

A DIALOGIC MODEL FOR LITERATURE TEACHING

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“Nur wo die Stimme des anderen noch gehört wird, besteht Hoffnung auf Selbsterfahrung” (Peter V. Zima 2000: 416)
[“Only where the other’s voice is still heard, is there hope for self-development”]

Abstract

Based on theory and classroom experience, this paper argues that a unidimensional teaching method is less effective than a dialogic one in which a number of positions are presented, placed in conversation, and explored. Readers are encouraged on this model to explore a multitude of responses rather than look for a single interpretation. This can involve, moreover, an expansion of the content of traditional literature courses towards more popular materials such as popular movies and music.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of my paper is to introduce a dialogic model for literature teaching. This model results both from a specific text-approach and from my own practical teaching experiences. The text-approach goes back to a hermeneutic concept of aesthetic reading. According to this concept, an aesthetic response implies entry into fictional worlds and the adoption of a holistic reader stance. To put it more simply, readers are invited to become involved in secondary worlds¹ and to ask themselves what a literary text means to them as a whole. By doing so, they may create a multitude of potentially unexpected links with a text. The element of surprise and the multitude of responses both entail a theory of literature which is dynamic and wide in scope.

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¹ I have taken over the term secondary world from Michael Benton (1997).

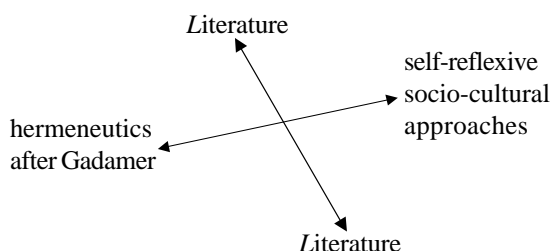
As far as my own practical teaching experiences are concerned, some of my teaching projects have shown that reader interests can vary considerably. A conflict I have come across repeatedly concerns aesthetic v. engaged socio-cultural readings (cf. Delanoy 1996 & 2002). In the classroom, those attempts at conflict resolution turned out most productive where the two could enter a dialogue. In other words, the two approaches were treated as equally valid, and each of them was questioned in the light of the other to invite reflection upon the limitations of both, and upon ways of linking the two in the interest of a more comprehensive and differentiated understanding of literature. These teaching projects also showed that what my students wanted to read as literature may not be compatible with the texts chosen for traditional literature classes. In one of my literature courses, the students opted for watching a Hollywood film (*Dead Poets Society*; cf. Delanoy 1996). While my first reaction to the movie was negative, my students' responses convincingly made clear that a one-sided assessment of the film would not do justice to its textual basis. Experiments with pop-songs have yielded similar results, again pointing to both insight-inviting and problematic textual aspects (cf. Delanoy 1999 & 2002).

Based on these experiences, my model aims to bring together aesthetic and socio-cultural text-approaches to both acknowledge literature's specific qualities and its embeddedness in socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, a concept of literature is introduced which is wide in scope to invite inclusion of text-practices which so far have only played a marginal role in literary criticism and literature didactics. This model is, of course, provisional, and, as already mentioned, it is closely linked to my teaching experiences as well as my critical and pedagogical interests in literature. Thus, its relevance to other teaching situations and

critical/pedagogical practices remains to be explored.

2. A DIALOGIC MODEL

Graphically, my model can be represented as follows:



In this model, literature teaching is viewed as a site of different critical, pedagogical and literary practices. These practices are related to each other with the help of two intersecting axes. While one axis is related to different approaches to literature, the other one is focussed on diverse realizations of literature. On the approach-axis, a hermeneutics following Gadamer's *Truth and Method* is linked to approaches with a socio-cultural and political orientation. Such a hermeneutics has mainly concerned itself with the aesthetic dimension of literature, i.e. with art's/literature's specific potential for fostering a better understanding of oneself and others. At the other end, socio-cultural approaches have drawn attention to how cultural values and social power relations have influenced the production, reception and distribution of literature, and how literature may itself become an accomplice in the ideological formation of a society. On the literature-axis, two concepts of literature are juxtaposed. Literature with a capital "L" refers to texts which have been accorded a privileged status by institutions concerned about what should count and be passed on as literature. Literature with a small "l" concerns texts excluded from and going beyond this privileged category.

Critical debates have shown that the two pairs may make strange bedfellows. Yet, I do not intend to treat them as irreconcilable oppositions, but rather as equal partners in a dialogic alliance where each concept may complement and challenge the other(s). To graphically illustrate this idea, the arrows between these concepts go both ways. Since the two axes intersect, all four are interconnected. In other words, mutual enrichment is intended not only within but also between pairs.

In my theoretical orientation, I view myself as beholden to a hermeneutic approach building on Gadamer and on critical and pedagogical concepts developed by proponents of reader response theories and literature didactics. Such a hermeneutic approach rests on the assumption that human understanding can never be final since it is realized by historically and culturally situated human beings with specific interests and a limited knowledge-base. Yet, its proponents also claim that understanding has important epistemological and ethical functions, since it permits self-reflection, a better understanding of oneself and others, and the furtherance of dialogic relationships. Such a hermeneutics has made a case for a concept of understanding which is inextricably linked to dialogue. Dialogue ideally leads to forms of peaceful and critical coexistence of and cooperation between people thinking differently. Dialogue, however, only becomes possible if the partners involved, accepting the particularity of their viewpoints, are prepared and able to critically question themselves in the light of the other.

Despite their different interests in and assessments of literature, the hermeneutic and socio-cultural approaches included in my model all share an interest in critical self-enquiry. In some cases, their proponents have already made attempts to enter into dialogic

relationships with colleagues from the other group. In hermeneutics, Hans-Herbert Kögler (1992) has redefined Gadamer's approach in the light of cultural analyses throwing attention onto the power relations implicit in human forms of meaning creation (e.g. Bourdieu, Foucault). As far as socio-cultural approaches are concerned, both text-sociology (cf. Zima 1980, 1989, 2000), proponents of a feminist literature pedagogy (cf. Decke-Cornill 1992: 131-132) and advocates of cultural-studies-approaches (cf. During 1999: 1; Grossberg 1999: 77) have stressed the importance of self-reflexivity to become aware of one's own conceptual limitations. Further, they have given hermeneutics credit for its contributions to developing a self-reflexive concept of theory (cf. Zima 1980: 6) and to highlighting the anthropological and educational potential of aesthetic communication (cf. Bogdan 1990).

3. A HERMENEUTIC AESTHETICS

As stated before, my understanding of aesthetic communication goes back to hermeneutic theories. This concept rests on the following assumptions:

(a) *Understanding as interactive text-exploration:*

According to Gadamer, understanding begins "when something addresses us" (cf. Gadamer 1993: 367). In other words, understanding does not exist independently of the addressee. It only becomes possible when addressees can create links between themselves and the people/objects they turn their attention to. Reader response theories have argued that this is also the case with art and with literature as a specific art form. Unless recipients can establish a personal relationship with a work of art/a piece of literature, its specific potential remains dead to them. To establish a personal relationship, addressees must become involved in literary texts. This

involvement is viewed as an open-ended process in which the recipients, not knowing what the outcome of their engagement will be, follow how a text unfolds, thus gradually exploring what this text means to them. Understanding literature, therefore, presupposes active reader participation and an exploratory text-approach.

Such an approach is interaction-based. On the one hand, readers bring texts alive on the basis of their specific knowledge, experiences and interests. On the other hand, they need to do justice to the text, which is seen as specifically encoded and as a challenge to the reader's prior understanding.

(b) Understanding as aesthetic experience:

For Gadamer (1993:70) "... the power of the work of art suddenly tears the person experiencing it out of the context of his life, and yet relates him back to the whole of his existence". This concept, although it has undergone some significant modifications both within reader response theory and literature pedagogy, lies at the heart of a hermeneutic aesthetics.

What Gadamer tries to bring together is an aesthetics which both acknowledges the autonomy of art and which links aesthetic experience to wider socio-cultural contexts (cf. Zima 1991: 218-224). For Gadamer, art can become autonomous through its dissociation from primary worlds. In other words, the recipient is taken out of his/her world and becomes engrossed in the world mapped out by e.g. a literary text. Gadamer, however, does not view detachment from primary worlds as an end in itself. In his view, the connection to primary worlds is not lost, since engrossment in fictional worlds helps create a qualitatively different relationship with life. This different relationship results from a holistic focus of interest. In other words, recipients do not read

art with an eye to a specific problem. Instead, they ask themselves what a work of art means to them as a whole. Recipients, therefore, may create a variety of links between themselves and the text read.

While creating these manifold links, readers, according to Rosenblatt (1994: 15), *live through* the world of the text. Living through a text gives aesthetic communication a life-like quality. In other words, readers become involved in secondary worlds as if these fictional worlds were their habitat. While exploring *with* the characters how the plot unfolds they respond to the text both affectively and cognitively. Rosenblatt uses the term *evocation* for this process of meaning creation. By *evocation* she means "the web of feelings, sensations, images, ideas that [the reader] weaves between himself and the text" (cf. Rosenblatt 1994: 137). For her, aesthetic communication is highly evocative because of its holistic focus. For Rosenblatt, the primary aim of literature teaching, therefore, is a rich, whole-person oriented and aesthetically motivated text-evocation on the part of the learner.

Bredella (1996a: 2-3) has argued similarly. He adds that, contrary to real life, art is a more "secure place" for living through life-like situations. He quotes Mollenhauer's distinction between "being hungry" and "feeling hungry" to highlight the difference between experiencing real life and art (cf. Bredella 1996a: 3). For example, when reading a text like Adam Zameenzad's *My Friend Matt and Henna the Whore* (1989), in which the protagonists are starved out of their home village in Eastern Africa, readers can feel with the characters their pain and hunger without having to suffer it in their real lives. Another example is Beverley Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* (2000), in which a Nigerian family must flee their home country and find

themselves stranded as illegal immigrants in contemporary Britain. Again, readers can live through the traumatic experiences of these characters from a relatively secure position. Furthermore, participation in these secondary worlds may help readers develop empathy with and solidarity for the characters portrayed. Thus, such an aesthetic response also has a strong ethical dimension.

Within hermeneutic debates, Gadamer's concept of aesthetic experience has been criticized for its lack of critical detachment. Since addressees are *torn out* of their primary worlds they are emotionally overpowered by the work of art. Kögler (1992: 45) and Bredella & Delanoy (1996b: xiv) have pointed out that such an approach does not leave sufficient space for conscious reflection upon what is bringing about reader reactions. They, therefore, make a case for a different aesthetics permitting the dialectical integration of emotional involvement and critical detachment (cf. Bredella 1996a: 9).

(c) A highly positive assessment of art/literature:

Gadamer's assessment of art/literature is overwhelmingly positive. For him there is a fullness, density and infinity to art which goes beyond all other forms of human experience. He even goes as far as viewing aesthetic experience as a means of temporarily transcending basic human limitations. While under normal circumstances human understanding can only activate a fraction of its total possibilities, "an aesthetic *Erlebnis*" in Gadamer's words "... immediately represents the whole of human existence" (cf. Gadamer 1993: 70).

There is a discrepancy between Gadamer's concept of dialogue and his understanding of art/aesthetic experience. While his notion of dialogue presupposes equal

partners with limited access to themselves and others, art is seen as principally superior to other forms of experience. While dialogue is an ongoing, unfinished process, art permits a glimpse of life in toto (cf. Gadamer 1993: 70). Moreover, Gadamer (1993: 67) emphasizes that dialogue "as against the fixity of opinions ... makes the object and all its possibilities fluid". There is, however, a fixity to Gadamer's definition of art. His glorification of art practically places this category beyond critical questioning.

In line with this position, proponents of reception theory have also assessed literature in a predominantly positive way. For Iser (1978) fictional texts permit socio-critical insights into the worlds they put up for discussion. There are no references, however, to how literature is shaped by these worlds, and how it may also obstruct socio-critical enquiry. In literature pedagogy there is a similar tendency. Again, attention is drawn to literature's potential for enabling manifold insights, while a critical perspective on literature, at best, only plays a marginal role. In some cases literature is glorified to an extent where a rational discourse is no longer possible. Bruner (1986: 159), for example, views literature as "... an instrument of freedom, lightness, imagination, ... reason ..., our only hope against the long grey night". Such a valorization is highly problematic since it places literature beyond doubt and, to quote Corcoran (1992: 50), it casts both teachers and learners in the role of a "respectful, deferential, and receptive acolyte".

In the majority of cases, however, a more rational and balanced view is taken. Bredella, for example, warns against too great and too small expectations of literature. For him literature cannot reveal eternal truths. Yet, he points out that literature "... deals with values and experiences in such a way that we can see them in a new light, so that we can become less one-sided, less stubborn and less

provincial” (cf. Bredella 1996b: 113). For Bredella, this potential for new insights results both from a specific aesthetic text-approach and from literature’s critical investigation of social issues. While a holistic focus based on involvement *and* detachment invites lateral and critical thinking, literary texts already prestructure a critical response through their questioning of established beliefs and values. For Bredella, literature is part of a humanistic project which is inseparable from ethical considerations. Because of its potential for new and critical insights he sees literature as a vehicle for becoming less biased and more respectful of human diversity. As a specialist in EFL, one of his main interests, therefore, lies in how literature and literature teaching can foster intercultural dialogue (cf. Bredella 2002).

In one respect, however, Bredella’s concept is not wide enough. For Bredella, detachment and critical enquiry do not serve as instruments to question literary texts. They only concern the reader who is invited to self-correct himself/herself through literature. Like other proponents of hermeneutic approaches, Bredella believes that by developing a self-critical attitude readers will be able to meet the socio-cultural challenges literary texts pose to them (cf. Bredella 1996b: 112-113; see also: Rosenblatt 1994: 37). There is no denying that literature has served socio-critical purposes nor that a self-corrective attitude should be an essential component of a reader’s literary/communicative competence. Yet, solely appreciating literature neither does justice to the dynamics of literary text production, nor does it fully empower readers to enter into a dialogue with literary texts.

If one looks at the history of literature, it is common practice that writers appreciate *and* critically question other literary texts in their works. Such criticism may concern both the formal devices used and the socio-cultural

views expressed in other texts. Moreover, such criticism has also been levelled at complex and canonized texts which have been praised for their (socio-)critical potential (e.g. Achebe’s critique of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* or Jean Rhys’s rewriting of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*). One wonders why what is possible for writers should not also be an option for students in a classroom context. This, however, requires a concept of literature which invites both appreciation and criticism.

4. SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACHES

In their socio-cultural dimension hermeneutic approaches have drawn attention to literature’s potential for fostering socio-critical awareness. What has been neglected, however, is how literature itself is shaped by cultural influences and how it may also invite uncritical approval of social norms and beliefs. This other side of literature has been studied by, e.g., marxist, feminist or postcolonial approaches. In some cases, proponents of such concepts have defined themselves in strong opposition to hermeneutics (e.g. Eagleton’s [1993] criticism of Gadamer). Yet, one does not have to give up a hermeneutic perspective to link the approach outlined in the previous section to a socio-critical questioning of aesthetic communication and literature, although - with reference to Gadamer - some modifications definitely are in order.

In hermeneutic philosophy, Hans-Herbert Kögler (1992) has sought a dialogue with schools of ideology critique and new concepts of cultural analysis. Following Gadamer’s approach, Kögler also sees understanding as contextually situated and as subject to basic limitations which can be partly overcome through confrontation with other viewpoints. On the other hand, Kögler argues that Gadamer’s approach does not pay sufficient attention to deep-seated convictions

and claims to power which influence people in their feelings, thoughts and actions. He, therefore, turns to Foucault with whom he shares the view that human understanding in general is subject to such influences. Thus, Kögler makes a case for a basic scepticism towards any form of human meaning production. Despite this scepticism, he, however, retains the hermeneutic belief in the epistemological and ethical potential of human understanding. As far as literature is concerned, he, therefore, still acknowledges literature's critical and ethical qualities without bracketing its embeddedness and complicity in social power struggles (cf. Kögler 1992: 45ff.).

Kögler (1992: 58, 113ff.) has also drawn attention to the concept of culture formation underlying Gadamer's approach. For Gadamer, understanding and dialogue ideally lead to agreement. Conflicts are resolved when the parties involved find some common ground that binds them together. For Gadamer, this common ground can be found through linking current conflicts back to the cultural tradition that historically precedes the partners in a dialogue. Gadamer views cultural tradition as a basically benevolent, trustworthy, partly irrational and unifying force offering a wealth of experience which by far transcends that of actual people. For Gadamer, therefore, tradition has authority, i.e. it is superior in knowledge and experience, and can thus offer guidance to human beings (cf. Gadamer 1993: 280-281).

Contrary to Gadamer, Kögler (1992: 58) argues that dialogue need not lead to agreement. Instead, people may become aware of differences which, at least for the time being, cannot be overcome. Moreover, Gadamer's understanding of tradition is questioned critically. For Kögler (1992: 109-117), Gadamer's concept is too optimistic. He points out that tradition also includes rival viewpoints and claims to power.

From a marxist perspective, Eagleton (1993: 72) has argued similarly. For him, Gadamer sees history as one relatively conflict-free and unbroken continuum. Such a concept ignores the existence of different traditions and the conflicts and power divisions between and within them. Eagleton (1993: 73), on the other hand, makes a case for an ambivalent conception of history and tradition according to which they are seen "... as oppressive and liberating forces". If this ambivalence is eliminated in the interest of a merely positive construction, tradition may become a tool for ideological manipulation. In culture conflict, for example, insistence on agreement and on the belief in a trustworthy common tradition may be used as arguments to defend a cultural status quo. In other words, only those aspects of other positions need to be accepted which can be integrated into dominant thought patterns. Kögler and Eagleton, therefore, suggest taking a different look at the cultural context in which understanding is situated. For them difference, rival traditions and power struggles are integral components of the socio-cultural context in which all human interactions take place.

Following Kögler, I would argue that schools of ideology critique and new concepts of cultural analysis can make a hermeneutics after Gadamer increasingly aware of deep seated convictions, implicit power relations, cultural difference and the ambivalence of cultural phenomena. Moreover, these approaches have developed analytical tools for systematic inquiry into such issues.

In the context of literature teaching, socio-cultural approaches to literature may challenge and complement the position outlined in the previous section in the following ways:

(a) A critical questioning of ideological meaning creation:

My definition of ideology goes back to

Peter Zima's text-sociological approach, i.e. to his reflections in *Textsoziologie* [Text-Sociology (1980)], *Ideologie und Theorie* [Ideology and Theory' (1989)] and *Literarische Ästhetik* ['Literary Aesthetics' (1991)]. I have chosen this definition because of the self-reflexivity of Zima's approach. For Zima, a critical questioning of ideologies does not depend on whether a marxist, feminist or hermeneutic approach is chosen, but on the readiness and ability to self-reflect upon one's own programme.

According to Zima (1989: 385-393), ideologies represent and re-present certain collective viewpoints. These viewpoints are informed by deep-seated, often unconscious convictions and claims to power, privileging certain groups over others. Its spokespeople are either unwilling or unable to question and reflect upon their interests and language use. Instead, they present their views as right and natural in opposition to others. Following Althusser and Gramsci, Zima makes a distinction between ideology and repression. Thus, the addressees of ideological discourses are not coerced into acceptance. Contrary to using force, viewpoints are presented as desirable for the addressee to invite consent from within.

For literature teaching, growing awareness of the ideological dimension of language use may serve a variety of purposes. On the one hand, such awareness facilitates a critical questioning of literary texts to help unmask their potential ideological interests. On the other hand, it may also support readers in their appreciation of literary texts. Contemporary rewritings of canonical texts, which Peter Widdowson (1999: 166) has termed as "revisionary writing", are a case in point. Texts falling into this category (e.g. J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* [Robinson Crusoe] or Sue Roe's *Estella: Her Expectations* [Great

Expectations]) invite their readers to unhinge ideologies "that have been central to the construction of ... [a] European-male consciousness" (cf. Widdowson 1999: 166). Finally, the social institutions mediating between literature and its readers (e.g. schools, universities, schools of criticism, the media, educational policies) may themselves become objects of an ideology-critical investigation. Here, the aim is to reflect upon their strategies to privilege certain notions of literature and the values underlying their arguments.

(b) *A political interest in marginalized perspectives:*

Both feminist, post-colonial and cultural-studies approaches have a political orientation. They have thrown attention onto social divisions and inequalities along the lines of, e.g., race, class, ethnicity and gender, speaking up for groups who they see as silenced or marginalized by dominant interests. In debates around literature, such a focus has led to a political examination of existing canons and to the formation of alternative syllabi. With reference to reading practices, new concepts such as *reader resistance* or *reader positioning* have encouraged a political and critical response to literary texts.

(c) *Literature and aesthetic communication as ambivalent entities:*

The socio-cultural approaches represented in my model have made efforts to avoid a one-sided assessment of literature and aesthetic communication. German and American proponents of a feminist literature pedagogy (e.g. Bogdan 1990; Decke Cornill & Gdaniec 1992; O'Neill 1990), for example, have referred to the ambivalence of an aesthetic text-approach. On the one hand, they agree with the hermeneutic approach outlined in section two that involvement in secondary worlds and an open focus offer important possibilities for gaining new insights. On the

other hand, a solely positive appraisal is rejected. When studying student readings, Bogdan (1990: 65) points out that young readers may become so engrossed in secondary worlds (e.g. through identification with characters) "... that they remain unaware of what is bringing about their response". Such engrossment may obstruct critical detachment, and it may make people more susceptible to accepting certain ideologies. As far as the open focus is concerned, I have already pointed to its potential for making manifold and discovering unusual connections. Yet, one can argue that it may also hamper a deeper understanding since readers can more easily change focus when confronted with something disturbing.

It must be added, however, that the literary texts Bogdan has in mind only partly overlap with those that, for example, Bredella refers to when proposing his theory. While in Bogdan's case literature first and foremost aims for emotional involvement, the texts selected by Bredella invite a more detached and critical response. While I do not intend to downplay differences between texts, I would still argue that a basically ambivalent attitude is indispensable. I have already referred to critical rewritings of complex literature to show that even with such texts critical readings should be welcome. Moreover, research in cultural-studies has shown that the boundaries between high and popular culture are fluid (cf. During 1999: 19), and that popular practices also contain elements of creativity and reflexivity (cf. Kögler 1999: 216, 225). In this article, therefore, a case is made for approaches which pay attention to literature's plural possibilities, its contradictory potentialities and its manifold realizations across the high and popular divide.

5. Literature v. *literature*

For Peter Widdowson (1999: 37) "literature exists independently" while

"'Literature' is only created by criticism". Widdowson's statement implies that it lies in the power of the institutions concerned with literature to include/exclude and privilege certain textual practices. Furthermore, Widdowson's distinction suggests that there is more to literature than is captured in institutionally accepted text corpora.

Although I agree with Widdowson that the "L"-category is an institutional construction and that it only does limited justice to the actual diversity of literature, there are some major differences between my position and his. For Widdowson (1999: 121) literature - i.e. 'L'- and 'l'-practices - refers to texts whose "originating modality and final point of reference" is in written form. My concept, on the other hand, also includes crossings between written, spoken and visual text-practices (e.g. films, songs, hypertext literature).

Moreover, his understanding of what is peculiar to literature is only partly compatible with the ambivalent concept introduced in the previous section. Like Widdowson I see the peculiarities of literature as culturally and historically situated phenomena. In line with his position, I also view literary texts as both ideological and as permitting insights into ideologies. For Widdowson, however, the ideological aspects still take second place. What makes literature special for him is the "literary" which in his definition only has a "proleptic" function (cf. Widdowson 1999: 106, 150, 179). In other words, the *literary* allows people to see through and beyond ideologies and existing realities. Moreover, the *literary* permits momentary revelations, where what is looked at manifests itself in its totality (cf. Widdowson 1999: 114). Although Widdowson views himself as a socio-political critic - in an earlier book he explicitly refers to his socialist orientation (cf. Widdowson 1982: 13) - his concept of the 'literary' shares

important characteristics with hermeneutic approaches, i.e. with Iser's functional definition of fiction's socio-critical potential and Gadamer's belief that art permits an all-encompassing view. As discussed earlier, I see such an approach as too one-sided and too idealizing to invite a critical understanding of literature's specific qualities.

Coming back to the 'L' v. 'I' distinction, texts may be included in the "L"-category for diverse reasons. If one looks at the various approaches mentioned in the preceding sections, each of them has particular implications for a capitalization of literature. For Gadamer, recipients are overwhelmed by art and entry into secondary worlds helps them to create new links with the tradition they belong to. Such an approach implies a preference for texts inviting deep engrossment. Gadamer's belief in a common, relatively conflict-free tradition may also help defend traditional canons viewed as a basis for a common identity. Kögler (1992: 44-47) or Zima (1980: 16), on the other hand, have come out in favour of modernist texts and writers (e.g. Joyce, Kafka, Musil, Svevo). Such texts obstruct undisrupted engrossment in secondary worlds. Moreover, they often resist closure and radically question dominant viewpoints. Bredella or Rosenblatt take a middle position between the two in their attempts to link emotional involvement with critical detachment. Finally, feminist or postcolonial approaches have called into question canons favouring white, male and western writers and have modified or replaced these canons by setting up alternative reading lists for their literature programmes.

Within this debate, I view Bredella's contribution as particularly productive for literature teaching. Bredella makes a case for a relational concept of aesthetic/literary value which includes both reader- and text-related considerations. Bredella claims that the

aesthetic value of literary texts needs to be judged by the extent to which they "... can activate the reader's experiences and values" (cf. Bredella 1994: 121). As a specialist in literature and foreign language learning, Bredella has a particular target audience in mind. His recipients are relatively inexperienced, young readers of literature, reading in a foreign language in which they are only partly proficient. Following Bredella's understanding of aesthetic value, literature can only address this audience when it is compatible with its interests and competencies. Just to cater for reader interests, however, may not do justice to literature's aesthetic potential, which for Bredella also lies in art's challenge to established and unquestioned thought patterns. With such a perspective in mind, capitalisation becomes an act of institutional mediation to make communication possible between insight-inviting literary texts and certain reader groups.

A reading list derived from this position may differ significantly from traditional concepts. What has been treated as milestones in the history of literature (e.g. Shakespeare's plays, Romantic poetry, modernist texts) may prove too difficult for certain learner groups, and may have to be replaced by more student-friendly texts/genres (e.g. children's literature, young adult fiction, literature produced for language learners [e.g. simplified versions]).

In line with Bredella's position, I, therefore, view *Literature* as a relational category depending on specific textual, reader-related and institutional interests. From such a perspective, capitalisation practices serve particular ends for particular people in particular cultural settings. In my view, such an approach is opposed to all capitalisation practices which neglect the fluidity and heterogeneity of canon formation. Let me add that such a concept is not against capitalisation as such as long as the criteria underlying the selection of texts are themselves put up for discussion. Actually,

capitalisation practices also have positive implications. Handled self-reflexively, they invite judicious text-selection with reference to particular historical periods, types of literature (e.g. poetry anthologies), reader groups (foreign language learners, different age groups) or learning dimensions (e.g. literature and intercultural learning).

I first came across the term “literature with a small ‘l’” in John McRae’s book of the same name. McRae’s (1991) main interest lies in the language-literature-interface in communicative language learning. For him, the term ‘literature’ stands for “... any kind of material with imaginative or fictional content that goes beyond the purely referential, and brings imaginative interaction, reaction and response into play” (cf. McRae 1991: vii). This definition includes capital-’L’-literature as well as other practices (e.g. “nursery rhymes, fairy tales, comics, songs, TV series or computer games” [McRae 1991: vii]).

For McRae, working with *literature* opens up new avenues for language and literary learning. He argues that in an L2-context, *literature* permits stronger emotional and intellectual involvement than purely referential language learning materials. With reference to literary learning, he claims that a shift to the small ‘l’-category permits the inclusion of materials which have a formative influence on young people in their everyday lives (e.g. fairy-tales, TV series, films, or songs). Furthermore, a more learner-friendly methodology can be introduced with the help of this category. For McRae, *Literature* also stands for entrenched academic

critical practices which may address specialist interests but not those of the majority of student groups. When students cannot relate to such approaches, they may lose interest in literature altogether. McRae’s small-’l’-approach, on the other hand, implies a playful text-methodology as already practised in communicative language learning (e.g. working with jumbled texts, writing a continuation, leaving gaps in texts, etc.). For him, such a methodology permits a high degree of learner involvement and an experiential approach to text analysis.

In its experiential orientation, McRae’s position overlaps with the hermeneutic concepts developed by Bredella or Rosenblatt. For both, meaning creation is the result of specific text-reader interactions. Furthermore, the methods suggested by McRae have also played a significant role in hermeneutic literature didactics, where they have been subsumed under the term *creative text-approaches*². Since McRae’s academic background is applied linguistics, his approach, however, is more focussed on the linguistic composition of literary texts, while hermeneutic concepts have mainly concerned themselves with literature’s aesthetic potential for inviting new insights. In my view each position can be enriched by the other. With the help of applied linguistics, hermeneutic approaches can improve their understanding of the stylistic dimension of texts. On the other hand, proponents of stylistic approaches can learn more about literature’s aesthetic possibilities through confrontation with hermeneutic concepts. Both approaches, in turn, can heighten their awareness of ideological language use through, for example, a text-sociological concept as introduced by Zima.

² There is no denying that this emphasis on ‘creative’ classroom work has heightened learner-involvement and livened up literature classes. What has often been neglected by stylistic and hermeneutic approaches to literature teaching, however, are the cultural influences informing ‘creative’ classroom work (cf. Delaney 2002: 114-133). In line with my dialogic perspective, research with a stronger socio-political focus should be encouraged to highlight the cultural dimension of such a methodology.

For McRae any text inviting imaginative involvement falls into the category of literature with a small 'l'. His position, therefore, goes well beyond Widdowson's, whose understanding of literature only includes texts in written form. Following Sell's prognosis that the range of hybrid text-types (texts bringing together, e.g., written, auditory and visual forms of communication) will continue to grow in the years to come (cf. Sell 2000: 274), literary studies seems well-advised to take such practices on board when they are fictional in orientation. Mere concentration on written language would leave the discussion of such hybrid texts to other disciplines (e.g. communication studies) and might well diminish the social relevance of literary studies for contemporary and future societies.

A concept of literature as wide in scope as that proposed by McRae invites the inclusion of textual practices which so far have received little or no attention within literary studies. In addition to some of the text-types already mentioned (e.g. films or songs), such a concept may also include computer games, music videos, soap operas, Big-Brother-programmes or theme-park attractions. Up to now, the study of such phenomena has fallen into the domain of cultural studies. As mentioned before, cultural studies has drawn attention to the ideological plus to the creative and critical dimension of such cultural practices (e.g.: Fiske's comments on the soap *Married with Children*; cf. Fiske 1994: 189 ff.). This twofold interest is in line with the approach to literature as suggested earlier, which acknowledges both literature's ideology-critical and ideological functions. Nor does it contradict a relational concept of aesthetic value aiming to bring together student interests and insight-provoking texts. On the one hand, soaps, films, songs, etc. often play a significant role in student lives. On the other hand, literary studies can still play its mediating role by selecting practices which seem more

promising in their critical potential.

Keeping in mind the changes in meaning the term literature has undergone over the centuries, future definitions could well encompass a variety of old and new forms of fictional meaning making. Moreover, literary studies could play an active role in such a reconceptualisation of literature, provided its proponents are prepared to include hybrid and popular practices in their research and teaching. With the help of cultural studies approaches plus the category of literature with a small 'l', the textual basis of literary studies, therefore, could be broadened to bring this discipline up to date with new developments in imaginative meaning creation.

6. CONCLUSION

Summing up, the model outlined in this paper gives four different angles from which to look at literature and literature teaching. Through dialogic confrontation with each other, each should ideally be challenged and complemented in the light of the others. On the one hand, this model aims to intensify dialogic relationships between hermeneutic and socio-cultural theories of literature. On the other hand, a case is made for a concept of literature which is wide in scope and open to new developments in imaginative meaning creation.

In its pedagogical orientation, this model invites learners to become actively involved in the exploration of literary texts. As readers, their interests are taken seriously, and they are encouraged to respond both appreciatively and critically to literature. The aesthetic text-approach suggested for classroom work implies a holistic focus, entry into secondary/fictional worlds, and a reader stance based on both emotional involvement and (self-)critical detachment.

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