2015)
Strategies		- close reading – iceberg theory (Reimão 2020) - collaborative reading (Blyth 2013)	- reading strategy practiced with another text (Reimão 2020)

Creative interpretive activities	- associations on the title, guessing content (Floris 2004; Koutsompou 2015, Lazar 1994; Puig 2017, 2019)	- watching the performance of the chosen extract (Crahay 2020) - gap filling (reconstructing poem with missing lines) (Lazar 1994)	- giving a title as a form of interpretation (Lazar 1994) - what happens next (Alemi 2011; Koutsompou 2015; Martín de León & Garcia Hermoso 2020) - improvisation with two characters (Alemi 2011) - writing dialogue (Crahay 2020; Martín de León & Garcia Hermoso 2020) - creative writing exercises (Reimão 2020; Alsyouf 2020; Lazar 1994; Bernal Martín 2012) - letter writing (to a person from the time of the story about cultural differences)(Dalmau et al. 2012) - writing an article connected to a broader context or an event in the story (Dalmau et al. 2012)
	freedom of text choice (Reimão 2020)		gamification: - board game (Martín de León & Garcia Hermoso 2020)

As can be seen, the third phase gets the most attention from the sources and includes the most activities while the second is largely ignored. Furthermore, the number of traditional activities is high, learners are predominantly expected to participate in pair or group discussions, or answer questions from the teacher. This is often true even for thematically rich worksheets with a variety of engaging content (e.g. Puig 2017, 2019; Dalma, et al. 2012). Therefore, I want to draw special attention to a few approaches that go beyond such forms and try to find innovative modes of expression.

3.1. Creative activity types: gamification, parallel text methodology, role on the wall

Martín de León and García Hermoso's (2020) article is a kind of summary of research findings, therefore, it does not focus in detail on specific methods, however, there is mention of a number of ideas that are worth discussing. The researchers aimed to develop empathy towards characters in the texts used in the classroom, hoping that this empathy would then also manifest in everyday communicative contexts (41). While working with children, the importance and possibilities of gamification are mentioned and the text suggests creating a board game to the story used in class. While details are not given on how they envisage this, it is a particularly unexpected and potentially engaging form that is worth considering not only for children. Another creative task mentioned is interviewing the main character of a

story, which in this example the learners are prepared for by listening to interviews with the writer. Similarly, writing dialogues for characters, or finishing a chapter are all creative ways of engaging with a story and its characters. Furthermore, they develop linguistic skills and style of writing, and imagination, and highlight the creative use of language.

Another particularly useful idea is that of *parallel text methodology* suggested by this source, which means the use of two (or more) texts at the same time. In this text, the reason for such an approach is a similarity between characters' attributes, however, I would see the possibilities of going beyond thematic similarities. Using extracts from a variety of literary texts teachers can emphasize the heterogeneity of literature, which might help reluctant learners to dare engage with texts and be aware that the dislike of one particular text is not a failure and a different type of text might prove a better fit leading to joy and success. In addition, teachers might gather information about their learners by observing their ways of interacting with extracts, which might facilitate the choice of materials for the future learning process. Furthermore, the freedom to link thematically similar extracts from different types of literary texts allows teachers to create source material that can be used according to learners' needs. For instance, a set of character descriptions from different works may be used even with beginners as describing the characteristics of a person and describing themselves is generally the first large thematic unit in the learning process. Using extracts of literary texts that thematically link to this area of learning allows the extended use of the acquired vocabulary and expands it. Moreover, literary contexts may raise an often tedious and repetitive topic to a complex and meaningful level that requires an active interpretive act from learners rather than the mechanic repetition of learnt structures. This might also be used to help learners experience how simple linguistic choices influence the communicative effect, which is an understanding necessary for any language speaker.

Such activities can be used to draw attention to how even simple language use involves creative input, which can be an invaluable early experience that can develop the ability to make interpretive comments or choices in activities on higher levels. Another highly useful activity I additionally suggest is called *role on the wall* which is often used in drama pedagogy. It could be used to collect attributes of characters from a literary text but also as a way to enhance creativity in a simple, low-anxiety way by collaboratively creating a new character. Even beginner language learners have enough resources to collect expressions about appearance and personality, always paying attention to the input of all members of the group in order to create a fully-fledged character that might be a useful source for more work later on in the learning process, as a basis for collective story building.

3.2. Creative writing

Interestingly, in the CEFR 2020, all writing by learners (e.g. a letter to an imaginary friend) is categorised as creative writing, which means the expression is not exclusively used for texts created for aesthetic purposes or for the methods used to create them. This attitude draws attention to how regularly learners are already expected to use their creative imagination in the language classroom. On the one hand, this means attention must be paid to preparing them for such forms of expression, and, on the other hand, it proves that there is no need to hesitate about expecting complex creative utterances from learners as those are not that far removed from already existing tasks.

3.2.1. Cento and transformative writing

Alsyouf (2020) presents the method of *cento*, which is a kind of creative writing process where learners freely use lines from several poems (written by one or several poets) to create a new poem. For this, Alsyouf offers a selection of Shakespeare sonnets, then tells learners to determine a central theme and select and combine lines accordingly to create a self-contained new poem. This way learners' imagination and creativity are challenged and developed, and they grow more confident in creating texts of their own. The process described by Alsyouf has several deficiencies: mainly the lack of preparation or activities to help the reading process, creating the illusion that reading and understanding Shakespeare's sonnets do not require attention in itself. However, despite the lack of attention to this part of the process, the form itself is highly useful.

Transformative writing is regularly used in language learning, for example, longer texts are often cut up and have to be rearranged by learners with the help of logical progression of thoughts and the use of linguistic elements (e.g. linking words). Creative transformations use the same principle, but rather than attempting to find a single correct answer, learners have the freedom of creativity. Creative transformative writing contains activities that require active attention to language use (sentence structure, connection words, word class, etc.), and simultaneously allow meaningful creativity. The creative transformation from Alsyouf's example can be modified and used for work on a single poetic text in the preparatory phase. Learners might be told to rearrange the cut-up lines of a poem according to their own taste, emphasizing that the goal is not to figure out the original poem but to find a coherent, meaningful text they like. When reading the different versions, it is advisable to discuss possible differences in meaning as well as linguistic ways in which lines are connected. This allows learners to form a deeper, active connection with the text before they are asked to read the poem for the first time.

A similar aspect of creative writing can be found in Crahay (2020), where a French dramatic text is used for beginners of French in higher education. The play consists of unfinished sentences that learners are required to find creative ways to complete. Crahay emphasizes that while there are linguistic constraints to this, within those

constraints learners have the chance to find creative, often unexpected ways of expression (80). Similar gap-filling type activities are given by Bernal Martín (2012) in a Spanish language learning context, where beginner learners are expected to create a poem by filling in a blueprint text according to simple instructions. These forms of "poema personal" and "poema acróstico" are creative forms that can be easily used in new groups as part of them getting to know each other (35–36).

3.2.2. Erasure or blackout poetry

Not considered in any of the sources, but equally useful for classroom work is *erasure* or *blackout poetry*. This is a different form of transformation, where parts of the source text (usually prose) are crossed out. The remaining expressions form a self-contained, meaningful poem. Similarly to the previous examples, learners are expected to create new texts by transforming existing literary materials. Awareness of the rules of the language is equally important, adhering to them or deliberately breaking them in creative ways is crucial while learners have the safety of an existing source material to work from.

One aspect of erasure poetry I find highly useful is that it can be approached in a variety of ways. The text used as a basis can be anything depending on the pedagogical aims of the activity. The focus might be on different genres (creating poetry from prose), or even the transformation of informative texts into forms of literary expression. When learners have reached higher language proficiency, they may be given additional challenges (e.g. central theme or form), but on lower levels rather simple, one-line sentences can be expected. Even single sentences can be the basis for further work as they might be further combined to create a sort of poem using all sentences of the group.

In terms of text selection, I see two possible approaches: learners might be expected to read, understand and engage with the material in a variety of ways, and this transformation might be one of them. In that case, it is important to choose a literary extract that will not prove too challenging for the learners. However, if the goal is to create texts that can become the main focus of classroom work, even challenging texts can be used that exceed the proficiency level of students. This way they are expected to endure not understanding all elements, a task usually highly challenging for learners, and find meaning based on linguistic elements they already know. Especially in a group with varying proficiency levels, the poems created by them might vary significantly. Thus, teachers can use the imaginative work of their learners to make observations on future learning goals and aim to decrease differences within the group.

3.2.3. Micro-fiction and interpretive strategies

The little texts created in the previous section share similarities with the already mentioned micro-fiction category, and it is possible to work with them similarly. When working with micro-fiction, Reimão (2020) uses the so-called iceberg theory, according to which the text itself is only the visible tip of the iceberg and hides information on the sequence of events, characters, and themes. In Reimão's case, a text selected by the learners was used to develop strategies of reading and interpreting that they could later deploy with other texts. The examples in this source are for Portuguese language learners, but, especially in English, it is very easy to find such examples online. One of the most well-known examples of such fiction is the six-word story anecdotally attributed to Earnest Hemingway (though the connection is not proven): "For sale: baby shoes, never worn". Such examples can be found on the internet, but small extracts of literary texts chosen by the teacher can function in a similar way, independent of the work itself.

It is important to further highlight, that Reimão is the only one out of all sources used here (and among all sources I have encountered recently) that attempts to give learners strategies for reading and interpreting literary texts that they might use not only in the specific context but when interacting with other types of texts as well. The general lack of focus on this aspect is problematic and ought to be remedied.

3.4. Reading as a social activity – eComma

Finally, it is important to highlight another unique source. Not for the obvious reason of using modern technology as a tool, but because this is the only instance where reading is not seen as a solitary activity but rather a social one. Blyth (2013) introduces the program called eComma and its array of potentials by presenting the observations of several case studies. The program was created in 2009 by the English department at a Texan university and originally aimed to help students of English literature to work with literary texts. However, soon language education began to regard it as useful, and after a full reworking of the program in 2010/11, it became an open source tool that now anyone can use.

Without going into the specific details of the four case studies, it can be said that they generally used eComma in the following ways:

- giving groups of learners different tasks, asking them to pay attention to different aspects of the text and mark them for all to see (poetic devices, different past tenses, singular/plural, active/passive sentences, etc.)
- looking for content in collaboration (less time looking for new vocabulary for the individual as others might have already looked those words up)
- reactions to content, adding first thoughts and interpretations to be used as a basis for further discussion.

These are all examples of how reading becomes a collaborative effort rather than a challenge that learners have to face by themselves. In addition, by collabo-

rating this way, learners can also learn from each other's reading strategies. Furthermore, the teacher, too, can draw conclusions with the help of the program's various features. For example, if a part of the text contains too many annotations, it can indicate that further work with it is necessary. Additionally, conclusions can be drawn about individual learners' reading strategies (e.g. who focuses on grammar, who, on vocabulary, who, on content with a global understanding of the themes, etc.).

One particularly useful example Blyth mentions is how a teacher might influence the reading process without directly giving instructions, which might disrupt the natural flow of work. In the case study, learners were expected to read a poem and reflect on their own reactions to it by commenting on parts of the text that affected them. During this process, the teacher noticed it would be beneficial to draw the students' attention to some interpretive factors, but did not want to give the impression that the work being done was wrong or not valuable. So, instead of direct instruction, the teacher added his/her annotation to the text, highlighting certain aspects. This was successful, as certain learners noticed and commented on this annotation while others began adding similar thoughts to other parts of the text. To me, this example shows that the teacher, by putting themselves in the position of yet another reader, and without adding stress and the feeling of concrete expectations to the process, managed to positively influence the reading and interpretation. This is a good example of how a technological tool, when used well, can help in a variety of ways.

In my opinion, redefining reading as a social activity is a particularly useful approach. Recently, the connection between reading and social media has been increasingly present. Content creators on Youtube, called BookTubers produce videos containing book recommendations or book reviews on a variety of topics (for example, award-winning books, translated books, and books for different countries), and book recommendations can be found on TikTok, using #BookTok. Often reading lists of celebrities are in the centre of attention, or books read by specific characters in TV series or films. The site named Goodreads is specially designed for book recommendations and reviews but wears attributes of social media sites, like the possibility of friending or following people, liking their content, etc.

Regardless of what one might think of social media and the way such sites operate, the existence of these connections with reading shows the existing need in society for reading and storytelling to be a social activity. It is useful for teachers to react to this existing need. While a large number of existing authentic video materials might be used in class, it is especially important to highlight the possibility of integrating certain forms, themes, or attitudes into the learning process. For example, a popular English BookTuber uploaded a video in May 2022 titled *books i'd sell my soul to read again for the first time*. He passionately talked about books (both classical and contemporary) that he had loved to read for the first time without knowing how they would end. The video closes with the sentiment that while he cannot read these books for the first time again, the viewers can (Jack Edwards 2022). This is a good example of how talking passionately on any topic can have a strong effect on the actions of other people. Rather than telling learners to describe

the last book they have read, teachers might tell learners to create a video (or short presentation) with this title, introducing three books that had a profound effect on them. While the language requirements differ only minimally, the emotional involvement of learners is higher. The same user at the beginning of May hosted a reading livestream on YouTube, where he was simply reading a book for thirty minutes in silence and so tried to motivate viewers to join in with a book of their choice. Over 35 thousand viewers joined the event (either live or in the weeks since then to motivate themselves to read for a set time). This kind of communal experience can be easily used to motivate reading at home, either for a specific reading assignment or as a way to motivate learners to build their own sustainable reading habit. These are good examples of how certain situations in the digital world can be useful sources for the language classroom; hence, their existence shows real-life needs that can be adapted for the needs of language learners.

4. Summary

Observing a part of the literature on how to integrate literary texts in the language classroom (specifically those texts that offer practical advice), it can be concluded that the same topic can be approached in numerous ways, with a wide array of emphases. This leads to a broad range of innovative and valuable approaches and ideas that can enrich our methodological tools. However, it is also evident, that basic guidelines in approaches to literary texts are largely missing. There is a need for research that would go beyond running circles around aims and potentials and would offer universally useful aspects and methods in order to support teachers practically in integrating literary texts into their teaching processes in the best possible way.

Based on the variety of methodological ideas proposed, first, I analysed the suggested aspects of text selection, which showed a particularly eclectic picture. In addition, I highlighted particularly innovative aspects of the sources and attempted to add some of my own. In Table 2, I sum up briefly the aspects that have been mentioned and formulate a number of questions teachers should consider when working with literary texts in the language classroom.

TABLE 2

Summary of Key Ideas

Aspects of text selection	Some innovative methods
1. Framework: space and time *How much time do I have for the entire process and for each part of the process?* *How much time do we have in class, and how much time can I expect students to work at home?* *How much time do I want to dedicate to reading vs. activities?* *What is the learning space like? What constraints and possibilities does it have?* *Is it easy to move around?* *Are there any objects that can be integrated creatively into any of the activities?* *...* *...* *...*	drama-based pedagogy: - freeze frame - tableau - role on the wall … … …
2. Learner competencies: proficiency level, literary competency *How much practice do students have with interacting with literary texts?* *What reading strategies have they acquired so far?* *In what ways do they generally interact with texts (reading for information, reading for pleasure, reading as an assignment, etc.)* *What habits and strategies do they have negotiating interpretations with others?* *Can they easily access strategies and experiences used when reading in their first language?* *Is the text accessible for them with regard to their language proficiency?* *How much explanation/help is needed to make the text accessible? Is that adequate, or too much, not enough?* *...* *...* *...*	- creative writing: cento - creative writing: erasure/blackout poetry - a letter to a character - an interview with a character … … …

3. Age and interest *How old are my students?* *What topics are they generally interested in?* *What are their literature-specific interests, if any? Do these align with assumptions about their age?* *What (cultural and personal) background do my students have?* *What are their attitudes towards reading in general?* *What attitudes might they have towards certain topics of the selected text?* *...* *...* *...*	- designing book cover - gamification (boardgame) - ”casting” based on the attributes of a character, what actor might play them … … …
4. Pedagogical aims *What aspect of work with literary texts is my immediate concern? What are my possible secondary or tertiary aims?* *Do I want to work with specific aspects of language? (e.g.: describing people, different past tenses in stories, communication situations)* *Do I want to use the text for cultural enrichment? (e.g.: social and situational aspects of communication, the role of women today and in the past, minorities in different cultures, learning about important literary works of a certain culture)* *Do I want to use the text to allow personal development? (e.g. respect towards other cultures or groups, the ability for self-expression, negotiating different opinions respectfully, forming a habit of extensive reading, learning to read for pleasure)* *...* *...* *...*	- eComma: reading as collaboration - reading as a social activity: Booktube, BookTok, Goodreads, etc. - iceberg theory as a reading strategy … … …

Though I hope this paper has managed to sum up some ideas that will prove helpful for the existing teaching practice, I am convinced that more articles on the topic are needed that give tangible advice, allow discussion about approaches, and discusses case studies of the potential uses of new methods. That is the only way we can move beyond the uncertainty that currently exists in connection with the use of literary texts in the language classroom.

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