



## INTRANSITIVITY OF LITERATURE TEACHING

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### ABSTRACT

The article proposes a teaching practice based on a specific conception of what literature would be. The assumptions are that the literature is not a speech that the literary does not have to be wrapped in a prestigious logic, it is not connected to the well, and that only comes afterwards. From this all emerges a notion of the classroom space as the elaboration of ideas, and not the transmission of content.

KEYWORDS: Literature. Teaching. Streaming.

### I. Considerations about the object and its transmission

Any practice of teaching literature takes place against the backdrop of what is conceived to be its object. This does not mean that the literary must be defined a priori so that it can be studied, since almost always the definition, when based only on the propositional content, is inferior to showing; but it also does not mean that there are no gaps or possible tensions between the implicit understanding of what literature is and what is done with texts in the classroom<sup>2</sup>. If such an understanding works as a kind of regulatory idea that opens the horizon of what can be said, it does not need to be watertight, since it often undergoes mutations with pedagogical practice, nor should it be asphyxiating, relegating texts to the role of example. In any case, however problematic and provisional the connection between theoretical image and teaching activity may be, the relationship is nevertheless sufficiently structuring to be operational. Even in the most extreme cases, as in excessive eclecticism, in the total lack of rigor, it will always be possible to identify an underlying notion, in this gelatinous case, without defined contours, that of literature as a kind of MMA. There are already two consequences here preliminary to be

pointed out. First, obviously, different positions in relation to the literary will imply dissimilar didactic actions; with the exception of anachronisms, those teachers who stopped in time (or who never entered it), teaching reflects, in one way or another, the broader debate of literary theory, especially in relation to incompatible basic concepts. Making such divergences evident to students is important for them to be able to consciously engage in this dispute, based on their own judgment, and not as a result of co-optation by a more engaged or seductive teacher. secondly, in this light it makes no sense to speak of "teaching techniques" in literature. Didactic procedures do not exist in a vacuum, they are not neutral tools, but they are necessarily linked to the theoretical representation that the performance in the classroom both exemplifies and tensions. This is important because, among other things, it marks the separation between the area of Letters and Education: the latter, in the absence of knowledge of the lines of force that make up the field at present, has nothing to say about teaching of literature.

I would like to discuss in this chapter [article] some basics that outline my understanding of what literature is, that represent the result of a twenty-year performance in higher education, as well as pointing out the implications they bring to teaching.

The intention is not to present a comprehensive or detailed view, but only to develop some central points that may be useful for the discussion of what happens in literary studies in the classroom, mainly in higher education. The first idea is that literature is not a speech. There is no kind of attribute or characteristic, quality, trait, aspect or compositional resource that can guarantee alone that a certain text deserves to be called a work. Generally, when reference is made to a "literary discourse", the what we have in mind is a formal or erudite use of language. The presence of functionality, a canon of given works, whose ordering principle is not at stake, an advertising resource. The concept I would like to defend from the literary is another; it would be the result of the successful invoice of the artefact, of its internal articulation: material proof that it exists as an object that is sustained, something that is not derived, that does not simply repeat the findings and achievements of previous writers. Undoubtedly, this obligation of originality and uniqueness is historically determined, having been first postulated in romanticism and pushed to the limit in modernism. It goes against the trends of the present, as it considers enunciatively positions and identity determinations as subordinate to the objectivity of the artifact; moreover, it clashes with the logic of the culture industry, low or high, in the vagabond newspaper or in the academy, which has its guiding principle in public acceptance. The primacy of internal consistency is repeatedly criticized for its supposed elitism, but what is at stake here is not a matter of choice of objects (typical emphasis of consumer society), but of their productivity. A text based on worn formulas will not allow one to say anything relevant about it without being distorted or criticism or artifact. There are countless books, usually considered "literary", that do not deserve the name. Unsuccessful works are nothing but documents of their failure; the exception to this is when a specific cause is found that offers a reason for failure. If such a cause is cognitively productive, if it brings something revealing, the text will be a work in spite of itself.

This emphasis on internal consistency, on formal articulation, forces the reader to make value judgments, and to authorize himself to discard what

he does not consider appropriate. It is curious to note that the qualitative distinction, once the most fundamental assumption of criticism, has become a target of suspicion today, as if each judgment based on the opposition of the good versus the bad hides some spurious interest in itself. There is no space here to discuss the crisis of aesthetic autonomy; it should be enough to point to the relationship between the weakening of valuing discernment and the deepening of mercantile logic in the context of culture, which rhymes with the ideology of multiplicity today hegemonic. That critics increasingly resemble publishers' publicists and newspapers, that certain ideas impose themselves with the inexorable force of fashion, is something that can be brought negatively to the teaching of literature, through a maxim of two ends: it is not necessary to praise, and imperfection is not demerit. The confrontation with the object does not require dazzle, and flaws, which are different from the failure mentioned above, often contribute to the productivity of the text. The reverence for literature not only helps the trade of letters, but also makes it difficult to penetrate the singularity of the work. In the classroom, this perspective translates into an investigative stance that refuses to conceive the reader as inferior to the object. Instead of idolatry, which projects an image of literature as something untouchable, an ethereal sublimity, it is better to work with another representation and think of it as a toy, or as made of something that can be touched, smeared, like clay or mud.

From all of this, two aspects of literature derive that clash with common sense. First, it has no connection with the moral world. Literature does not humanize man; however much the contrary is said, it does not make you a better person. Taking Machado de Assis to the favela does not help anyone, not even the slum dwellers. Teaching is not a priesthood, nor is school an inherently benign place. Teaching is not a mission, it is not a gesture of generosity and love for one's neighbor: it is a profession like any other, and like any other, it should have a remuneration compatible with the time needed for the training of the workforce. At most it would be possible to say that literature broadens mental horizons and strengthens

intelligence, which can be used for any purpose, including, of course, the most harmful. The connection between literature and power has already been sufficiently mapped in history to dispel any doubts in this regard; Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is only a late manifestation of this, which often leads to the opposite error, that of reducing literature to a pure game of interests, as if there were no objectivity in the artifacts. If indifference to the Good makes it difficult for literature to be institutionally and socially justified, the second aspect further deepens its legitimation crisis, as, as such, it has no use (Durão 2008b). Any knowledge that is sought in a specific work can be more profitably obtained in a particular discipline. It is not through the study of fictional characters that the human psyche is known, but through psychology and psychoanalysis, just as it is not profitable to seek historical, social or anthropological inspiration in works - or, better said, literary texts can be used by other disciplines, thus ceasing to be them. However, there is a usefulness in uselessness: it works as a criticism of a reality that cannot conceive that things can exist on their own, in which everything has to serve something (read: everything has to generate profit). This does not mean that literature and knowledge are antithetical, but that the latter must be obtained through the mediation of what makes the literary artifact an object, as already mentioned, its internal consistency. When this is safeguarded, a world of possibilities opens up for dialogue with other areas of knowledge, including its criticism. It is no coincidence that literature was at the center of the emergence of Theory (Durão, 2011), which has played a central role in several trans disciplinary debates, such as those of globalization and postmodernity, and which tools for reading the theory to migrate to other disciplines. In summary, the insertion of literature in the modern division of knowledge is productively paradoxical, since on the one hand it respects it, because it wants an autonomous scope, governed by its own laws to be respected, on the other it questions it, showing how this fragmentation charges a price the experience.

The second basic idea derives from what has already been exposed. The consistency needed for a successful text is hardly noticeable immediately;

instead, it must be extracted through interpretation: the literary occurs a posteriori. And as the interpretation takes place at a specific moment, it is not possible to speak of "great literature" as something ontologically existing, an essence hovering above time. Literature deserves this name only as long as it is able to raise questions relevant to our present; if not, it becomes a historical document or social testimony, the object of another discipline or anecdotal curiosity. No author is immune to the effects of time. In many cases, the decades reveal layers of meaning totally hidden from contemporaries, which today seem to us to be absolutely constitutive. Madame Bovary's style, for example, can only appear as an element of composition once adultery has left to mobilize passions; as long as he is capable of general outrage, the moral impact will erase the accuracy of the writing. In others, however, there are changes that hinder access to the work, which may render it inapprehensible. A current and dramatic example is the destructive force of reproduction. Beethoven's "Pour Elise" has become inaudible today with the gas trucks and on the phones' standby, because when we hear the original piece performed, it is difficult not to come to mind the reproductions heard. This also applies to the issue of adaptation. It is by no means a rhetorical question to ask whether Shakespeare, in the face of all appropriations (which include Monica and Carolina), would still be able to generate an aesthetic experience ... In one way or another, it is important to bring to the classroom that sense of actuality necessary from a literature that is alive, not a succession of inert monuments.

The fundamental implication for the pedagogical practice that takes place this conception of literature as a propitious object for the formulation of hypotheses (Durão, 2015b) is that teaching does not happen through the transmission of watertight knowledge. All that information that is usually brought up - from the author's birth and death dates, his biography, the social context, the influences, the characteristics of the period style to which he belongs etc. - all this is only valid when subordinated to an interpretive hypothesis. It will help to establish the object as such. And note: it is not something reserved for graduate students, but it

should accompany the teaching of literature from the beginning. It is up to the teacher to differentiate the types of reading hypothesis according to the student's level. Issues such as the scope and depth of the bibliography, the solidity and complexity of the concepts used, the familiarity with the field in which the work is inserted, the rigor of the concatenation of ideas and the exposition of the argument - all this can vary greatly from the initiation (even from secondary education) to doctorate, without changing the investigative stance.

In opposition to a widespread schism today, and already indicated above, there is no place in this approach for the reader's "position" of speech; the subjective aspect of the interpretation is not something that is added from the outside, but acts in the construction of the object's art factuality. In this mutual mediation between subject and thing, detail plays an important role. Again, it is impossible to properly discuss, in the space of this text, the issue of close reading, of close reading, in current literary studies. This practice, which has already been associated with the tout court interpretation, is currently under attack. There are two basic arguments that can be remembered here. In the first place, attention is drawn to its artificiality, since close reading is typical of the classroom and finds no parallel in any social sphere. It would even be possible to say that it is so closely linked to the institutionalization of literary studies that its main function would be to provide a technique that shows the professionalization of the critic / teacher, legitimizing his job and salary. The second argument goes in the opposite direction, arguing that close reading is harmful to the critic's and professor's metier because it adheres to a limited number of texts. As it presupposes a density of the object, which in turn makes it visible and verifiable, it does not apply very well to medium ship, to the vast majority of what was and is published. The horizon of works that could be read closely would therefore be disproportionately small in view of the gigantic apparatus of teaching literature, which involves the training of thousands of students year after year.

Analysing these two arguments calmly, it is possible to see that they do not reach the heart of

close reading as a practice. That it is only possible at the university should not be an argument against it; on the contrary, it makes us realize how much the academy is a special space and how it can be a pole of resistance to neglect due to increasingly faster messages, which generate a decoding process that is increasingly closer to a neurological reaction, a Pavlovian reflex. On the other hand, to condemn close reading for not being adapted to the modus operandi of the contemporary university means to bow to the imperative that it be productivist and competitive. The disproportion between the number of major works and teaching and research activity is based on the need to generate new knowledge quickly and continuously. If these works could inhabit their own temporality, if they did not need to provide so many answers, they could easily exist in a slower academy.

The constitutive and intrinsically argumentative character of the reading hypothesis added to the emphasis on detail and detail transform the classroom into an elaborate environment. As from this perspective, subject and object necessarily mix, even if the ideas exposed are not new, the aspect of discovery in the transmission of knowledge must come through. In other words, what is taught is first of all a relationship with the object, a structured and rigorous way of appropriating it. Undoubtedly, the elaboration process must be open to students' participation; however, I suspect a completely democratic approach, which conceives the construction of knowledge in the classroom as an equal activity, in which everyone has the same degree of participation. In an ideal world, this might be achievable; in ours, the feasible thing is for the student to follow the steps of the teacher's reasoning and mimetically learn how to build a reading. Thinking aloud involves a sui generis type of intersubjectivity; the attentive gaze of the students, although silent, is a mark of presence and encourages the teacher to go ahead.

That is why many technological didactic resources are not well suited to the literature class. To be more specific, it would be possible to postulate the maxim "the better the power point, the worse the lesson." It is important, not only because it calls

attention to something that technophile would easily overlook, but because it reveals, negatively, about the speech dynamics of this strange genre. What makes the power point difficult is the element of elaboration present in the class, mentioned above, the fact that, similarly to writing and with some proximity to psychoanalysis, it embraces the unpredictable, which only after speaking do you come to know that he knew, and that comes with the presence of the students, from questions or the mere attentive look. In power point, the path is already outlined, while the fun of the lesson is not being sure exactly where you will get. Instead of the possibility of something new, the PowerPoint encourages the repetition of the content previously established. The speaker now is actually the machine, which the teacher just reiterates; even in the spatial arrangement, this is clear: no longer the teacher in motion, thinking, associating ideas and wandering around the room, but the clicker beside the screen, which can no longer be obstructed: a stage with the machine in the centre, almost an object of worship. With a little imagination it is possible to insert the PowerPoint into a story of the predetermination of the contents, whose next stage would be the loss of control over the flow of information, a series of images with preordained speed, which the teacher must follow.

The elaboration process sets in motion a specific desire dynamic. As knowledge is not located in an outer sphere, but occurs in action (again, even if new ideas do not appear, the discovery procedure remains) the intersubjective relationship is subordinated to that with the object. Over the years I have come to a formula that I like for its clarity. On the first day of class I usually say to students: "I have no desire for your desire". This signals that they must be responsible for it (or for its lack), and that I will not try to use strategies that aim to interest them, or to make the matter more palatable. Trying to "bridge the gap" with the students' world, a world that becomes more distant for the teacher every year, means giving in to a specular game that is bound to fail. If I am to captivate the class, it is because, deep down, I do not believe in the value of literature; moreover, my desire for the student to learn inevitably enacts a desire for him, and,

consequently, puts him in a position of minority. Instead, when proposing to establish a relationship as faithful as possible with the object, it is allowed that it appears in its greatest vehemence, and that the relationship with it can be desired, and consequently apprehended. Note well, this does not imply that students should remain silent, but that their participation should ideally accompany the development of the interpretive hypothesis, which includes disagreeing with it or offering counter-arguments.

Here I would like to say two words on the issue of difficulty in the humanities in general and in literary studies in particular. The theme is certainly complex and cuts across all areas of the field. The difficulty may be the result of an authorial plan, of historical or cultural distance, or of the very conditions in which teaching occurs; it is easily seen as a marker, be it positive, of a community of interpreters, or negative, as an elitist strategy, a kind of savings that provides interest on symbolic capital. But perhaps the most appropriate distinction is that between a necessary difficulty for the artefact and a superfluous one, the result of a subjective investment that erases the object. Of course, this differentiation is often problematic, but the embarrassment to decide ("am I the one who doesn't understand, or is it the text that doesn't make sense?") is a positive experience, precisely in what is distressing? The teaching of difficulty here - and the ambiguity of the genitive is pertinent - needs to mediate two opposites that are equally unsatisfactory. Too weak an "I" will see wisdom where there is nothing but deception; their lack of understanding will be transformed into veneration of the name. An overly rigid self will not have the patience and the flexibility to open up to something different.

The difficulty is not an obstacle to be overcome, something that once overcome would reveal a perpetual clarity; it is, rather, a state with which it is necessary to learn to live. When the student says, "teacher: I didn't understand anything", one can directly refute and say that total incomprehension is impossible, that there will always be, despite yourself, something to process, a thread, or grain, of meaning, which can be

extensively expanded in several directions, even if eventually wrong. (There is pleasure in that.) In this case, "I didn't understand anything" could be interpreted as a sign of laziness or even resistance to something that has already been understood. However, it is often more worthwhile to turn the sentence inside out and congratulate the student. In our daily lives we understand too much, we understand everything, from billboards, to soap operas, films, newspapers, clothes ... All we do, all the time, is to understand - and even the underlying intentions: who does not buy? Understand that the ultimate, inescapable objective of advertising is to sell the product? Given this, not understanding anything arises as a gift, a deeply dispiriting experience. And if the difficulty is something with which it is necessary to learn to live with, then that pedagogical representation that tries to start with the easiest to progressively ascend to the most complex is not appropriate, each stage always clear, always under control of the teacher and student. Adorno formulated it very appropriately, in the context of sociology: "God knows, I have neither the intention to be light-hearted nor to encourage any voluntary and amateur drive to study. It is just a matter of expressing the experience of the consequent distinction between academic study and school that not everything occurs gradually and mediated, without gaps, but according to certain leaps. That suddenly we have a light, as they say, and when we have been busy with the subject for a long time, even if at first with possible difficulties in understanding, simply due to the duration of the study and, above all, to the duration from contact with the matter, there is a kind of qualitative leap through which the things that were not so clear at the beginning are clarified"(2007: 51). Reconciling with the difficulty is already half way to have a happy intellectual life.

## II. Social mismatch

Everything I have said so far refers to a particular way of conceiving the literary and of transforming that understanding into pedagogical practices. Going against the norm of customary didactics, I defended a radical inactivity in the relationship with the object, without which it does not appear as itself. What is up to the students is to

contribute to its construction: the exact opposite of "each one has his own reading". This, however, does not take into account the insertion of the area of Letters in society, which ultimately determines the origin of the student. Unlike careers such as doctor, engineer or lawyer, there is no adequate social representation of the professional of Literature. It would certainly be necessary here to carry out a comprehensive empirical study to characterize it; however, there are researches that fully show the insignificance of literature for society, and thus provide evidence for the distance between what is done in academia and what, outside the walls, is imagined as literature.

Although as speculation, it would be possible to postulate that there are two main images that motivate an adolescent to take the entrance exam for Letters. The first is that the university trains teachers for high school, and that their classes would be of the same mold, just more difficult; learning would thus be grammar, mainly syntactic analysis, and literature according to the styles of the time. In this case, there are those who want to enter the language teaching market, the only strong point of contact between Literature and the market. For these students, who aim to master a foreign language, or Portuguese for foreigners, literature will tend to be a hindrance. At best it will be seen as a good source for improving vocabulary. The second would associate the literary with a space for the expression of the singular self and its abyssal interiority; hence its proximity to the lyrical, the writing of diaries, etc. Underlying this conception, in addition to isolation, there is an idea of literature as linked to the beautiful and the ineffable. If the university is competent, this type of representation will go down the drain in the first semester. The emphasis will not be on writing, but on reading, not on self-expression, but on text analysis. In short, most students of Literature discover their metier as they learn it, and must adapt to what the university offers, leaving behind their preconceptions.

However, in addition to the absence of social representation of the professional of Literature, it is important to underline that the characterization of the literary outlined above clashes in several aspects with values that are widely disseminated socially.

Each of the aspects developed above conflicts with provisions rooted in different groups. It is always necessary to remember the pre-aesthetic force, which, in the extreme of intolerance, feels hurt by the freedom of literature to say everything. However, even for liberal ideology there are points of tension. As previously mentioned, the conception that the object's art factuality, its construction character, can only emerge from the presumption of lack of utility and interest does not harmonize with a worldview in which only what it generates is justified profit. There is no reason, according to the current neoliberal logic, for maintaining a national system of teaching literature based on the assumptions presented here, as something existing in itself. Bearing this in mind would change academic policy stances (including strikes), which give the humanities a solidity they lack.

The inadequacy of literary studies for the dominant social ethos - or, to put it more clearly, for capitalism - could be much more developed here; indeed, a systematic and comprehensive study is yet to be done. However, the bases for the conclusion that I wanted to reach are already given, namely, that there is no possible mediation between the teaching of literature and its position in society. In other words, the gap between the literary and the spirit of the time can be seen in the relationship with the object, but not itself the focus of teaching. Hence it is impossible to "captivate", "interest" or even "seduce" students. The resulting intransitivity can be symbolized in several ways. In particular, I would think of a tripod composed by the rigor of discipline, a certain persistent courage and, without a doubt, a melancholy loneliness. Which one will fall on is an issue for each of us.

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