

LINGVISTIKA/LINGUISTICS

Literature as a Source of Cognitive Knowledge

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Abstract. The pedagogical application of fiction as a source of cognitive knowledge in integrated language and literature programmes at university is treated here as problematic, since doubted by some theorists and, while effort-consuming, causing difficulties in practice. The conclusions are based on specimen analysis. Cognitive knowledge from fiction is not accessible directly. It may best be gleaned from the subconscious and conscious match of the known of reality *a priori* in alignment with the author's knowledge, transformed and encoded in his work(s), and accessible only through connotations, while an expert teacher can guide the student in this. A natural way to glean cognitive knowledge from fiction is reading widely, while turning to fiction relaxed to maximise one's perceptive powers, and let the mind collect the knowledge in elemental senses from *volumes* of reading.

Among many aspects of the application of imaginative literature, reading for delight and enjoyment is essential. When literature is used in the teaching of foreign languages, students often find that its delight recedes to the background. The English stylist F.L. Lucas even records a case when, to her supervisor's question whether she liked the work, the student responded, 'I don't read "to enjoy", I read "to evaluate"', which baffled the instructor who was unable to understand how one can analyse a literary work before one responds to it wholly, with all one's senses, reason and emotions, and likes or dislikes it. This anecdotal story highlights a pedagogical aspect of literature in language studies and hints at the difficulties to the teacher and the student at university in a respective programme. Some authors, like Oscar Wilde, maintain that, unlike language, literature cannot be taught (cf.: Pattison, 1963), while others, who reason with a purpose in mind, treat literature in language teaching like an integrated natural resource (cf.: Efstathiadis, 1977: 181). It will be my task in the present paper to consider difficulties related to these problems and put forward some suggestions on how to resolve them as I generalise on the publications, research and analysis of concrete texts.

The idea of the present publication has not come from speculation. It has rather been a timely response to a renewed interest in learning language through literature (cf.: Brumfit, Carter, 1986; Carter, Burton, 1982; Carter, Mcrae, 1997; cf. also: McMurtry, 1985; Scholes, 1985; Simpson, 1996), after a wealth of the experience of the teachers of the pre-war generation, who had had classical education, has been lost with their death or retirement, while the proficiency of their students together with a contribution of universities to the preservation and fostering of the ideals of Western culture through them have retained value and wonder. In the meantime, however, the complexity of literary work has been studied in depth, new trends in the interpretation and analysis of literary works have come into being and, with them, new

methods in the humanities at university. This places a practising teacher in a predicament because of the amount of the information and none the less because of the expectations of ever so informed students in this age of information explosion.

Before focusing on the central question in this paper, the background difficulties might be mentioned in passing, for so far I have assumed that it is only the pedagogical aspect that is problematic in the use of literature in language learning. The process of reading itself is a difficulty, but this may be ignored at university. Another difficulty which cannot be ignored is reading in a foreign language, and there is a difference whether one reads fiction or non-fiction, although this difference and difficulty in genre is not easy to define (cf.: Cicurel, Moirand, 1990: 155; cf. also: Vigner, 1979). Whatever the difficulties with purely informative texts, average knowledge of a foreign language may preclude the enjoyment of fiction. Indeed, the first powerful stimulus to reading fiction in a foreign language is the stage at which the reader experiences pleasure at his ability to follow the text at a normal speed and understand it. Since my object is a study of English as a foreign language at university, this difficulty, although not entirely irrelevant, will have to be left at mentioning. But there is a point made in recent studies of literature in education relevant in the context of this paragraph, and that is that an earlier concept of a literary work as that of a fixed masterpiece (*un chef-d'oeuvre immobile*) which has to be given authorised and perfect interpretations should be discarded. Instead, the student should be trusted with his experience in reading and encouraged to produce his individual interpretation of the work. The only unbending rule in an individual interpretation is to warrant the statements by a precise reference to the text (Vigner, 1979; Widdowson, 1992). The problem of comprehension is not considered by these authors as they address the native speakers. By the same token, unquestionable linguistic proficiency of the foreign learners of English, for instance,

at university may be also taken for granted, and thus the problem of reading resolved, in theory.

Although the respected and influential authors have never doubted the value of literature in the respective programmes, there has been some friction and waste in clarifying to the practitioners in education what had been obvious to the scholars and the literati. The mere pedagogical aspect mentioned above demands profound familiarity with the literature in the language taught, intelligence and insight to orientate the student, while the often neglected complexity and significance of literary work together with its underrated value require remedial instruction offered to the average teachers thus misguided. Hence have appeared numerous publications bringing down literary theories and methodologies, giving recommendations, proposing short cuts and simplifying the methods¹.

A responsible consideration of the pedagogical application of imaginative literature has to counter and compromise with the for and against that cluster around the integrated language and literature programmes at universities. That is to say, one has to take obligations as a literary scholar, a linguist and a teacher, and exploit the multiple uses of literature with the required degree of expertise and sophistication. Here are two aspects to consider: one of literature and language, the other of the student.

When one thinks of literary art in the abstract, the basic objection to the use of literature in language learning to extend the learner's concept of the cultural context and improve his proficiency is that literature is supposed to be taken too much for granted, that literature is even abused, in a sense. Henry G. Widdowson, for instance, has voiced objections to the treatment of literature as information. This warning would apply to literate housewives and mediocre teachers. So far as the Universities are concerned, this warning would be misdirected. Many an author affiliated with the Universities regretted the separation of language and literature in the humanities (cf.: Quirk, 1974: 65; Prator, 1993; on the unity, cf.: Vallins, 1970: 9-21), which is a related point of contention to the moderns. Indeed, language never exists separately from the body of the national literature. (One can consider the pursuits of Society for Pure English, and the state of the English language today when it exists not only as a national and a world language, but also as an enormous

¹ Cf.: Perrine, 1970, a manual and an anthology, which would be one of the broadest, yet typified in method but achieving what it purposes, *i.e.* to give the beginning student "a sufficient grasp of the nature and variety of literary works", to lead him "to appreciative understanding" and to some "basic principles for making literary judgements"; cf. also: Monfries, 1974; Sheffter, 1975; Sheffter, 1962, esp. Chapter 9, entitled *How Are Literature Questions Answered?*; Sheffter, 1955, esp. *The Introduction*, in which this author assures the reader that great literature may have an influence on the student's English: "... some of the master poet's gracious writing style will rub off on you". To get an idea of how major influential conceptions become simplified in textbooks, one might compare: Richards, 1929, with Alexander, 1969, and Drazdauskienė, 1975. A recent book, (Widdowson, 1992), written as a practical manual for the teaching of young students at the initial stage of engagement with literature, offers a thoroughly motivated and explained concept of literature, with only vague reflections of the concepts of the French semioticians in it, and includes original exercises, would be least simplified.

body of printed texts accompanied by no fewer reference guides and dictionaries). For the same reason, on which contemporary French authors have been quite explicit (cf.: Adam, 1991), the goals of the Universities have always been directed to giving classical education to the students in the humanities, which means integrated studies. Single language courses do not, in fact, exist as programmes at university level in the West. Language courses are prescribed only to immigrants who fail to pass a proficiency test and cannot apply for a job in an English speaking country, for instance. Otherwise, those majoring in languages, focus on literature, with language skills attended to only at the highest level of sophistication.

Since the focus in the present paper is on literature as a source of cognitive knowledge, modern concepts of literature have to be considered. It would be difficult to find a book or an author who treats literature otherwise than a form of art today. In most recent works, poetry, for example, has been defined as representation and as a use of language (Widdowson, 1992: 16-25), and, more philosophically, as "*the creation of terms rather than ... the manipulative handling of them*" (Falk, 1991: 62; cf. also: Vigner, 1979: 158-159, 162). However, since, like all arts, literature appeals to the senses, intellect and emotions, it has multiple significance. Therefore different functions are ascribed to literature, the cognitive function among them. It is not so much the cognitive function that will be my concern here; it is rather cognitive aspects of representation in literature, *i.e.* literature as it reflects, by implication, rather than names some aspects of the physical and social world, usually, and with the native speakers always, perceived and experienced in physical no less than in verbal environment.

In aesthetics, the cognitive function of art and literature is traced back in the classical antiquity (cf.: Sparshott, 1970: 250-251). Plato's notion that poetry is meant to inform by imitation, and the identification of delight in imitation with that of recognition by Aristotle are treated by Frank F. Sparshott as evidence of the presence of the cognitive function in literature. It seems that the cognitive function in this case identifies with the impact of art through the senses and with recognition of the emotive-intellectual attitude of the author to his subject which may be the heroes or the Gods, one's beloved or the native country. When it engages the reader emotionally and intellectually or at least is perceived with involvement, this recognition is expected to purify and ennoble the reader. It is only reasonable thus to assume that art may "*educate simply by the exercise it gives: to purify vision and hearing, to increase sensitivity of perception, to maintain and inculcate standards of accuracy in the use of language, and more generally to train and refine feeling*" (Sparshott, 1970: 252). It is in these terms that the educating power of art was understood by the ancient Greeks. Hence derived their application of literature in school (cf.: Garrod, 1931: 8-9; Grant, 1962: 55-58; Sikes, 1969: 1-5, 37). These notions may be traced in the poets themselves, such as Homer and Archilochus, Horatius and Vergilius. Taking up with this line of reasoning, one can suppose that, if cognition in art is achieved as perception through the senses when, for example, poetry appeals to the reader's

sense of silence or noise, slowness or rapidity, roughness or smoothness, vulgarity or refinement, this is indeed cognition of the notion in the ideal, and there can be no better way of achieving it. For, when, aided by his reason, the reader perceives these notions as sensations of the pleasant or the repulsive, his mind generalises in concepts related to the beautiful or its contrary, or he subconsciously senses something like it. A sensitive reader is thus delicately exposed to an impact of beauty and refines his instinctive reactions, which otherwise come only by birth and good breeding, while literature fulfils its noble function as it purifies the delicacy of the reader's feeling (cf.: Raizis, 1980: 88-89).

There is, however, a specific aspect related to literature. It is assumed that, though being a mode of representation, literature somehow reflects reality and that the reader can get "*some kind of direct acquaintance with some kind of reality*" (Sparshott, 1970: 252). It is with this particular view that I shall be concerned here. This view is not entirely groundless. First, the author's senses and mind give him the experience known to man because his body is permanently engaged in mutual multitudinal influences with all kinds of reality from all imaginable contacts with it. Second, literature invariably draws on reality, both physical and sociocultural, for its concepts and images because it would not make sense placed in a vacuum. Authors place their representations in a certain cultural context, which has to have an intrinsic system, often bearing resemblance to those known to man². Otherwise a literary work might not be understood. This has been summed up in plainer terms, in fact. Cf.: "*the writers of poetry, and indeed of literature in general, make their representations out of the language and culture current in their own community*" (Widdowson, 1992: 114). An analogous concept has been known from French authors who have made delicate distinctions in saying that "possible worlds are not entirely separated from the rules of the functioning of the worlds which are called real, and it is only on this that interaction of discourse strategies (*i.e.* of progressive communication - M.L.D.) rests" (Cicurel, Moirand, 1990: 155). There are indeed literary works which are representations of an identifiable culture and language. Consider, for instance, Homer's epics, narrative poetry, and the novels of the nineteenth and of a part of the twentieth century. The literature of these genres and periods has initiated numerous literary studies which centred on social and cultural themes and gratified even lay readers, not only the literati (cf.: Warner, 1894; Milner, 1968; Drabble, 1971; Gill, 1972; Lerner, 1979; Sahel, 1984; Kenny, 1984; Richards, 1988; Willeke, 1990, and many others). Studies of the language of literature as credibly representing the common idiom and thus being exploited for characterisation as well as offering testimony in research, which required exceptional expertise, have also been known (cf.: Salmon, 1975; Dumčius, 1983; Drazdauskienė, 1969, 1974, 1992a and others).

² The cognition that derives from this identification of the reader's actual experience in the world and of a very indirect reflection of reality in fiction can indeed give vicarious knowledge to the reader, and this is mentioned below in conclusions as an important aspect in gaining cognitive knowledge from fiction.

Minding the objections expressed by Professor Widdowson (p. 2, above) and acting with subtlety, knowledge and taste, one can variously apply imaginative literature in foreign language learning at university level. Literature should accompany language studies for the delight it gives and the polish it lends to the reader's feelings, taste and language. But literature can also be a source of knowledge of a society's culture and of the level of its sophistication, of its literary style, taste and tradition, of the extralinguistic environment of the speaking community, to an extent, and of the idiom of contemporary usage. The second point in this review gives a very limited glimpse of an angle of literary studies, but the first means a recent pedagogical trend, that of culture studies, which in the US began as studies of history and contemporary literature. The two latter points indicate two aspects of the application of literature in foreign language programmes at university. Literature as a source of extralinguistic or cognitive knowledge will take most of the remaining space in this paper, while the use of literature as a record of contemporary usage will only summarise drawing on a successful practice.

The pedagogical exploitation of literature for a source of cognitive knowledge is not as straight as it may seem. But this application of literature is possible and can be motivated even theoretically. Although complicated because of its multistratified meaning, imaginative literature, like poetry, nevertheless is a use of language based on images, which has no other but a self-contained context of metareference (cf.: Widdowson, 1975, 1992; Drazdauskienė, 1983). This definition excludes the notion of literature as reflecting reality photographically, but may not convince the student or the lay person. This is what complicates the use of literature in education in general and as a source of cognitive knowledge, in particular, and requires some explanation.

Like semiotic studies in the twentieth century, the above definition of literature commits the student to the notion that, whatever cognitive knowledge of the culture or of the practices of the speaking community he may expect to gain from his reading of literature in the language studied, it is not to come from the names. It is rather to come from connotations and implications (Bartas, 1991; cf.: Vigner, 1979: 159-160; Cicurel, Moirand, 1990: 154-155) rendered by the vocabulary, syntax and composition. The student is also expected to take for granted that images in and the generalised sense of every literary work variously build up out of its micro, ephemeral and often semiconsciously perceived contextual meanings. These meanings, however, build a well-wrought general sense, which, depending on the vividness of the impressions on the reader, remains with him when he closes the book. This is so because the generalised sense of literary works, like their style, has a systemic nature as does the text of every work. This is to say that a literary work is an accomplished composition, a systemically organised body of sense in a likewise organised language, which may be perceived, understood, reacted to and discussed because the text of the work, which is also a self-contained context, had been produced with utmost care to detail in the choice of verbal means. To emphasise, the sense and significance that every literary

work has for a contemporary individual or generations of readers way back in time or in time to come is achieved by means of language, and the vividness of the reader's impressions depends on the degree of his linguistic proficiency. Merely this consequence confirms that language and literature are inseparable and that every sensitive and ardent reader is likely to have his language improved and taste refined. But select reading, professional advice and guidance together with classroom exercises give a university student in the humanities an incomparable advantage over the lay readers. Since literature belongs to the arts, it is only expert teachers who can take up guidance in the studies of language and literature (cf.: Zadornova, 1984: 126), and nowhere else the challenge to expertise is greater, while universities gain an extra point in definitions of their functions.

Even the gist of theoretical essentials given in the previous paragraph would oblige the student in the humanities to read with care to detail but never lose sight of the wholeness of a literary work, and to decide upon the meaning of concrete words only with reference to its complete text. Seeking impressions of the culture of the speaking community, the student must be familiar with some guidelines given *a priori*. To reiterate, a literary work is an accomplished specimen of speech, at least, of a definite period, and the teacher must, while the student is expected, to view it "*as a globed fruit*" in practical analysis and in discussions on all levels of proficiency so that, finally, this view becomes the student's own. But there are also technical principles and criteria applying to literature. The basic technicalities are required even at the initial professional treatment of literature and should be part of instruction at university. Within the scope and goals of this paper, the broadest concept of context is indispensable.

Linguistic context or co-text (Halliday) should be mentioned first as the sole resource of naming, enabling and accomplishment in a literary work. It is the complete text of a work: it keeps meaning both unbounded and limited. Other contexts - the context of situation and that of culture depend on it. Contexts of situation may be seen as components of plot structure and as routine events reflecting human concerns. Cultural context is the overall background, an identifiable and structured panorama of social milieu in fiction. All the three types of contexts are self-contained imaginative constructs produced by language. Cultural context (cf.: p. 4 above) lends human significance to literary work. Even science fiction is not entirely a void in this respect. It can be an entirely fictitious context, but it has to have a system which fulfils itself by verbal means. Reading is easier when the system identifies with one or several with which the reader is familiar from his life experience. The classics and national classical authors observed this condition, while modernist literature departed from it, and few would agree that it has gained in communicative value (cf.: Garrod, 1931).

Literature is virtually always bound to the overall system in which a civilised society functions, by the identity of which it establishes itself in the history of mankind, and which is the broadest sense of the word *culture*. Language is an inseparable part of the general system of culture, and

this was reiterated throughout the twentieth century, beginning with Edward Sapir and finishing with Michael A.K. Halliday. Culture presupposes a system of values and has therefore been defined as the total of the spiritual and material, artistic and intellectual, historical and geographical identity of a civilised society within a system of values, significant to posterity as the society's legacy concealing indices of the values that possessions and practices, material things and myths, beliefs, magic and spells, symbols and worship, verbal routine and the code of conduct, military and commercial routes and encounters and many other experiences had had for the society. Most of these may be deciphered from the community's language and no less from its myths, tales and original literature, if they are recorded (cf.: Greimas, 1990).

The semantic and etymological deposits even of a dead language conceal a wealth of information which had been and has remained an object of research in philology (cf.: Watkins, 1975; 1975a; Mažiulis, 1988). Similarly, the semantic potential of a language, together with resources of its expressiveness and an unfathomable contextual multiplication of meanings, build up an infinite potential of meaning in concrete literary works, thus making them eternal (*ars longa...*) and preserving their significance out of time as well as offering endless possibilities to new and new discoveries to generations of readers. This is also what makes it possible to interpret concrete texts and their sense anew, while comparing it with the sense the work had had for the contemporaries of the author. The potential of meaning of a literary work, the networks of relations that build in and around it, and the outlined panorama of meaning provided by the language's potential and the structure of the literary work, lend continuity to its sense and significance as to its ever new and individual interpretations³.

To clarify the statements unrelated to practice, an example will be considered. I shall focus on an excerpt from Chapter Two (§2) from the novel *A Severed Head* by Iris Murdoch. This novel has been chosen not to distract the student by the colourful pictures of mock reality that one finds in John Galsworthy's or even in Shakespeare's works. A Galsworthian text can distract the student by its rich thing-language and merely the denotative words may mislead him to believe that it has cognitive value by virtue of what it denotes. The scenery and dress are only details in Iris Murdoch's novel, with much else foregrounded, and therefore the dangers of and lures into misinterpretation are fewer in this case. The extract has been chosen from the initial chapter because the sociocultural context plays a greater role in it. In the following chapters when emotions hold the author's attention, the sociocultural context recedes and cannot be analysed at all.

The complexity of meaning in fiction requires the following comment although imaginative literature is disconnected from an immediate social context

³ It is, however, only the classicists among the practising teachers as among the scholars today, who have a fundamental concept of the continuity of literary works and of the conditions of their interpretation. That is why what is being said in this paper at such length has to be said and addressed to the teachers of modern languages.

(Widdowson, 1975: 69), it is not devoid of metareferential content, *i.e.* of content as the make-believe representation, which, because of its palpable images, is taken for or identified with reality by the inexperienced readers. It is there, this realistic image, one gets from realistic fiction, because, without it, fiction would lose typical means to impress and help the reader imagine: “*If all words were deprived of connotative content in poetry, they would be reduced, in communicative power, to the level of exclamations like alas, ouch and tally-ho*” (Leech, 1969: 40). But it is an invented reality, made only by the story, and technically, is called a metareality. The credibility of metareality or imaginary reality derives from connotations and the implied sense of the language of fiction. All words and the syntax contribute to the vividness of the picture one imagines in reading fiction; only proper names mean specifically, but of this later. Consequently, to understand what sense one makes of novels and stories over and above the tales they tell, one has to consider the implied meaning in the work, which technically is called the metacontent. Indeed, thinking only of the story in fiction on the level of the words’ denotative meaning, one has no evidence and no criteria to deduce and prove that the story has any sociocultural, aesthetic or philosophic, and still less cognitive sense (cf.: Drazdauskienė, 1992: 26-28).

Turning to the excerpt chosen for analysis, one has to reiterate that, on the semantic or content level, one has no grounds to speak of the sociocultural sense in the novel by Iris Murdoch. To identify any sense as having cognitive value, one has to view the extract analytically for its figurative meaning, which certainly rests on its denotative meaning and content. The paragraph from Chapter Two from *A Severed Head* represents Martin, the principal character’s, account of his double married life, given in somewhat disconnected details and comments. And that is all there is to it on the semantic or content level, but for the environment, the impressiveness of which depends on the associations rendered by the real place names. The actual British place names that had been used prior to the episode under analysis recur (Covent Garden, for example, in the proximity of which another character, Georgie, lived). The meaning of Covent Garden in this text is not the area in London, although the reader may associate what he imagines in reading with the actual architecture of the place or the Opera, if he had been to the district. But it is not the real buildings that matter in this extract from the novel *A Severed Head*. It is rather the respectability of the area, which the place name evokes to any Londoner and which matters⁴ in the novel as it adds an extra measurement to the image of the character’s milieu and status. The meaning of the words in fiction should permanently be perceived with this line that separates the real and the imaginary in mind. Therefore, to be correct, the statements of the student should always encompass an observation based on the text and the author’s

⁴ Proper names in fiction have initiated numerous and enlightening studies (cf.: Baužytė, 1991, 16; Graham, 1966: 32, 55), the question virtually unknown in Lithuanian literary criticism. What is more, the study of proper names has for years been known as a field in its own right in philology. In Lithuania the known names in the field are Zigmantas Zinkevičius and Aleksandras Vanagas, while in Eastern Europe A.V. Superanskaya.

masterminding presence. That is how the statement of the gist of representation in the extract from Chapter Two of *A Severed Head* given on lines 9-13 in this paragraph was produced and that is why it is correct. But it requires intellectual training and the discipline of thinking, sensitivity and skill in verbal expression to produce such summary statements. The difficulty is not to be denied as inexperienced students tend to say something like, ‘The paragraph is a story of a man of lame morality in modern England’ or ‘It is a story of a clever Englishman who observed liberal morals and managed to keep both a wife and a mistress’ with reference to the same excerpt, none of which is true because the students obviously had taken only the story into consideration and ignored connotations, both emotive-evaluative and linguo-cultural, and certainly missed the author. However, statements like these happen to be pronounced in the classroom (cf.: Widdowson, 1975: 78-79), which means that, to be professionally acceptable, analytical statements of literature are difficult to make. Therefore analytical exercises with fiction are necessary to the student at university and make a significant part of his philological education.

The correct statement above, however, was only a statement of content. The sense of the excerpt is broader, and, to say something of its sociocultural significance, the student should focus on what he perceives between the lines, *i.e.* on the implied and figurative meaning. One has to reason that the logic and straightforwardness of Martin’s statements in the first person narrative together with a few evaluative phrases imply an image of a healthy man with a sense of humour, “cool and rational” in all he was doing. It is his rationally motivated view of his own double life that excludes all criticism, while the modality of the statements implies his certainty of his own righteousness. It is the view of the author given to her character but, in its turn, it suggests the character’s double consciousness. This assessment is supported by the character’s explanation of his own behaviour, *i.e.* knowing the ‘rules’ of conventional society and consciously ignoring them. Martin’s view of his own double life would be cynical if it were not for his unbending reason in the explanation of his being “not indifferent to the “rules”, but doing what he chooses because he can explain to himself why he neglects what is solemn and sacred to the society. By formally observing the convention of the marriage bond, the character is shown to have retained his emotional and intellectual independence. The impression of the character’s manliness is strengthened by a philosophic hyperbole, “*I cannot imagine any omnipotent sentient being sufficiently cruel to create the world we inhabit*” given for an explanation of his being an unbeliever. With the character in view, the student analysing the text should not overlook that this single paragraph of the first person narrative additionally renders an image of conventional society and of the ‘rules’ of behaviour in it. Since of all rules only conjugal fidelity is reasoned about, yet in essence, the reader would subconsciously resolve that the other rules would be those of a conventional Western society. This unquestionable certainty of the reader in his simple completion of his mental image of the society depicted in the book is an obvious proof that the reader’s extralinguistic knowledge

assists his imagination when he finds some undeniable identity between the story and reality.

But the teacher has to pause at this point to impinge two truths on the student. One would be that the story which created the images of the character and society sketched above is fiction, and that the characters are only the reader's mental pictures of them. This would be a technical statement of an analytic view of the professional reader's psychology which attends his reading of fiction. The other truth would be an answer to the question what cognitive knowledge the reader gains about Anglo-Saxon culture which the author represents and how he does it.

I have already noted above that the reader's extralinguistic knowledge assists his imagination in reading fiction subconsciously⁵. A single clue in the text, which is conjugal fidelity in the excerpt analysed, suffices for the reader to add the remaining out of his own experience and continue reading convinced that it is a conventional Western society that he is reading about. This kind of the subconscious merge of the reader's extralinguistic knowledge with the images perceived in reading is natural but it should not delude a university student in languages and literature when he analyses and evaluates literary works, and still less his teacher. A further question and, indeed, the question of the present paper is whether imaginative literature conveys any extralinguistic knowledge to its reader and, if it does, how.

Focusing on the same excerpt, the analyst can make a still further step on a more abstract level of reasoning and see whether the text contains or implies anything that would identify with reality. Since the character Martin is represented very rational and frank, which shows in the unbending logic of his statements, the reader imagines him to be a man who not only pronounces but pursues what he considers right, although contrary to the social conventions, the more so that the story supports such an image. Since Martin's views and motives identify with some of those known from liberal westerners, and since his healthy feelings, the cleanliness of approach and the power of reason again identify with realistic portraits of westerners, the analyst has grounds to assume that it is a Western society that supports his image and lends it credibility. Since the place names used in the novel are all real British place names and are significant in the text by their social connotations actually shared by the British, the analyst can assume that it is ultimately modern Britain that had been the background on which the author had drawn for *her* images. Although critics had been reminded of

Jacobean and Restoration plays by a combination of the intellectually piercing and macabre in Iris Murdoch's novel, the style of the author and the mode of her characters' reasoning, views and attitudes are not only realistic, but very modern, too. Therefore, although permanently conscious of the author's intellectual superiority, sophistication and inclination to combine the realistic with the extraordinary and macabre, the reader perceives this novel as a work of a contemporary author who had written it with modern Britain in mind and senses. This is how the implications in the text and overtones of meaning can be read in reverse to enable the student to glean some undeniable identity between the images produced by the text and those known from reality, and, further, to make professionally motivated and rationally acceptable statements. The teacher who is sufficiently informed about Britain and sufficiently knowledgeable about English and literary text would see **the point** in this reasoning in reverse and would be able to aid his students if he **risks** (cf.: Squire, Rehage, 1977: 132) to take up the question of how the student can learn of reality from fiction.

The teacher could show to the student the difference between reality and fiction in texts, *i.e.* between a realistic tale and a short story, between the actual meaning of the words in a newspaper and a novel, for instance, between reality of which the contemporary learns as of concrete people, facts and things, and the imaginary world that builds out of the words' contextual and figurative meaning. But there is no direct way. No word or statement has any referential value in fiction. Neither the teacher nor an experienced critic can point out a detail, a description or a statement that would be as good as a newspaper item or would read as a line from a personal letter. The teacher therefore has to be very cautious and careful. But there is another possibility. If one reads widely and focuses temporarily on the works of Charles Dickens or John Galsworthy, one can, without much rationalisation, gain a fairly credible image of British society of either of the two centuries. But it would be good if the reader trusted his senses, intellect and feelings, in this case, as they function in unity in reading rather than going into atomic analysis of the text. Several or all works by a representative author read in close succession would be likely to render trustworthy, though vicarious impressions of Britain in these periods.

The teacher could also help the student see how experience and prior information aid the reading of fiction in a foreign language, and how it may consolidate his subconscious response in reading as in his conscious analysis of the work. In this case the student may be advised to read a history, a sociological study, diaries and letters of the period (along with or) before taking up a novel by Charles Dickens, for instance. But he can also do it in a reverse way, *viz.*, to study a chapter or a volume of British or American history after he had read a novel, and devoted students often know better than to wait for an encouragement. A novel like *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne may be subsequently accompanied by a chapter on Puritan New England from a volume of the History of the USA and by a chapter on the nineteenth

⁵ In a slightly different context of reasoning, two French authors described the role of the known to the reader in advance, which they called his "*compétence encyclopédique*" (Cicurel, Moirand, 1990: 155). These authors believe that the effect of such encyclopaedic knowledge is its mental stimulus which helps the reader "reconstruct the fictional world". This accurate observation may not be the only mentioning of the psychological role of the information internalised by the reader in advance, and I cannot even pretend to have exhausted the references, many of which are not known to me, while some are not really relevant, especially if one minds the space limit. Although I am competent only in the sphere of English, I could not ignore French authors because of their renowned taste in style, subtleties in upbringing and expertise in the humanities acknowledged by the British and because of my own appreciation of their major authors in semiotics, literature and style.

century USA, which might help the student see the practices to which the Puritan New Englanders had committed themselves and what suffering some of them rendered to the people, whereas the nineteenth century history of the USA would help the student see the causes of Hester's tragedy and continuous suffering as a consequence of the clash of the excessive puritan canons with the humane and individual. But novels like *American Dreams* and *California Gold* by John Jakes, which are historical novels, would stimulate only the reader's curiosity to read more about the Hollywood, the Gold Rush, the Pacific railway, and the economy of California in the nineteenth century USA, and this may be found in the respective chapters of a history of the USA or California's own history. On reading *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles, for instance, the student might like to read up for Devon county and Exeter in particular, of the countryside, the town and the architecture, to test and vivify his own impressions received in reading the novel. The supporting reading in this case would be especially valuable if the student were going to England. Examples of this kind of pleasure and supporting reading⁶ may be multiplied at will, especially that the value of readings in history was assessed with confidence so long ago that it has been forgotten (cf.: Robertson) and finally buried by the noise of the media. I would emphasise this point here because British and American historians are not only informed professionals but also incredible experts in English, so that the student would extend his concept of English style in readings from British and American history in addition to the information which would become alive and be memorised for long in the neighbourhood of fiction.

Turning to the student's linguistic proficiency which always improves in literature studies at university, one has to review the known practice. The student's advancement in literary appreciation usually goes hand in hand with an improvement of his linguistic proficiency. The unnoticed but always present resource in such programmes is extensive reading of national classics, which is a way of immersion (into the language), as the text engulfs the reader's senses and mind into a stream of the language of an outstanding native speaker. Extensive reading can develop a 'feel' for the creative use of a foreign language (cf. Yorke, 1986: 313). This is a natural process but its effect depends on the upbringing (cf.: Widdowson, 1983: 34) and on the level of education of every individual student. It has fortunately escaped the interference of the inquisitive and indiscreet practitioners and it should remain as it is. Another more definite and prosaic practice in learning a language through literature has been prescribed vocabulary lists accompanying the weekly portions of the student's reading, which he is usually supposed simply to learn. This is one of the easiest and most profitable ways of learning vocabulary as it comes in contexts, which was

⁶ This idea of the supporting reading really applies only to foreign learners of English. The role and even the moment of the introduction of the supporting or background reading for the native speakers has been strictly delimited by Professor Widdowson (Widdowson, 1992) so as not to interfere with the student's individual impressions and experience in reading and not to regulate his interpretation and appreciation of the work.

appreciated throughout the twentieth century (cf.: Dolch, 1927: 98; Politzer, Politzer, 1972: 237; Hill & Dobbyn, 1979; Povey, 1984; Gairns and Rodman, 1991). Prescribed vocabulary lists seem to have been used by teachers both in Europe and the US, the difference being that in Eastern Europe, at the University of Vilnius, for instance, the focus has usually been on the common words and expressions that may be extracted from the prescribed literature and that would be useful to the student in practical communication. In the United States, the prescribed vocabulary lists usually include rather technical and sophisticated vocabulary, and this is true both of guides to literary appreciation (cf.: Sheffter, 1975; Povey, 1984) as of those to vocabulary building in their own right (cf.: Lewis, 1963; Funk and Lewis, 1975).

Judging from the books referred to here, all teachers require that their students not only memorise the words aided by the literary contexts but also practise using them in the same, similar or new contexts. It is true, in the circumstances as described and depending on the proficiency of the teacher, a willing student acquires much passive knowledge of the language as well as some words of doubtful value, which would be clichés, expressions that had fallen out of use or vocabulary purely literary in character. However, whatever the student memorises along with his reading becomes useful and can be activated when the relevant contexts appear: the passive knowledge of the language thus acquired is a reliable background to the student's usage when he selects and evaluates the appropriateness of his own choices of words in realistic contexts (cf.: Widdowson, 1983: 34). If the student does not forsake his engagement with literature as a qualified employee, although such are few, he can ultimately achieve proficiency in English as a foreign language.

With some of the vocabulary from the literary contexts memorised with stamina in addition to the natural effortless memorisation in reading, the students are learning a language extensively. Thus literature becomes an invaluable resource, both as an engagement with pleasure for delight and as a context for the development of the student's linguistic skills in a foreign language (cf.: Widdowson, 1983). The advantages of learning language through literature have been appreciated by individual teachers from different universities⁷. This makes one believe that the practice with literature in integrated language and literature studies has not been ignored, in Europe at least.

The classical way of learning languages, *i.e.* learning languages through literature in the humanities discussed in this paper is an extensive and expensive way of language learning, but it pays on more occasions than one. Enough has been said above on literature, and the indispensable theoretical concepts have been explained. It is just that the teacher cannot explain to the student in advance what use and pleasure literary knowledge can give. But the teacher should not neglect or damage the psychological appeal of

⁷ I published a message on and appreciation of the study of English through literature at the University of Vilnius, in West European press (Drazdauskienė, 1986) and received a letter from Spain enquiring after more references and information on the methodology.

both literature and the methodology (cf.: Pattison, 1963; Loban, Squire, 1969; McKay, 1982; Cormon, 1986; Widdowson, 1986, 1992), especially in the first years at university, which means putting the right emphasis at the right time and point, not too frequent, nor too strong, but most importantly, letting the student become aware of the range and magnificence of literary experience and philological knowledge. The student may be reminded that, in this field, his devotion as a kind of love is expected by definition, but this should rather be not stated. What may be pointed out from time to time is that learning a language through literature, even when the student is asked to memorise a number of words and phrases which appear in his reading, is combined **with delight and beauty**, subsequently long-lasting in contemplation, while thus gained verbal polish is also gratifying. The best teachers may permit themselves a hint at the ultimate pleasure accessible to a connoisseur in liberal arts, especially when one has learnt so much language from literature that he can resort mentally to his own verbal resources to perfect one's own expression and evaluations in an instant, which is the highest level of achievement in foreign language learning and which is probably worth seeking.

Many authors considered the value of literature in the above discussed conditions of foreign language learning (cf.: Quirk, 1974: 65; Widdowson, 1986: 269). Professor Widdowson has even devised a term to denote the practice in such programmes: he calls language learning through literature a matter of investment. Learning language through literature has been discussed and practised in countries around the world (see: Pattison, Univ. of London, 1963; Brumfit, Carter, Univ. of Southampton, 1986; McKay, San Francisco State Univ., 1982; Raizis, Univ. of Athens, 1980; Yorke, Univ. of Rome, 1986; Peytard, Moirand, l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1992; Ostrowski, Poland, 1977; Kern, Abels, Higher Pedagogical School, Freiburg, 1982; Kobayashi, Tokyo Women's Christian College, 1975; Frost, Australian Universities, 1980; Obeidat, United Arab Emirates Univ., 1997, and other authors). This paper has summarised on why literature in foreign language learning may be not only a source of cognitive knowledge in addition to delight and refinement of the student's feelings, intellect and taste, but also a means leading the student to proficiency in English as a foreign language. Methods have barely been mentioned here, but many teachers and scholars have published on it (cf.: Loban, Squire, 1961; Squire, Rehage, 1977; Evans, 1984). Still other authors emphasised other aspects of literature and the learner. Only the Greeks (Raizis, 1980), to my knowledge, however, have based their concept of literature in language studies on beauty and explained their concept of it by the end of the twentieth century anew to the moderns.

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Literatūra kaip pažintinių žinių šaltinis

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje aiškinama, kodėl nelengva grožinę prozą taikyti mokyme kaip pažintinių žinių šaltinį ir koks teorinių žinių minimumas reikalingas ir dėstytojui, ir studentui, kad jie galėtų analizuoti grožinio kūrinio tekstą su deramu subtilumu ir profesionalumu. Paminimi šią idėją paremiantys ir atmetantys autoriai, nepaisant jų sąsajų su mokymu. Aptarus pedagoginę ir estetinę grožinės literatūros vertę ir jos pedagoginio taikymo sunkumus, prozos ištraukos analizės duomenimis aiškinama tai, kas pageidautina ir kas įmanoma taip taikant literatūrą. Parodoma, kad apriori žinios apie tikrovę greičiau paremia mintis skaitant negu kad įmanomos pasiekti autoriaus turėtos žinios, užkoduotos grožiniame kūrinyje. Nėra tiesaus kelio į pažintines žinias grožiniame kūrinyje. Tai galima padaryti tik svarstant atvirkštine kryptimi, lyginant žinomą ir pavaizduotą, t.y. derinant apriori žinias apie tikrovę su konotatyvinėmis teksto reikšmėmis, kuriose esti transformuotų ir užkoduotų autoriaus apriori žinių. Analitinėmis kategorijomis neapribotų įspūdžių apie tikrovę ir kultūrą gana patikimai galima įgyti plačiai apsiskaičius, o į grožinį tekstą įsigilinant atsipalaidavus dėl maksimalaus įmlumo ir pažintiniams turiniui leidžiant kauptis iš pasąmonėje natūraliai vykstančio gretinimo tarp apriori žinių apie tikrovę ir kūrinio konotacinių reikšmių.

Straipsnis įteiktas 2001 10
Parengtas publikuoti 2002 05

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