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Rethinking the Teaching of English Literature (The Case of Moroccan Universities)

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Abstract. This paper analyses the situation of English literature and its teaching in Moroccan universities. The gap between students and literature is widening. The malaise is obvious. Some students no longer know how to approach literary texts. They have no clear strategy for reading, understanding and criticising a text. Moreover, a sense of the literary activity is also missing. Why read novels, plays and poems? What is the purpose of it all? These questions continue to resonate in the minds of our students without finding the courage to address them with their teachers. In order to be in a position to identify the problem and propose realistic and practical solutions, it was necessary to organise two different surveys. While the first dealt with methodology, the second focused on motivation and the meaning of literary activities. The results show that the problem exists and that the need to rethink the teaching of literature becomes more than significant.

One must be an inventor to read well
Ralph Waldo Emerson

When Elaine Showalter claimed that "Teaching literature in the twenty-first century will demand more flexibility"[1], she was absolutely right. Teaching literature is becoming increasingly challenging and the list of questions that arise before the course begins is getting longer and longer. These questions are largely due to student behaviour. In contrast to other courses, we have observed that students tend to be more passive and quiet during a course on the novel for example. When asked how long it will take them to read the literary work under study, one can only observe the embarrassment of the students in answering this question.

The reason for this perplexity is that students do not know how to go about it. In fact, they face two major obstacles. On the one hand, they are embarrassed by the fact that they do not dare to admit in front of their colleagues that they do not have the right strategy to read and understand a literary work. They are students in the English department and it would be disgraceful to pose a question about something that is supposed to be basic. On the other hand, they are firmly convinced that they will not have time to do detailed readings of the work, but they cannot express this openly.

When the floor is given to questions, it is impossible not to notice that most students are only obsessed with exams. They are not interested in challenging the barriers to reading but only in finding ways to succeed. Obviously, it is pointless at this stage to confront them with these realities. Instead, we need to approach the problem differently, first to understand the real reasons for this reluctance, and then to establish an action plan to remedy the situation.

A student had asked me for information about the study of *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. He wanted to know how many sessions would be devoted to this novel. I told him that we would have seven sessions in which we would analyse seven passages from seven different chapters of the novel, which has twenty-four chapters. Immediately, he followed up with another question about whether the exam question would be about the seven chapters analysed or the twenty-four chapters. In fact, this student was attempting to optimise his situation. Instead of reading twenty-four chapters, he was looking to save time and effort by concentrating only on the seven chapters.

Having almost traumatised students in front of any teacher invites many questions: Why this apprehension toward literature? Why do many students dislike literature courses? Why do they find it so painful to understand and appreciate the texts? Moreover, when one analyses the schedules and compares them to other faculties, one notices that the

[1] Elaine Showalter, Teaching Literature, Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003, p.viii.

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programme does not require an incredible investment of time. Yet, students feel that they do not have enough time to read books. Why is reading conceived as an overload instead of being seen as an essential pillar necessary for the development of critical thinking as well as language skills? Why are our students reading less and less? Do we not insist enough on the importance of literature? Have we confirmed to students, by our behaviour, that literature is a discipline that no longer has a place in the current socio-economic context where technological advances are progressively taking precedence over the humanities?

In addition, have we not done enough to defend literature and its place in the construction of societies? Has the labour market redefined the priorities and rules of the game by emphasising the importance of certain disciplines over others? Have students become selective in their approach to study, aiming for job opportunities? Does employability play a decisive role in the future of literature? From another point of view, in the past and before the democratisation of the Internet, it was sometimes difficult to find a wide range of literary material. Today, with a few clicks, we can download important literary and critical works free of charge. However, students are less and less interested in literature. Why is this so? The answer to all these questions could not be found without the students, who are considered our main stakeholders. That is why we decided to carry out this study by sending out two different questionnaires one year apart.

Teachers have different approaches to teaching literature. Some teachers opt to start working on the literary work immediately, while others prefer to allocate time for students to read it. Some of the teachers who choose the latter strategy plan consolidation and remediation sessions during this interval. At the same time, some teachers teach theory, while others focus on practice. Some teachers involve students in the construction of the lesson, while others prefer to intervene from the beginning to the end of the session. Thus, there is no single, standard approach to teaching literature. Furthermore, we have no idea what strategies other teachers have adopted in previous lessons. In other words, we had to start from the beginning in order to control all the steps in the process so that the investigation would be fully valid.

For the reasons mentioned above and for the validity of the responses collected, I had to wait two semesters before drawing any conclusions. The English department entrusted me with the teaching of English literature during this academic year, which allowed me to design the course while observing the different pedagogical skills the survey investigates. During the first two lessons, the students received a detailed description of the course. We discussed their expectations and those of the teacher. We then established a clear timetable with deadlines. It was also very important to discuss the nature and methods of assessment. Lastly, an assignment was given in class with the aim of diagnosing the students' strengths and weaknesses.

On the other hand, it was made clear to the students that reading requires the establishment of and adherence to a strict timetable, as there is no alternative to reading the main works selected for the course. Students were advised to read the texts more than once to get their own point of view. Bad strategies, such as the extensive use of critical notes, were mentioned and discussed. Students were advised to read other works by the same author and works by authors from the same literary period rather than reading the critical notes of other critics. Even some reading techniques have been clarified. The importance of taking notes while reading, the importance of highlighting, the use of the dictionary when only necessary, the use of colours, mind mapping, and other techniques. These two weeks were very rich in terms of identifying strengths and weaknesses. They allowed me to regulate my teaching and revise my course a little to adapt it to the level of the students. All that remained was to test all this and see if the situation at the end of the semester would be different.

As the course neared its end, I was delighted to notice that the students were responding to the words in the text. They had developed a sense of criticism. They started to despise some characters and empathise with others. Emotions related to the story have begun to build up. They became sensitive to details such as the presence of colours, symbols, objects and fragments. They dared to raise relevant and sometimes difficult questions. This suggested that the students were no longer frightened of literary texts. They gradually gained confidence and increasingly ceased consulting what was written about the text. In other words, we succeeded in guiding the students toward the text rather than towards what had been said and written about the text.

However, I have also noticed that some

questions still preoccupy students. "Why all this?" What was the point of doing all these exercises that require a lot of energy, effort and time? "I had to admit to myself that the students' attitude towards literature has not substantially changed. This certainly caused some disappointment but did not dissuade me from pursuing my research. I had to explore all possibilities to identify the source of these dysfunctions. Therefore, for the sake of complementarity, the need to send another survey to the students became almost mandatory. Undoubtedly, the first survey enabled us to identify several shortcomings and determine the best way to address them. Nevertheless, it did not resolve the problem of motivation and interest. Students were still unable to view literature as an essential element of personal and professional development.

In this second survey, through the first set of questions, the objective was to find out whether students were aware of the importance of reading books. I sensed the need to investigate how students associate reading books with the development of writing skills, learning and applying grammatical rules, increasing vocabulary and developing critical thinking skills. The second set of questions was designed to focus on the importance and the role of literature in society. In a rapidly changing world, does literature still have a purpose? Does literature have a socioeconomic role or does it purely exist for pleasure and entertainment? What is the significance and function of certain subjects such as mythology, poetry and the novel? Should they be removed from the curriculum?

To better understand the problem of students' relationship with literature, we need to work from the starting point. Teachers understand that "the beginning … can also be chaotic"[2] and that the ultimate success of a course depends largely on the first class. They are aware that the first few lessons are meant to implement a sound strategy and to provide students with course descriptions and deadlines. They acknowledge that these initial, often exciting moments are an ideal opportunity to acquaint students with the objectives and sub-objectives of the course, to assess competencies, to carry out a diagnosis and "to use the results of assessment to change the curriculum so that it more accurately addresses students' errors and misunderstandings."[3] For this reason, we have decided to interview students about how they had been introduced to the English literature course.

The responses to this question indicate that we probably do not attach much importance to the function of the introduction in starting a course. We observed that 33 students out of 150 simply did not attend the first two classes. This means that 22.45 percent of students did not participate in the most relevant classes, where remediation sessions are often provided by teachers to facilitate the continuation of the course. Such a start can be disadvantageous as the content of those lessons will not be repeated or caught up.

This problematic beginning is exacerbated by the fact that some teachers start the course on the first day without having identified the needs and without establishing a strategy to meet them. 27.89 percent of the students interviewed confirmed that they started discussing the literary work and its author on the first day. This suggests that students who assume that the initial sessions merely serve as a broad introduction to the course and prefer not to attend are twice penalised. Not only do they not benefit from any consolidation of knowledge, but they also miss out on the analysis of the opening chapters and the discussion of relevant biographical elements of the author that are intimately linked to certain aspects of the literary work.

Worryingly, however, very few teachers (2.04 percent) were concerned with diagnosing students' weaknesses and requirements. This obviously has implications for the students' learning and, subsequently, for the flow of the course. When embarking on a literature course, it is advisable to carry out a diagnosis to determine the skills and competencies already acquired by the students and also to identify the gaps that need to be addressed. Paul Ramsden had brilliantly pointed out that "A good way to start learning about a subject is to review what you already know about it"[4]. Then, the findings and conclusions should be taken into consideration when refining the architecture of the course. It is inconceivable to imagine developing new skills in students without verifying and consolidating the fundamentals. In other words, teachers are required to ensure that students have the requisite skills to undertake and comprehend the course. Failure to do so means that the student either will have

[2] Elaine Showalter, Teaching Literature, Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003, p.46.

[3] Paul Ramsden, Learning to Teach in Higher Education, 2nd ed. London ; New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p.241.

[4] Paul Ramsden, Learning to Teach in Higher Education, 2nd ed. London ; New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p.14.

to abandon the course or will have to devise other strategies to guarantee success in the examination with no learning whatsoever.

Definitely, the appropriate time to address the weaknesses is when students are reading the intended literary work. It depends on the length of the literary work, but approximately two weeks are required to get into the detailed analysis of a novel, a play or a collection of poetry. During this time, the students read the literary work at home and come to class to consolidate their knowledge with the teacher who ensures that any gaps are being filled. In conclusion, these findings invite us to rethink the introduction of a literature course by dedicating all our attention to this stage so that it is mutually beneficial to both students and teachers.

From another perspective, the effectiveness of the introduction is contingent upon the full commitment of the students and effective management by the teacher. By management, we understand the orientation of the student. This is the right time to point out dysfunctions and address them. One of the great weaknesses of the majority of students is that they do not read the planned literary works. Students are often caught up in their approach to reading. Perhaps it has not been properly explained to them that reading also has its rules. Reading is a skill that is acquired through practice and exercise. Reading is also a set of techniques to be followed and applied in order to better understand the text in a reasonable time. Effective reading is the result of a great deal of effort and daily practice. It is also the subject of motivation and interest. Montgomery believes that "how we read a given text depends on our particular interest in reading it."[5] In other words, students need, to quote Montgomery again, an "active engagement in inference and problem-solving."[6]

What students ought to grasp is that there are various types of reading and that one does not read to fall asleep. Reading requires self-discipline. The student should determine a minimum number of pages to read per day. They should make a plan with dates and deadlines. Before starting to read a book, the student must know when he or she will complete it. In other words, reading a book is a project where specific project management knowledge and techniques are applied.

Unfortunately, this approach to reading is not yet obvious to all students. For some learners, an accurate and rich analysis of a literary work does not depend greatly on reading the work. Our survey clearly shows that more than 20.81 percent of the students have never read the books for which they had to write a critical analysis. This figure is quite alarming because it reveals that students do not make any connection between reading and doing literature. This literary split will certainly lead to students being very weak in understanding and analysing literary texts and even weaker in literary criticism. For these students, lack of time is the main factor behind the failure to read. Nevertheless, is it a question of curriculum overload or a poor organisation due to a missing reading plan? Again, more than 33.56 percent of the students surveyed consider that reading is not subject to planning. It depends largely on mood and time available.

An additional problem that turns out to have a negative impact on the reading process is that of note-taking. It is positive to notice that some students realise the importance of taking notes while reading. No one will argue with the fact that this is a personal exercise and that everyone does it in their own way. Some prefer to use a pencil and bookmarks while others use a pen and blank paper. In this respect, students should be enabled to choose the appropriate technique that suits them and helps them to identify the essential elements of the story. However, there are still students who would wait until they have finished reading the book to attempt to summarise it or to write down the ideas they have retained. This is a hazardous approach. A work of literature tells a story and this story is in turn built on several characters. The interactions between these characters mirror the complexity and richness of the text. It is almost beyond the ability to remember all these interrelationships together with the sayings and doings of each character in the story.

Surprisingly, however, we continue to have students (14.77 percent) who believe that it is not necessary to take notes whilst reading since everything is available in books or on the Internet. This class of students will probably never be in a position to provide a critique of a literary work because they simply assume that they have no added value compared to what has been written by professional critics. In adopting this approach, students who consider

[5] Martin Montgomery, ed. Ways of Reading: Advanced Reading Skills for Students of English Literature, 4th ed. London ; New York: Routledge, 2013, p.11.

[6] Martin Montgomery, ed. Ways of Reading: Advanced Reading Skills for Students of English Literature, 4th ed. London ; New York: Routledge, 2013, p.11.

that they do not necessarily need to take notes should understand that they are reading for pleasure or perhaps to discover the story being told. However, under no circumstances should they presume that they are reading to formulate a critique based on the words and deeds of the characters in the story.

A poor approach to reading will certainly result in a lack of the material necessary for an original literary criticism. As literary critics, we read to assess what has been said and to find out what has not been said. To accomplish this, we must first be keen observers, checking all the details and interrogating all the connections that the characters make with each other. We also have to analyse silence, looks, movements, and the non-verbal. We have to compare versions, attitudes, behaviours, evolution, change and many other aspects that expose themes such as hypocrisy, love, hate, and revenge. In short, in the words of Elaine Showalter, we have "to "do" literature as scientists "do" science."[7] It is such analysis that helps us understand the motives for a crime, suicide, murder, rape, exile and many other decisions in a character's life. This profound sense of observation is only possible if one reads attentively and properly, and also if one pauses at the details to note and record the words, actions and promises that the characters make.

Not being able to understand these matters implies that one does not realise why one has to read a literary work appropriately for their literature course. Cursory reading is manifest in the responses to our survey. Just 8.72 percent of the students were actually able to identify contradictions and inconsistencies in the proposed literary works. For the vast majority, it was virtually impossible to discern the paradoxes into which the author is dropping his characters. What needs to be mentioned here is that sometimes the author him or herself unwittingly falls into contradictions, and the reader's primary role is to recognise these contradictions and to refer to them by providing a critical commentary in the literary essay.

In his How to Study a Novel, John Peck writes that "The easiest novel to read and study is the one that presents a seemingly realistic picture of ordinary life but there are many novels where the oddity, opacity or exaggeration of the writings is what most strikes the reader."[8] Our study confirms Peck's statement, as students have great difficulty with works where the author has deliberately chosen not to follow the chronological order of events. This narrative technique is well known to authors including Joyce, Woolf, Durrell, Faulkner, and many others. Such writers impose duties on the reader who has to figure out how to assemble the puzzle parts to construct the sense of the story. This suggests that without a thorough and well-structured reading, it will be very challenging to understand and criticise the work in question.

We aimed to explore this further, and we asked students whether they had been confused during the reading phase of a literary work and, if so, what sort of confusion they had experienced. Among the aspects that students found destabilising were the length of the story and the involvement of multiple characters. 27.52 percent of the students reported this and the same number expressed discomfort when the text lacked clarity. This requires us to rethink the content of our literature course by including some sections on teaching reading skills specific to literary texts. Students are expected to learn how to read, take notes and even use their dictionaries. They are not supposed to understand all the words in a work, given that we have authors who occasionally invent words for some reason or another. Rather, they should first view the word in its context and then guess at its meaning. This is one of several techniques, but there are indeed various ways to help the reader discover the meaning of a word without disrupting the reading process.

This brings us to another important point, which is among the most critical in this study. It concerns the complexity of the vocabulary and the approach taken to cope with it. A large percentage (69.13%) acknowledge that vocabulary is a major obstacle to understanding the text. This point is strictly related to the question about the strategies used by students during the reading activity. It should be recalled here that 43.92 percent of the students acknowledged that they consult the dictionary for each and every difficult word used in the text.

This high percentage shows that students are disarmed when faced with a highly sophisticated vocabulary. The excessive use of the dictionary is a strong sign of discomfort. Confronted with such a situation, many students experience blockage and resort to other strategies to unblock the

[7] Elaine Showalter, Teaching Literature, Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003, p.25.

[8] John Peck, How to Study a Novel, 2nd ed. How to Study Literature. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1995, p. 61.

situation. Indeed, the difficulty of vocabulary leads to students using critical notes to better understand the text. It also leads them to research and read the translated literary work in their mother tongue. Some students simply stop the reading after the first chapter because they failed to find the appropriate strategy, whilst others are compelled to trust the teacher's notes to reproduce them in the exam.

Furthermore, 48.99 percent of the students questioned had difficulties with the figurative language used in literary works. As defined by Martin Montgomery, figurative language 'depends on a general distinction between literal and figurative uses of language."[9] Montgomery adds that 'discussion of figurative language has a long history, at least as far back as the study of rhetoric in classical Greece and Rome.'[10] It is noticeable that the English being used in literature is quite different from the ordinary English being used in everyday life. In place of straightforward language, authors tend to favour figurative language in which they rely on literary devices such as metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, allusion, pun, onomatopoeia, synecdoche, and alliteration to persuade and convey their messages. Alongside vocabulary, the presence of figurative language introduces even more complexity and difficulty in understanding literary texts. Students already encounter barriers in determining the sense of some individual words, but sometimes even the explanation of these words proves to be of no help in comprehending the underlying message. In this context, the dictionary is rendered irrelevant. In consequence, students feel frustrated and blocked, yet without an effective strategy to resolve the impasse, the process of rejection commences.

The rejection hypothesis was corroborated by the students when we requested them to describe their reaction once they were stuck in front of a text and it was impossible to come up with a solution. The response was quite disturbing as 60 percent of students gave up reading to find alternative ways to pass the exam. This prompted us to realise that the primary focus of the vast majority of students was to achieve success in the exams. Very few students were interested in the study and learning of literature, not because of disinterest but because they have not yet developed the appropriate approach and methodology.

Following these alarming results, it was deemed advisable to investigate further by asking students which strategy they follow to pass the exam when reading and understanding a literary work turns out to be very demanding. The responses given by the students largely explain the absence of critical thinking in their essays. We also begin to understand why the majority of students of English literature are simply consuming literary interpretation rather than designing it.

Sometimes, when correcting the students' copies, we are left in a state of incomprehension due to certain answers that have little to do with the question. We have great difficulty in accepting such answers, and at times we wonder whether the student has really understood the question or not. Worse still, we begin to question the student's academic ability, wondering if they do understand and speak English, or if they decided to study English because there was no other option. Yet, in reality, as the study shows, some students (9.33 percent) take the exam completely unprepared, relying on coincidence and chance to find a general topic close to the themes of everyday life where the student may engage his personal experience to write a few lines.

Despite the various course materials available on the Internet or in libraries, a large number of students continue to be very attached to the teacher's notes. Large numbers of students (74.67 percent) prefer to memorise the teacher's notes and use them at any expense to answer the questions in the exam. However, this is a "poor substitute for constructing a personal response."[11] The reason why the majority of students adopt this strategy is that on the one hand, they have confidence in the ideas of their teachers and on the other hand they have to demonstrate that they have attended all the lectures. However, such an approach is problematic because it leaves no room for critical thinking. Students are only obsessed with repeating what they have been taught. At this point, we need to examine why students attach so much importance to teachers' notes. Is it because they have realised that teachers enjoy getting back what they have said in class? Is it because they are made to understand that attendance will always have a positive impact on the student's final grade?

[9] Martin Montgomery, ed. Ways of Reading: Advanced Reading Skills for Students of English Literature, 4th ed. London ; New York: Routledge, 2013, p.124.

[10] Martin Montgomery, ed. Ways of Reading: Advanced Reading Skills for Students of English Literature, 4th ed. London ; New York: Routledge, 2013, p.124.

[11] John Peck, How to Study a Novel, 2nd ed. How to Study Literature. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1995, p. x.

This context leads us to assessment methods. We cannot but realise that we ought to change our assessment practices by being strict and firm with students who merely repeat what they have heard in class. We need to be more generous with students who come up with original ideas, who are innovative, who are critical of the critics, who demonstrate that they do not quite share this or that interpretation, and who provide solid arguments.

At the same time, these measures require explanation to the students. Teachers should be clear from the outset about their objectives and the skills they are aiming to develop in the student. Our survey indicates that merely 13.61 percent of students had been informed about the assessment strategy. Once again, the type of information given needs to be considered, but what we recommend is not to just explain the types of tests and percentages. Expectations should be expressed in terms of the content of the answers. Students should be instructed on what teachers would like to see in their literary essays. The ideal approach would be to take an extract from a novel, poem or play and organise a group exercise where students have to attempt to provide a literary critique based on the extract alone. The teacher supervises the groups without over-helping them.

We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that students are to understand that the role of the literature teacher is not to provide them with all the insights and explanations but to promote creative thinking supported by evidence from the text. They equally should be aware that the student's duty is not to demonstrate to us that they have been diligent and attended all the lessons, but to manifest their skills as a future critic. All this should be made clear from the first lessons. It also needs to be reflected in the mid-term exam assessments and in the individual and group work.

To return to the strategies that the students follow to pass the literature exams, we noticed that 79.33 percent adopt a different approach to attain their objectives and pass the exam. They place all their energy into reading critical notes written by literature experts to first be familiar with the history of the book and then to memorise the provided analysis of the themes. Critical notes often supply students with information about the author's life, a list of characters, a general summary of the story, detailed summaries or chapter summaries, comments and review questions. This comprehensive package misleads students into thinking that they will find all the answers to their questions in the critical notes. They are convinced that the exam questions are somewhere to be found in the critical notebooks. As a result, the rote learning process begins with no room for creativity.

As an example, students who are studying Moby Dick will immediately observe, from the first pages of some critical studies, that Herman Melville's novel centres on the quest for man's position in the universe. They will accordingly commence preparing an analysis that builds on this theme by incorporating events from the beginning to the end of the novel, beginning with Ishmael's search for a place to eat and sleep in New Bedford. If Thomas Hardy's The Mayor of Casterbridge is the subject under study, students might readily find and learn the themes of secrecy, fate and coincidence, love and other themes in the critical notes. To illustrate, while marking papers for an exam on Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, I noticed that many students had repeated almost the same text on hypocrisy. When I searched for the text on the Internet, I realised that it was indeed part of an article on Hawthorne's work.

This strong relationship with critical notes prompted us to investigate further and ask supplementary questions to better comprehend the students' rapport with the thoughts of other writers. The outcome confirms what has been mentioned above. Unsurprisingly, 57.33 percent of the students believe that these critical studies are fundamental for the understanding of a literary work, while 26.67 percent acknowledge the academic superiority of the researchers who have written these critical studies. In an academic structure where literature is taught and learned as it ought to be, we expect to find different trends.

In an educational environment where students either rely on teachers' notes to write their literary essays or on critical notes to reproduce the same words of academics, we can hardly expect an original literary interpretation. Maybe we need to stop here to emphasise that interpretation "involves such activities as personal response, appreciation, evaluation, historical reception, explication, exegesis, and critique."[12] As the survey shows, students do not feel that they are yet ready to express their opinions. They are afraid that their critical autonomy will be used against them and make them appear arrogant. This is

[12] Leitch, Vincent B., editor. The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, 1st ed, Norton, 2001, p.2.

because we do not stress sufficiently to students that what we are seeking to develop in them is to hold a point of view and to be prepared to defend it. Whether the interpretation is correct or incorrect is of limited importance. What matters is that we express what we think or we express our "personal response" by bringing evidence to bear on our assumptions. We do not necessarily have to be in agreement with all the thoughts of others, even teachers and writers. Rather, the richness of a text is created when opinions diverge. By standing up for what they think, students broaden the scope of criticism and open up other, sometimes exciting, avenues to explore. If we now consider the example of "to be or not to be" and Hamlet's hesitation to murder his uncle, we will come across a multitude of interpretations with sometimes dramatic variations. This is not intended to favour certain criticisms over others, but to explore the text and render it dynamic and receptive to all interpretations in a total challenge of time and space.

In the end, we switched roles by inviting students to recommend the most effective strategy for understanding a text. Not surprisingly, 65.10 percent advised working with critical notes. This is not only because they were compelled to consult those critical notes after finding obstacles that made the literary work inaccessible but because they believe that critical notes may very well substitute reading the work. This proves that we have a considerable amount of work to do to teach students to approach and study literature. In addition, a high percentage of the students (44.97 percent) thought that reading the author's biography was essential for understanding the text. This figure becomes significant when compared to the number of students who consider that reading books by the same author (only 19.46 percent) and reading books published contemporaneously with the work being studied (only 22.15 percent) are interesting for understanding a literary text. These two latter strategies may seem of little importance, but in reality, they are among the most effective for criticising a literary text and for appreciating its historical and aesthetic value.

The responses indicate that we probably need to rethink the approach to introducing students to literature. We ought to teach them how to engage with the literary text, how to read it and how to analyse it. Frequently, we assume that students are familiar with reading strategies. We ask them to read a work, but we tend to neglect to point out that they should not read to understand the story. They should also read to raise questions, to identify contradictions, to follow the development of the characters, to evaluate the style, to compare the work with other works by the same author and with works of the same period. Using the words of Harold Bloom, reading must be pursued as an "implicit discipline".[13] Finally yet importantly, they should be taught that in a literary text there is the told and the untold, the language and the discourse, the text and the inter-text.

> Another dilemma of teaching long books is managing background, and especially literary tradition, influence, and intertextuality. Many of the novels … are deliberate rewritings or reimaginings of other texts; ideally students should have read *1984 and Lord of the Flies before we read A Clockwork Orange, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Chronicle of a Death Foretold before Jeffrey Eugenides' The Virgin Suicides, Mrs. Dalloway before Michael Cunningham's The Hours.*[14]

Admittedly, this is a complex way of approaching a literary work, but with practice, automatisms develop, allowing the practice to become a habitual task.

These recommendations will undoubtedly assist students to better interact with and appreciate the literary text. Their relationship with literary works will improve over time, but this is not sufficient, as the problem is multifaceted and complex. In addition to the technical aspects mentioned above, another facet works against students' motivation and engagement in literary practice. This concerns the use and function of literature. Why literature and why do we have to devote all this energy to studying it? This question has preoccupied many students, but few have dared to ask it.

We emphasise to students that they should read a lot to expand their vocabulary, enhance their style, learn interesting structures of the language, and improve their ability to speak natural English. Apparently, the students had assimilated this, which is reflected in the answers they provided to the first questions of the second survey. Nevertheless, we found that they only understood it theoretically. More than half of the students (50.30 percent)

[13] Harold Bloom, How to Read and Why, New York: Touchtone ed. Edition, 2000, p. 19.

[14] Elaine Showalter, Teaching Literature, Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003, p.91.

concurred that one of the main functions of literature is to relieve stress and anxiety. This attitude towards literature reveals serious concerns. How can we expect students to attach greater importance to literature courses when most of them have little idea of the real value of literature and the relevance of studying it?

We asked students what they would recommend to read if they had the task of teaching the subject of writing. Most students (67.5 percent) selected "a collection of short stories". This percentage is quite high, simply because we are constantly stressing the necessity of reading. However, 18.1 percent recommended "a grammar book" and 14.4 percent "a book about learning English", which shows that 32.5 percent of the students have not yet understood the true merits of reading. This is where matters start to become more complicated since, as is generally believed, the learning process ends when the learner fails to make sense of the activity.

The same findings apply to the question about the most effective way to learn English grammar. More than a third of the students think that memorising grammar rules from grammar books is the most useful way to be proficient in grammar. Only 43.1 percent of respondents understand that learning grammar also involves a lot of reading. The same number of students agreed on the role of reading in vocabulary acquisition. This percentage is still low and confirms the conclusions we drew from the answers to the question about the main function of literature.

Additionally, students have often heard about the benefits of speaking English with native speakers. At every opportunity, teachers recommend that learners should speak with native speakers to learn pronunciation and intonation as well as fluency. However, although speaking English with native speakers teaches us to use natural English, it does not necessarily have a huge impact on the enhancement of critical thinking. When asked what students should undertake to develop critical thinking skills, 48.1 percent of them identified participating in debates and speaking with native speakers as the most appropriate strategy. However, reading literary works was one of the options provided, but only 23.8 percent associated critical thinking with reading.

Another key point revealed by this survey concerns the difference in perception between linguistics and literature by students. According to our findings, almost 70 percent believe that, unlike literature, linguistics enables students to acquire expertise in the practice of language, which increases employment opportunities. In other words, linguistics, as a scientific study of language, is supposed to open doors to employment easily, since language and public schools tend to favour students with a degree in linguistics. This high percentage explains the reluctance of some students to study literature. Meanwhile, one must not blame them, given that in a very complicated economic and political context, the search for a job places enormous pressure on students to opt for disciplines that make them much more employable.

This association between language learning and employability emerges very clearly in a question that asked students to identify subjects that they believe are no longer relevant in a rapidly changing world and therefore should be eliminated from the syllabus. Shockingly, 40.4 percent of students preferred to remove mythology and poetry, 22.7 percent did not recognise the value of literary criticism, and 9.9 percent rejected cultural studies. This implies that 73 percent of the students surveyed could not see a place for literary subjects in the current economic context where technology has taken over in all areas.

Lastly, the same observation has been made concerning the last question of the survey, which concerns time management. Students consistently expressed frustration with this issue. The question asked students to select tasks that they felt conflicted with optimal time management. Not surprisingly, 40 percent of them considered that reading literary works, especially novels, consumed a significant amount of their time. Once again, this result illustrates that students have difficulty understanding the value of reading and the importance of literature for language learning.

In conclusion, this study has shown that many students have great difficulty in studying a literary text. This apprehension is the result of several factors. The meaning of the literary activity remains the most important obstacle to any appreciation of the text. Most probably, this element has not been sufficiently taken into account and is often marginalised in the design of a course. It might be interesting to start each literature course by associating literature with the development of the individual and society. We do not read to pass the time, but we read to learn to structure our thoughts, arguments and ideas. We also read to meet in books and

stories new people with different backgrounds. People we might meet one day on the street or in our workplace. Harold Bloom highlights another function of literature by asserting that "We read not only because we cannot know enough people, but because friendship is so vulnerable, so likely to diminish or disappear, overcome by space, time, imperfect sympathies, and all the sorrows of familial and passional life."[15] We also read to learn how to cope with difficulties, how to handle delicate situations, and how to step back when we are emotionally involved in a conflict. We read to learn to express ourselves, to express our joys, to express our sorrows. We read to learn to evaluate new situations and to evaluate ourselves.

From another point of view, literature might be proposed as an effective instrument to develop interpersonal communication and emotional intelligence of individuals to prepare them for professional life. In other words, soft skills have become a necessity for any working environment. In a globalised world where many stakeholders with different cultures and interests are often involved in international projects, companies are constantly emphasising the importance of soft skills for their staff. Technical knowledge and hard skills alone are no longer sufficient in a world where interaction between people has become of paramount importance. Ultimately we must read, as Bloom agrees, "to prepare ourselves for change, and the final change alas is universal."[16]

We now need to explain all this to the students so that the literary activity becomes meaningful. We need to establish clear associations between literature and the world outside. This can be very well achieved through literary workshops in particular. Literary workshops will highlight the relationships that literature has with the socio-economic world, international business, international diplomacy, political science and many other fields. These workshops should have an innovative format by being "a place for students to actively practice their reading, writing, reasoning, and other abilities and to do so not in isolation but in groups."[17] It is not a question of reading texts describing the importance of literature. We need to proceed differently. For example, it will be interesting and exciting to invite personalities who are heads of large companies and who are identified as great readers and book lovers. These leaders can better explain the importance of reading literature in their field of work and in the management of their personal and professional lives.

Moreover, these workshops should never take the form of a lecture where the teacher talks and the students listen. Instead, they should be based on interactive activities, in which "students learn not just from us but from each other".[18] They should be designed in such a way that interdisciplinarity becomes the main axis of exchange. These workshops are an excellent opportunity to build bridges between the literary world and the economic and industrial world. People are at the heart of the industry and the economy, but people are also at the heart of literature. We need workshops with as few screens and telephones as possible. We need workshops with experiences to share and knowledge to pass on. We need workshops with a didactic vocation, where the older generations mentor the younger ones and prepare them for professional life and its challenges.

These workshops will also serve as a transition. They can be used to address the relationship between literature and the job market. It is extremely important to make this connection, as it will give meaning to the activity of reading and writing. Currently, students of English literature focus a lot on teaching as a subsequent profession. However, teaching is not the only field. There are many other areas where languages and literature are in demand. Meetings with professionals would broaden the perspective and open up other horizons for students. To illustrate, has there ever been an attempt to establish the relationship between comparative literature, diplomacy and work in international organisations? Has anyone tried to explain the link between literature and personnel management in a human resources department? This would certainly be of interest to our students. There is no doubt that there are other avenues and that inviting people from different sectors will teach us much more than we can possibly imagine.

We might also develop these workshops as a space where we discuss literary works but from a different angle. We have to depart from the traditional themes found in traditional criticism books. We could very well consider

[15] Harold Bloom, How to Read and Why, New York: Touchtone ed. Edition, 2000, p. 19.

[16] Harold Bloom, How to Read and Why, New York: Touchtone ed. Edition, 2000, p. 21.

[17] Diana Fuss, and William A. Gleason, eds. The Pocket Instructor, Literature: 101 Exercises for the College Classroom, Princeton ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016, p. xiii.

[18] Ibid., p. xiii

a contemporary reading of a twentieth-century novel, but with a contemporary perspective. If we consider, for example, Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, we may approach the novel differently by focusing on the business lessons provided by the story. The book teaches us that networks are extremely important to business, that human beings are not easily successful on their own, and that networking will certainly yield wealth. Gatsby spends his life attempting to capture his past and reach his love. He sets a goal and does everything in his power to achieve it. He remains focused throughout his quest. This is a great management lesson. We must set a clear goal, with a detailed plan, and we must work hard to achieve it. However, Gatsby never achieves his dream. Certainly, he has become rich and respectable, but he never manages to have Daisy forever. That dream kills him, and the lesson is that in business, you have to be realistic. Sometimes you have to give up instead of killing yourself over unattainable objectives.

Another novel that would be the subject of a very successful workshop is Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe. Crusoe arrives in a hostile environment and decides to make it his home. Instead of lamenting the past, he discards passivity and adopts a positive attitude and a self-determined approach. He tames and domesticates wild goats and parrots. He takes control of his life by building a house on the island. He does not surrender to fate; he fights to overcome its obstacles. The story of Robinson Crusoe is not simply the story of a shipwrecked individual struggling to survive. Rather, it is a story that contains many lessons about management. Robinson Crusoe teaches us some of the major principles underlying entrepreneurship. We learn that risk is part of any enterprise, and that to prosper one must be willing to take the risk. The story teaches us also the basic principles of risk-taking. Robinson first takes time to reflect and understand what is going on to identify the potential risks to his life. Then he decides to manage that risk by setting priorities.

From another point of view, this novel offers many lessons on project management. Robinson's survival is in essence a project. Like all projects, Robinson's project has gone through the phases of initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and closure. Moreover, almost all the processes of a project exist in this story: risk analysis, identification of the requirements, budget management, scope management, main stakeholders identification, and negotiations. Even time management has been taken into consideration. In conclusion, Robinson's survival is equal to the survival and sustainability of a company. Robinson had to implement a strategy, estimate resources and capabilities, practice cost leadership, and use creative thinking and innovation.

No one can deny the fact that leadership is essential in all fields. Whether in business, industry, politics, culture or education, leadership is a necessary foundation for success. Obviously, an incredible number of books and electronic media on leadership are available and accessible to everyone, but learning about leadership through literature and stories will introduce students to an insightful and original approach where pleasure mixes with imagination and learning to pave the way for a multitude of interesting lessons. Take Herman Melville's Moby Dick, for example, a novel about a captain blinded by revenge and obsessed with a whale. When Ishmael inquires about the captain, he learns that Ahab is a lonely man of few words. For the first few days of the voyage, Ahab does not leave his cabin. When he finally appears in chapter 28, he is frightening. Obsession has made him a static character, who does not grow or change throughout the novel. Can Ahab be trusted with the leadership of a crew and the management of a ship? This question could well be the subject of a workshop in which students will discuss the character of Ahab and his full responsibility for the tragic end of his team at the end of the novel.

Unlike Ahab, Santiago, the hero of Earnest Hemmingway's The Old Man and the Sea, has a completely different philosophy. For him, the most important thing in life is to live according to one's convictions, accept failure with dignity, and pass on principles and values to the next generation. Santiago is an exceptional character. Despite all the hardships he has endured and a lifetime of disappointments and failures, he remains a responsible man and an expert who knows the ropes of his fishing trade. He knows how to draw on the power of his imagination for the inspiration and confidence he needs to nurture hope within himself.

The employability of students and the role of the university in promoting employment is a subject that keeps coming up. Each time, the university is called upon to create courses that facilitate the insertion and integration of graduates into the professional world. This means that, to cite Paul Ramsden, "governments see universities as engines for social change and the expansion of prosperity.

Being competitive on world markets means that we must invest in higher education."[19] Many questions arise then about literature and its role in the enterprise of higher education. One of the purposes of this study has been to point out that literature can play an impressive role in the training of tomorrow's managers and in the teaching of soft skills which have become as important as technical aspects.

What we need to do is to rethink the teaching of literature. Paul Ramsden again believes that "learning in educational institutions should be about changing the ways in which learners understand, or experience, or conceptualise the world around them." [20]Thus, we need to move away from the old ways. We need to reread texts with today's eyes. The interpretation of literary texts must be adapted to today's world. Literary interpretation must be associated with the learners' personal development. It should serve their professional integration by giving them the tools to better manage their own and others' emotions. In other words, we must make the study of literature meaningful. We need to make explicit the reasons why it is important to engage in reading at all times.

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[19] Paul Ramsden, Learning to Teach in Higher Education, 2nd ed. London ; New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p.3.

[20] Ibid,. p. 6.