

Teaching Hungarian Literature to the Undergraduate Foreign Language Major

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This paper aims to address the question of what and how we should teach for foreigners when we are teaching Hungarian literature. Why do we teach literature at all? In an ideal world, the exploration of how to teach literature would be integrated into graduate programs in a systematic fashion based on collaborative work by faculty members in literature and second language acquisition. The reading can facilitate advanced-level language acquisition, second language literacy, and literary competence in a coordinated fashion: reading to learn, writing to learn, reading to improve writing, writing to improve reading, and reading and writing together for better learning. But our readers, our undergraduate foreign language majors, range from students who have just crossed the border between the end of the foreign language requirement (usually an intermediate-level language class) and the beginning of an advanced grammar or a composition and conversation class to those who have just spent a semester or year in Hungary. Regardless of their level of experience, though, these students have three aspects in common, which I will use to inform the framework for a literature course: our students as language majors, our students as language learners, and our students as „nonintended” readers of literary texts in the foreign language.

Methodology in language teaching has been characterized in a variety of ways. Within methodology we have methods and approaches, in which methods are the fixed teaching systems with prescribed techniques and practices, and approaches are language teaching philosophies that can be interpreted and applied in a variety of different ways in the classroom. I try to make the case for revising our curriculums and required readings and let's move towards the more popular texts. Popular culture is often viewed by academics as superficial and underneath the realm of academic composition. Many teachers fight against using popular texts in the classroom as anything more than an enhancement tool. These teachers think that students need to be enveloped in the protection of classic literature. We seek to counteract this idea of popular culture by showing that the „popular” may be used effectively in the composition classroom to teach valuable lessons in literature and generally in Hungarian studies.

After these: a look at how I prepare my Hungarian Philology students to step into the role of the reader. Before students read a short story, which shows urban and rural Hungary, we try to get a feel for what life is like in big cities and small cities in present-day Hungary and how changed it the last 25 years. On the first day of class, students describe and comment on a series of color photographs of urban and rural scenes from throughout Hungary, as a visual introduction to the diversity of the country. Students invariably make comparisons between what they see in the photographs and their own experiences in different parts of Bulgaria. Moreover, the views of rural life in Bulgaria expressed by the urban and suburban students (always the majority) are vigorously challenged by classmates from rural areas. In this way, students' in-class interactions become a sort of preview of the misconceptions that

can arise when urban and rural people come into contact. Next, we read and discuss an essay written at a level appropriate for high school students, on the losers of the political transitions. By the time students start reading the novel, they have a storehouse of vocabulary, images, and ideas of what can happen when rural folk and city dwellers collide. At the same time, the novel creates enough suspense to

keep the readers engaged. This example can serve on how to situate texts linguistically, culturally, and cognitively with regard to the readers in their current or future classrooms. At the same time, the example might show: deriving background knowledge through extensive experience dealing with spoken and written texts. Reading literature is an essential component of understanding a foreign language and culture: extensive reading of literature promotes intellectual comprehension of the target community and facilitates entry into it.

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