

A Theoretical Matrix to Approach Literary Texts in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Abstract | This article is based on my report for the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the New University of Lisbon which accounted for my Supervised Teaching Practice of English and German at the German School of Lisbon. In it the advantages of using a theoretical matrix when working with literary texts in a foreign language classroom are listed. After the necessary review of relevant research, the blueprint of one such matrix is put forth. With the Reader Response Theory as its cornerstone, it sets out to develop textual competences, reading strategies and interpretation and critical analysis skills through a management of the learner-readers' responses. This approach is best embodied by a multifaceted treatment of scrupulously chosen literary texts which should be oriented by a few guiding principles. Such treatment implies not only an open yet moderated discussion of the text but also a number of procedures which rely on different interaction patterns and promote the development of different skills and competences. The article ends with a short summary and discussion of some lessons which illustrate this theory in practice.

Key words | language teaching, literary text, Reader Response Theory, theoretical matrix, textual competence

It has been said of Boehme that his books are like a picnic to which the author brings the words and the reader the meaning. The remark may have been intended as a sneer at Boehme, but it is an exact description of all works of literary art without exception.

Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry. A Study of William Blake*

Literature in a Foreign Language Classroom: Benefits and Commonly-held Perceptions

Before addressing the question of whether there is a need for a theoretical matrix for literary texts in teaching, it is essential to briefly account for the unfortunately nonconsensual importance of literary texts in a foreign language classroom. Their benefits have been duly noted and thoroughly listed elsewhere (e.g. Short and Candlin 91-92; Bausch, Christ, and Krumm 150; Mealha and Falcão 193-196; Fenner 16-19). Brumfit and Carter, for instance, have identified some of the most frequently cited advantages, among them being the fact that literary texts are authentic and highly suitable both for the discussion of content and for more careful analyses of language in use (15). Meanwhile, Kramsch points to other equally noteworthy merits, such as learner motivation. The “appeal to the students’ emotions”, interest and memory stands out, as does “the voice of a writer” and its “ability . . . to appeal to the particular in the reader” (131).

Granted that the foreign language classroom stands to gain from an appropriate use of literary texts, how should they be dealt with? Since any teacher working in a member state of the European Union should take the precepts of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) into account, this is an obvious starting point when looking for general parameters. The paragraph of CEFR which pays homage to the undeniable importance of literature for the learning of languages and cultures gives some hints but nothing concrete

(89). Besides, according to the CEFR, which touts the Communicative Approach, this approach should be “action-oriented” – indeed, the “task” deserves an entire chapter (157-167) – and should focus on the development of “general” as well as “communicative language competences” (Council of Europe 9). The Communicative Approach itself reinforces this notion; its priority is above all the promotion of the development of a “functional language ability” (Byram, *Routledge Encyclopedia* 125).

This emphasis in “action” and “tasks” in no way runs counter to the use of literary texts in language teaching, on the contrary: as we shall see, the reader actually plays a very active role (see e.g. Neuner, Krüger, and Grewer 47), which requires a great deal more of participation in the construction, reconstruction and deconstruction of meanings than is apparent at first sight. Unfortunately, however, this perception, relatively consensual in the academic world, is often at odds with the actual teaching practice. In common parlance, it is arguably rather unusual to see concepts like “functional” and “action” linked to “reading”.

Perhaps with behaviourist inklings seasoning their reasoning, or overwhelmed by the increasingly uncompromising demands of a system obsessed with “accountability”, many teachers are over-reliant on overt and immediately observable behaviours and thus partial to what Pachler and Allford called a “[s]cepticism about the practical linguistic usefulness of the study of literature” (238). Unwarranted though such a notion may be, it is easy enough to understand from where its reasoning stems. One needs only to think of lyrical poetry. As Widdowson has demonstrated with wit and simplicity, any given lyrical poem, for all its aesthetic potential, does not say anything much, nor is there anything “worthy of comment” going on (133).

Moreover, even when necessity overcomes reluctance and literature has its day in a foreign language classroom, it may be disingenuously used for other ends. Language teachers, who are sometimes ill-prepared to deal with the intricacies of literary texts (Kramsch 137), often seem to be reluctant to probe such depths and prefer to use the text as an excuse to deal with its historical context or language structures, thus eschewing an actual engagement with the text itself. This tendency has been termed “flight from the text” (Short and Candlin 89).

The consequences of this rather philistine approach to literary texts are considerable, as Pachler and Allford have pithily observed: “The current utilitarian rationale for MFLs has tended to stress not just communicative skills but oral communication at the expense of reading in general and the study of literature in particular” (237). Portmann-Tselikas and Schmöler-Eibinger also pointed out how “Im klassischen kommunikativen Fremdsprachen-unterricht geht es primär um sprachliches Handeln in Situationen des zielsprachlichen Alltags” [‘The classical communicative foreign language lesson deals primarily with the use of the target language in everyday situations’] (10),¹ which leads to a lamentable deficit in substance in detriment of form (10). Without a rich and multi-layered content propitious to the development of an “own voice” (Izarra 8), students can be expected to have little “personal involvement”, which in turn causes their interactions to be forced (Fenner 15). And this, as Long has observed, is quite an unsatisfactory state of affairs: “The teaching of literature is an arid business unless there is a response” (42).

Engaging and Empowering through the Reader Response Theory

Instead of merely providing a definition of what may count as a “response” and risk oversimplification, it should prove more informative to tell the tale of its main proponent, the Reader Response Theory. This theory, which was developed in the 1970’s, rests on the assumption that the reader is the main agent in the construction of meaning of any text, including those said to be “literary”.

Such empowerment of the reader would have been totally unthinkable some decades ago. John Corbett neatly describes the evolution of the academic debate on who has the authority over the meaning of a given text. According to Corbett, as late as in the beginning of the 20th century the author was still the forthright owner of the text’s meaning, and it was up to the reader to find out the “message”. Later, the focus shifted from the author to the text, which now coded the meaning. However, this hardly changed the status quo as far as the reader was concerned, who was at this stage thought to merely decipher the text (169).

Things began to change in 1970, when Hans Robert Jauss pointed the way to “die Entdeckung des Lesers” [‘the discovery of the reader’] (Bischof, Kessling and Krechel 163). In reaction to the marxist and formalist methodologies, Jauss states the following: “Im Dreieck von Autor, Werk und Publikum ist das letztere nicht nur der passive Teil, keine Kette bloßer Reaktionen, sondern selbst wieder eine geschichtsbildende Energie” [‘In the triangle of author, work and audience, the latter is not just a passive party, no chain of mere reaction, but indeed a history-creating energy’] (169). Jauss, who introduced the concept of “Rezeptionsästhetik”, or “Reception Aesthetics”, went still farther in his ground-breaking defence of the reader as agent (as opposed to empty vessel) by categorically claiming that the reader-agent is critical to the historical existence of texts (169).

Wolfgang Iser also expanded the horizons of literary theory by introducing, in his 1972 book *Der implizite Leser*, the concept of the “implicit reader”, that is, the *sine qua non* element which underlies each and every literary work (8). Not only does Iser unequivocally attribute the “Sinnkonstitution des Textes” [‘creation of meaning of the text’] to the reader (7), but he also goes as far as to claim, in his later book *Der Akt des Lesens*, that “Texte [gewinnen] erst im Gelesenwerden ihre Realität” [‘texts come to be only once they are read’] (61). Besides, Iser, like Jauss, is clearly drawing attention to the active nature of reading when he considers “das Lesen als Prozeß einer dynamischen Wechselwirkung von Text und Leser” [‘reading as a process of dynamic interaction between text and reader’], as well as when he discusses the “Kreativität der Rezeption” [‘creativity of reception’] (*Der Akt des Lesens*, 176).

According to “Reception Aesthetics”, meaning is not inherent to any text; rather, it emanates from the interaction between the text and the reader and, crucially, must be meaningful to the reader (Bischof, Kessling and Krechel 163, 20). Despite this, and bearing in mind the scope of this paper (the foreign language classroom), it may not be very constructive to perceive reading, as does the poet Hans Magnus Enzenberger, as “ein anarchischer Akt” [‘an anarchical act’] in which “der Leser . . . hat immer recht” [‘the reader . . . is always right’] (qtd. in Bremerich-Vos 23). Even though the text can only be said to fully manifest itself as such

“through the reader’s voice” (Matos 57), here it would perhaps be more fruitful to consider that relationship as being dialectic, one in which the text “creates its reader”, who, in turn, attributes meaning to the text (Kramersch 7). The foreign language teacher, therefore, should ensure the occurrence of that “synthesis” and the creation of a “third space” (Matos 60), which is enabled by the ambiguity characteristic of many literary texts (Matos 59; Bischof, Kessling and Krechel 20).

Between Theory and Practice: The Conception of a Theoretical Matrix

This brings us to the next logical step: how to achieve all this? How to make good use in a foreign language classroom of all the benefits that literary texts can afford? Which principles could or should guide the teachers in the making of a didactic unit which revolves around literary texts? What kind of methodologies and procedures can serve these purposes? This paper advocates the use of a theoretical matrix, be it adapted from elsewhere or of one’s own making, in order to address these issues.

Bausch, Christ and Krumm highlight a crippling predicament inherent to the teaching of literature in foreign language classrooms: although it must show that it can be useful to achieve the foreign language learning objectives, it seems that inevitably “stößt jeder Versuch einer Operationalisierung von Lernzielen sehr schnell an Grenzen” [‘every attempt at putting learning objectives into practice quickly runs into obstacles’] (150). Admittedly, the complexity intrinsic to the teaching/learning process is such that any attempt to encapsulate it in didactics or methodologies which aim at a neat universality is a pipe dream doomed to failure (Kramersch 2). The particular school context, for instance, is a quintessential element without the consideration of which it is hard to imagine a successful teaching practice.

This does not mean that teaching should be left to chance and intuition. On the contrary, it is vital that teaching practices, like all tasks expected to be even marginally based on scientific precepts, be backed by coherent and structured thought validated by research in the relevant field. In teaching, that includes a careful formulation of the objectives and of the means to attain them. As Michael Byram stated, “[t]he advantages to be gained from the formulation of

objectives are those of comprehensiveness, coherence and transparency . . . as well as precision” (*Teaching and Assessing* 56). The implementation of general principles and objectives, which in itself already improves the teacher’s practice (Brumfit and Carter 23), also directly benefits the students, as they have much to gain from a clear formulation of objectives (Pachler and Allford 244). This is why, even beyond the narrower scope of classroom use of literary texts, it is paramount to be “as systematic as possible about the principles with which we operate” (Brumfit and Carter 23).

So which principles should a theoretical matrix stand by? It is argued in this paper that the cornerstone of any approach which concerns literary texts should address the tenets of the Reader Response Theory. The centre of this theory being evidently occupied by the reader, we still need to clarify what exactly is meant by “response”. As a working definition, let us consider it “the interaction that develops between reader and text and between different readers of a common text” (Matos 63). Having determined the objective, we now look for a means to accomplish it.

Even though at first sight it might seem easy to elicit responses from the students, that illusion promptly vanishes as soon as we try to establish what is to be considered a response. Furthermore, if we opt for a more honest although somewhat unsettling formulation of the task at hand, it is necessary to ascertain which responses are to be deemed adequate. It is the teaching world’s worst-kept secret that in many cases students learn not to think for themselves but to guess what the teacher wants them to say (Grigg 57) – a plight, as the writer Günter Grass has observed, that has long haunted literary studies (qtd. in Bremerich-Vos 23). In the theoretical perspective advocated by this paper, it goes without saying that these pitfalls are best avoided.

Nor is it productive, again under the scrutiny of this paper’s specific scope, to see reading as the “act of anarchy” advocated by Hans Magnus Enzenberger. In *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, where Byram writes about the development of the intercultural competence in the classroom, the author suggests the adoption of

international standards of human rights as a reference in order to “avoid the trap of cultural relativism” (Byram 44, 46), that is, the notion that every cultural practice is acceptable because it should be evaluated solely against the standards of the culture which spawns it. A useful parallel can be drawn here with the students’ responses to a literary text: it is inadmissible to acquiesce in interpretations which obviously go against the textual evidence (e.g. reading Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* as being a comedy), regardless of how “personally meaningful” such an interpretation might be to a given student.

Textual Competence: Providing an Adequate Basis for Responses

Having identified the two extremes as far as response management is concerned, we must strive for a balance, which admittedly can hardly be quantified, and it certainly cannot be expressed in a universal formula suitable for every possible context. However, a vital factor that should always be taken into consideration is the text itself, or more specifically what in the previous paragraph was named “textual evidence”. And the learner-readers can only frame their responses according to the textual evidence if they have refined their “Textkompetenz”, or textual competence. Indeed, Portmann-Tselikas and Schmölder-Eibinger go as far as making a fundamental distinction between “sprachliche Anforderungen” [‘linguistic requirements’] and “textuelle Anforderungen” [‘textual requirements’] (8).

This textual competence is closely related to the more well-known “interpretative and analytical skills” (Matos 63), since literary texts, due to their idiosyncratic nature, “require certain reading strategies, which need to be taught” (Pachler and Allford 244). This point, seemingly a matter of fact, cannot be stressed enough, as a widespread if undeclared assumption seems to systematically undermine teacher-moderated discussions: the idea that students “will in some way ‘catch’ the ability to read appropriately . . . in a fairly random way” (Brumfit and Carter 22). There is nothing “random” about how a literary text is liable to be interpreted, and this must be acknowledged and taken into account when a teacher prepares a class which deals with a literary text.

Hence, how are these skills and competences to be fostered? There is no magic solution for teachers, or at least for those who aim for a reflexive teaching practice. Having said this, such practice only stands to gain from being guided by some general principles.

Prior to anything, the literary text itself must be chosen wisely, and this becomes an easier task once the right criteria are taken into account. Bischof, Kessling, and Krechel (23), Strauss (65) and Kramersch (138-139) have authored relatively comprehensive and, to some extent, mutually complementary lists. In the context of the theoretical matrix described in this paper, one particularly important criterion is that the learner-reader should be able to react to a text “without the mediation of the teacher”, since the discussion of a literary text in the classroom is supposed to be a procedure “which analyses an experience already achieved” (Brumfit and Carter 32).

During that discussion, the teacher should value the students’ responses to the text and handle them always in a constructive way, so as to avoid confusing “reader response with free associations and reactions” (Kramersch 137). A teacher can briefly comment on the response, ask the other students to react to the response, or use it as a springboard to ask other questions. It is perfectly acceptable to steer a discussion in this manner; questions, when adequately formulated, “are an *aid* to a response, leading the learner-reader to get an insight into the text which might not be possible otherwise” (Long 45, original italics). Attention must also be paid to the fact that different students learn in different ways and react differently to texts (Kramersch 127-128), which means that the teacher is expected to resort to various interaction patterns and kinds of tasks and activities.

This theoretical background underpins a matrix of my own making, one that consists of three key concepts which have guided my teaching practice: “*response*”, “*relations*” and “*relevance*”. These concepts were designed to give more consistency to the lesson plans my matrix was meant to inspire. Moreover, by announcing these principles to the students at the beginning of the didactic unit in a clear way, the aim was also to contribute to a greater transparency of my own objectives (Pachler and Allford 244).

Some Guiding Principles: Responses, Relations and Relevance

So what is the purpose of these key concepts? In a nutshell, their role was to be reference points for the exploration of a given literary text and its manifold contexts. The first part of the matrix, which deals with “*responses*” or “*first impressions*”, requires the teacher to help the students deconstruct their first impressions, or at least to raise awareness of how they are forged in a subtle manner and how they can have a negative impact on the critical interpretation of a text.

Then, the discussion of “*relations*” or “*references*” picks apart the myriad network of relations within the text. These can be internal, such as the relations between characters, or between form and content; or external, that is to say, the relationship between the work under analysis and its broader context, the cultural world from which it arises and to which it constantly refers.

Finally, the tenet related to “*relevance*” or “*purpose*” urges not to address a putative “*message*” which is meant to be “*deciphered*”, but rather to put the focus on the multitude of issues the text raises, the exploration of the ideas it suggests in the reader and the management of the emotions provoked by the reading.

The theoretical dimension is of an inestimable value to any approach. Even more decisive for a successful teaching practice, however, is its implementation, that is, the transition from theory to practice, as well as its subsequent dynamic of alternation and mutual improvement. Below follows an account of some lessons which were engineered with this matrix as its beacon.

The First Lesson: “On irony”

In a 90-minute English class for 11th graders aged between 15 and 17, I set out to discuss the ramifications of one single concept, irony. The objectives for this class were: “To reflect on the often unsuspected importance of rhetorical devices in everyday life; to analyse different definitions and interpretations of what irony is, and confront previously held presuppositions; and

to recognise the complexity and richness of irony and its overlapping relationship with sarcasm”.

First, the students were asked if they knew what irony was, and once they had assured me that they had mastered that concept, I asked them if they could think of an ironic situation, which they were to do in pairs. Then, after having been given the lyrics to the song “Ironic” by Alanis Morissette, they were asked to underline all the ironic situations they could find while they listened to the song. Lastly, they were shown some dictionary definitions of the word “irony” and they were asked to review the lyrics of the song, as well as the instances of irony they had thought of in pairs, in light of those definitions. They quickly came to the conclusion that strictly speaking not one of the situations described in the song was ironic, and this epiphany was accompanied by the video of an Ed Byrne skit in which the Irish comedian tells his audience just that. This led to a discussion of the age-old difference between normative and descriptive grammar. In the second lesson, the scope was broadened and the task was to compare and contrast irony with concepts such as sarcasm and satire (examples of which were provided by excerpts from the TV shows *The Big Bang Theory* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*). Finally, the students carried out a written task in which they were to engage with one of these concepts in a creative way.

This lesson encapsulated all the main tenets of my matrix. Firstly, the students talked about *first impressions*, that is, their reactions to the text (the examples of ironic situations provided by the students). Secondly, they discussed *references*, or contexts (a commonly-held definition of irony which, though not yet extant in many authoritative dictionaries, is ubiquitous in the media). Finally, the focus shifted to *relevance*, or subtexts (that is to say, the different shades of irony, such as dramatic, verbal, situational and so-called “cosmic” irony).

These lessons were illustrative of the matrix’s potential as well as of its possible shortcomings. Eliciting and working with the learners’ responses improves motivation, and making sense of the complex networks of meaning which sustain certain concepts or result in rather obscure phrasings is the very matter of critical thinking, that much worshipped idol for whom so few sacrifices are ever made.

Yet it is also important to think in more practical terms. When confronted with an exam question on stylistic devices, to what extent can all these reflections on irony be useful? Better yet, to what extent can they be counterproductive, for complicating what had previously been known as simply “the expression of something through its opposite”? And granted that important cognitive aspects of learning may be worked on by helping the students reach the conclusion that there is little or no irony in the lyrics of “Ironic” on their own, to what extent is it wise to use 45 minutes of precious classroom time to get there?

These doubts, worrying as they were, would soon be soothed by sheer numbers: a lesson unit based on this matrix was rounded off by a class test corrected by myself and later also by my supervisor, and the overall final grades were 11% better than in the students’ previous test. That lesson unit, which comprised 37 lessons of 45 minutes and dealt mostly with Nick McDowell’s novel *Twelve*, will be briefly described below.

The Didactic Unit: *Twelve*

Some context is in order before plunging into the lessons proper, and for this reason I have penned the following plot summary of the novel:

Twelve narrates the excesses and ennui of wealthy Upper East Side teenagers, chronicling the five days leading up to New Year’s Eve. White Mike, a 17-year-old whiz kid who is taking a year off before college, is a shadowy drug dealer who, never having been a user himself, navigates in the violent underworld to which Manhattan’s well-off adolescents resort to, having been emotionally neglected by their families and tempted by the ease with which their primal instincts can be satisfied with a roll of bank notes. Deeply affected by the loss of his mother, White Mike must now cope with the death of his cousin Charlie, and the pursuit of his murderer, an unscrupulous dealer who sells the (fictitious) designer drug “Twelve”, leads him to a final showdown at a New Year’s party, despite his non-violent nature. However, former drug user and gun aficionado Claude

unexpectedly storms in and cold-bloodedly kills the drug dealer, along with half a dozen innocent teenagers at the party, before the police shoot him down.

The first 90 minutes of classroom time about *Twelve* focused on *responses*, or “first impressions”. Its secondary objectives, such as reflecting on basic elements such as the topic, the title, the text layout and even the cover, served the general objectives, which expected students to draw conclusions that might prove helpful in the future, when analysing other literary (or even non-literary) texts. Furthermore, it was emphasised from the beginning that the students’ responses to the literary text and to the themes associated with it were going to be not only valued as a means towards an end but also an end in themselves; it was from them that the conclusions of each lesson were to be drawn, as opposed to external interpretations.

It would have been coherent for this matrix which cherishes learner empowerment to allow their responses to dictate the pace of the lesson and decide which secondary aspects should be explored. But that was not the case. I stand by my abovementioned argument that when it comes to textual interpretation and analysis there *is* such a thing as an inadequate response, and that is why responses ought to be moderated. For instance, it would be hardly defensible to claim that White Mike, the novel’s protagonist, is not as complex a character as his friend Molly, when textual evidence suggests precisely the opposite.

This justifies a more interventionist teacher role, which was particularly evident in the first six lessons. In them, close readings of some excerpts and teacher-led discussions were predominant, in an attempt to understand the characters better, the way they interact, and the fact that the narrator, who at first is seemingly objective, upon closer inspection turns out to be rather biased in the way he presents the characters. Yet even in these lessons the learner-readers’ responses were the main driving force, sometimes going along the way hinted at by the teacher and occasionally heading down some road “which was grassy and wanted wear” improvised by the students.

Allotting a large number of discussion-based lessons would not only be pedagogically unsound but quite simply unbearable for a sizeable number of students. Indeed, the foreign language classroom has many reasons to welcome the adoption of “group dynamics”, as their benefits include higher motivation and a “lessening of teacher-centeredness” (Brumfit and Carter 37). This led to the implementation of the first large-scale group work in the eighth class.

As Pachler and Allford remind us, students who deal with authentic texts – that is, texts which were not adapted for them as learners of a foreign language – need specialised “background knowledge” (242) Thus the activity chosen for the group work was the making of posters about the different kinds of drugs and about the radically different laws which regulate its consumption in the USA, where *Twelve* is set, and in Portugal, the reality the students knew best. Having already dealt with the students’ first impressions and having started addressing the text’s internal references (that is, the relations between characters and the events), we thus began exploring the different aspects of the relations between the text itself and the reality to which it alludes – the external references.

The rich panoply of cultural references in *Twelve* are not there to simply establish a relationship between the reader’s universe and the universe of the text, they serve a very specific purpose; the text in general and the plot in particular lose much of their strength, interest and complexity once these references are stripped away – that is to say, ignored by the reader. So a second group work, one with slightly altered group dynamics, addressed not only such *relations* but also *relevance*, or the “why” questions. For example, why is “American Beauty” mentioned on the first page and not later on, or indeed not at all? Provided with a short list of a dozen significant cultural references, the students were to explain theirs to their peers and to try and reason what their contribution to the novel might be.

Later, and after a critical viewing of Michael Moore’s “Bowling for Columbine”, the students were to write a text about Claude, a discreet character who ends up killing several people in a mass shooting. By individually applying their recently bolstered interpretation skills, their task was to make a thorough, text-based description of the character, the ulterior motive of

which being the detection of any warning signs of the looming massacre, thus making sense of some short scenes which otherwise could have been perceived as random, isolated snippets.

Conclusion

In the end, the feedback obtained from the classwork, from the group presentations, from the test related to the novel and from the students themselves, seemed to indicate that an approach based on the precepts of the Reader Response Theory, for all its emphasis on the development of such ineffable competences as those related to interpretation and critical thinking, can indeed have significant and verifiable results in a foreign language classroom, although presumably more markedly so at more advanced levels.

None of this, however, is to say that this particular matrix is the definitive one and should be emulated by all who give credence to the Reader Response Theory. Rather, this article merely sets out to show that when theory is used to truly instigate practice, as opposed to legitimating it in retrospect, then it has the potential to provide a framework which, far from excessively narrowing the scope, can give some precious focus on what may at first seem to be a daunting task, for example the idea of having students teasing out the intricacies of a literary text written in a language that is not their own.

This is all the more important when one considers the paramount role of literary texts in certain foreign language curricula (namely in advanced classes), not to mention some often inescapable external constraints. After all, the average language teacher in Western Europe is trapped between two clashing realities: one in which scholars seem to be consensual in their praise of literary texts as legitimate authentic texts rather unique in their possibilities; and another in which today's unfortunately pervasive and influential mercantilist view of education pushes for a functional, pragmatic, almost philistine teaching practice which yields immediate results in standardised exams. Therefore, in these circumstances, one could do worse than deal with literary texts through a theoretical matrix, thus deftly addressing both the sound precepts which emanate from the academia and the pressing need for practical solutions.

Note

¹ All translations of the quotes provided in the original German are mine.

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