

## The Literary text Wants Readers, not Readings: The Implications of Louis Rosenblatt's Transaction Theory in the Literature Class

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### Abstract:

The paper demonstrates that Louis Rosenblatt's transaction approach to teaching literature would constitute a great gain if applied in the Algerian context. In its emphasis on the paramount importance of the learner, his personal experience and the pertinence of his socio-cultural background, transaction theory is likely to enhance students' involvement with the text and their appreciation of reading. This research paper has used, as an instrument, two questionnaires. The first is designed for students to investigate their attitudes towards literature. It aims at eliciting responses to whether they apply Rosenblatt's theory or not. The second is designed in order to investigate teachers' practices and beliefs about literature teaching and the extent they incorporate the principles of Rosenblatt's theory into their curriculum. As Rosenblatt's theory has many implications for the literature class, the paper ends with some suggestions for implementing a transactional curriculum in the Algerian universities.

*Keywords:* Reader-response theory, transaction theory, aesthetic reading, efferent reading, learner-centered approach, traditional method.

## Introduction

Recent research findings have evinced that effective teaching and learning require the participation of the learner in the teaching-learning process. However, and despite the CLT's (communicative language teaching) and the LMD system's (License, master, doctorate) call for learner-centeredness, the traditional method of spoon-feeding, the withdrawal and detachment of the learner are still rife in the literature class. This paper suggests Louis Rosenblatt's transaction theory to teach literary texts to university students of Algeria. Rosenblatt's theory conceives the reading process as a transaction between the reader and the text out of which meaning is generated. Unlike the other reader-response models, the transactional approach accords the reader and the text an approximately equal importance. There is always a mutual and reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text because "books do not simply happen to people. People also happen to books. A Story or poem or play is merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols." (2005, p.63) Though there are many reader-response models, the transactional approach has many potentials. It accords a cardinal importance to the psychology of the learner, which is emphasised by the most recent approaches to EFL teaching. It renders students more active and helps them develop their creative and critical thinking. Of utmost importance, there are striking affinities between this theory and the pedagogy of the learner-centered approach, which the Algerian educational system has attempted to foster by implementing the LMD system, which gives a key importance to learners' autonomy and self-directed learning. What has also prompted the choice of Rosenblatt's approach is the fact that the latter is unknown by many teachers of literature. The traditional methods, which are still used in our universities, are likely to enhance aliteracy and make students' motivation for reading ooze away in the mist of time. Hence, this theory is proposed to increase and save students' readability. The paper aspires to tergiverstae the outmoded methods, which are inconsistent with the principles of the LMD system and those of the learner-centred approach. This approach, which is confluent with the principles of the learner-centeredness seems to be very promising: it is likely to promote learners' autonomy and develop a never-ending love and passion for reading literature.

### 1-Reader response theory VS Learner-Centeredness

Reader response theory comes as a reaction to textual and formalist approaches, like New Criticism, Structuralism, and deconstruction, which undermine the reader's role and stress the objectivity of the text. In its emphasis on the student, the learning process, and the classroom interaction, reader-response approach has many affinities with the communicative language teaching (CLT). According to Marzieh Bagherkazemi (2010), reader-response approach "makes literature more accessible by activating students' background knowledge" (p.5) This approach "harnesses emotional reactions for classroom instruction" (p.5) Reader-response approach "increases students' individual and group participation and motivation since it personalizes the learning experience." (p.5) In addition to that, it "provides for a student-centered and process-oriented classroom" (p.5)

Very much like the learner-centred approach, reader response theory is based on a constructivist view of learning. Aly Anwar Amer (2003) maintains that reading, in this approach, "is a reflective and creative process and meaning is self-constructed [...] In other words, readers are independent makers of meaning. They view text as a construct. They construct their own meaning." (p.68) Louis Rosenblatt's theory, in particular, views the act of reading as "a

‘composing’ activity.”(1993,p.383) Like writing, reading is a productive skill rather than a receptive one.

## 2-Transactional Approach to Reading

Rosenblatt’s theory seeks to engage the reader in an intellectual cogitation rather than imparting him directly with the meaning, thus giving him a more important role. The act of reading deconstructs the binary opposition reader/text. Hence, the convergence between the reader and the text brings meaning into existence. In explaining the transaction, which occurs between the reader and the text in the reading process, Rosenblatt (1986) states that

It is necessary to make a distinction between the text and ‘the meaning’ that a particular reader evokes from it during the reading. The text is a set of signs. The poem or play is an event in time; it is the evocation that happens through a coming-together of a reader and a text. To emphasize their reciprocal relationship, I term it *a transaction*. (p.70)

So, transaction theory challenges the sharp demarcation between the reader and the text, which is promoted by traditionalists. It gives allowance for a symbiotic nourishing relationship. Transaction, in Rosenblatt’s parlance, is “perhaps similar to the electric circuit set up between a negative and positive pole, each of which is inert without the other.” (1969, p.44) Thus, the text’s meaning is always located in the in-between. It is neither completely inherent in the text nor solely resident in the reader. It emerges from the coming-together of the reader and the text.

## 3-The Reader’s Psychology in the Transactional approach

Transaction theory entices students to respond to texts giving vent to their pent up emotions and ideas. Unlike the traditional approaches, it promotes their personal involvement in the text, taking account of their socio-historical and cultural demarcations. Rosenblatt grants a key importance to the psychology of the reader, which has been overlooked in the previous approaches. According to Rosenblatt (1969), “The transactional view is especially reinforced by the frequent observation of psychologists that interest, expectations, anxieties, and other patterns based on past experience affect what an individual perceives.”(p.44) The construction of meaning relies on the reader’s emotional disposition, thoughts, and memories. In Rosenblatt’s view, the text’s meaning cannot be sought apart from the reader’s personal experience and background, which are germane to the interpretative process. In her words, “the quality of our literary experience depends not only on the text, on what the author offers, but also on the relevance of past experiences and present interests that the reader brings to it.” (1960, p.305)

In the communicative approach to language teaching, there is a vehement denunciation of the objectification of the target language. Michael Breen and Christopher Candin (2001) spell out their vitriolic criticism of the traditional method of teaching, which seeks to

separate the learner from the knowledge to be learned, to ‘objectify’ the target language as something completely unfamiliar to the learner [...] We have tended to see the target only in terms of ‘linguistic competence’ or textual knowledge [...] Thus ideational and interpersonal knowledge, which continually interact with textual knowledge and from which textual knowledge evolves, has tended to be overlooked or neutralized. (p.12-13)

Indeed, Michael Breen and Christopher Candin view of learning dovetail with Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading; they meet on the point that a purely linguistic view of language is likely to result in a feeling of estrangement, defamiliarization and detachment in the literature class.

#### 4-Transaction VS New Criticism

Rosenblatt reproaches the traditionalists, mainly the New critics, for their ignorance of the psychology of the learner. According to her, New Critics "did perform an important service in insisting that the text was not simply a biographical or historical document [...] In creating the image of the impersonal critic, they neglect to recognize themselves and others as first of all individuals, even at their most impersonal, still highly personal readers" (1978, p.139) Indeed, New critics, the formalists and the textualists, view the text an autotelic artifact, an autonomous or self-sufficient entity. They have taught students not to divagate from the text, which is the main concern, to what the text might evoke in them.

This objectivity of language creates barriers, which cannot be trespassed. Rosenblatt insists that "we must view language as an intermingling of cognitive and affective elements, an internal merging of sound, feeling, and ideas." (1986, p.70) Viewing language in this way makes reading an intensely and pleasurable and enjoyable experience.

In her outright criticism of the New Critics' notion of the "close reading", Rosenblatt maintains that the term should not be understood as the purging of the interpretative process from the readers' otiose personal experience. Instead, "Close reading requires close attention *both* to the text and to one's personal links with it." (1986, p. 82) So, the text should not be approached as a hermetic, self-sufficient whole, which is immune from the reader's emotions and personal life. Interpretation, accordingly, "is not the text, but the structure of thought and feeling that the reader has conjured up during the transaction with the text." (1986, p. 78) The text does not exist in a vacuum. Meaning is constructed in relation to the reader's personal experience and background, which interfere and impinge on the reading process. In highlighting the importance of the reader, Rosenblatt (2005) writes: "A story or poem or play is merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols." (p.62-63)

In its focus on the active role of the learner as a bedrock principle of literary interpretation, transactional theory reverberates with the call for a learner-centred approach. In defining the notion of learner-centredness, David Nunan and Clarice Lamb state that "learner-centred approach classrooms are those in which learners are actively involved in their own learning processes." (2001, p.27) Indeed, transactional theory and learner-centred approach are Siamese twins.

Central to Rosenblatt's transaction theory is the idea of literature as a living-through. During the act of reading, students enter an imaginative world and participate in its events. According to Rosenblatt (2005), "Literature provides a *living through*, not simply knowledge *about*." (p.63) Because it makes students emotionally and intellectually engaged, transactional reading procures pleasure and satisfaction. It helps cultivate the love and interest for literature in students; hence, it acts as an incentive for a continual transaction with literary texts.

### 5-The Use of Schemata in the Transactional Process

In the transactional process, the reader brings his own experience, his prior attitudes, and his socio-cultural background to interpret the text. As Rosenblatt (1993) points out, "Each individual, whether speaker, listener, writer, or reader, brings to the transaction a personal linguistic-experiential reservoir, the residue of past transactions in life and language." (p. 381) Indeed, Rosenblatt's view collides head on with that of David Nunan, who maintains that schemata, which means background knowledge, enables learners to recreate and reconstruct the text's meaning. In his words, "Given the fact that discourse comprehension is a process of utilizing linguistic cues and background knowledge to reconstruct meaning, these schemata are extremely important, particularly to second and foreign language learners." (1991, p.68) Abbas Pouhosein Gilakjani and Seyedeh Masoumeh Ahmadi, in turn, emphasize the importance of schemata, in the act of reading, as follows:

Reading is an interactive process in which readers construct a meaningful representation of text using their schemata. Schema theory describes the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend that text. All readers carry different schemata (background information). This is an important concept in EFL teaching and reading tasks are designed to activate the learners' schemata. (2011, p.142)

In the reading process, the student shapes the literary work to fit the pattern of his own experiences and background. He situates the text in his socio-cultural matrix, infusing the treasure house of his experience. So, teachers should aim at activating students' schemata in order to imbue the text with rich ramifications of meaning.

Rosenblatt's transactional theory borrows too much from John Dewey's philosophy of education, which emphasizes the interrelatedness between the learning process and the learner's personal experience. Dewey (1997) asserts that there is "an organic connection between education and personal experience." (p.25) Dewey abhorrently criticizes the traditional method of teaching, which expels the learner's personal life; students find what they learn "foreign to the situations of life outside the school." (1997, p. 27)

### 6-Critical Thinking

In the last decades, there has been an increasing call for developing students' critical thinking. In explaining the role of literature in improving students' critical thinking, Rosenblatt writes:

For the individual, language can be conceived as a kind of reservoir, the residue of past experiences with words in life situations [...] As we seek to make meaning in [...] reading, [...] this reservoir is all that we have to draw on, to choose from [...] The process of reading a text can be understood, then, as a process of thinking, of selecting and synthesizing elements from the linguistic reservoir in order to organize meaning. The verbal signs arouse certain organismic states, alert certain areas of memory, stir up certain ranges of feelings, from which relevant elements can be selected. " ( 1986, p.72-73)

Rosenblatt insists on the role of literature in promoting students' critical thinking, She states that "the sense of the intimate meaningfulness of literature is basic to wholesome growth in the kinds of abilities traditionally thought of as literary and critical."(2005, p. 63) Transactional theory is not a mere passive emotional response. The student is required to be voracious and industrious, to produce and recreate rather than to digest. In the intellectually and emotionally active process of reading, the student is urged to reflect on his literary experience and to take a critical stance towards what he reads.

### **7-The Problem of Correctness**

Rosenblatt's theory conceives the transactional process as an event, which includes a reader and a text in a particular time and space. As she points out, "The transaction involving a reader and a printed text thus can be viewed as an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader." (1969, p. 45) Since the text's meaning is a happening or an occurrence, which involves a particular reader in a particular context, it follows that there is no single or monolithic meaning. Any literary work is fluid, flexible, imbued with multiple shades of meanings, which differ from the author's intention. According to Rosenblatt, "Questions about the 'correctness' of the readings have often been raised." Even if the author "has somewhere stated his intention, or if his biography suggests a particular autobiographical intention, we should still have to depend on our own reading of the text to decide whether it actually fulfils that intention." (1986, p.69) Since meaning is generated in accordance with the reader's personal, historical, and socio-cultural make-up, the literary text is infused with different meanings, and it is open to a wide range of interpretations.

Indeed, teacher-centered method, which assumes that the text has a correct interpretation, precludes students' emotional and intellectual responses. This method of teaching is embedded in a banking conception of education in which the role of the teacher is to "spoon-feed" the learners, who are passive recipients of the teacher's ideas and attitudes. This belief in the existence of a correct interpretation makes students flee from the literature option in the third year. They find literary interpretation very difficult to reach.

The rightness of interpretation discourages students to make efforts to interpret the text on their own. It makes the teacher assume the role of the purveyor of the right judgment. Hence, he rejects students' personal views, which are likely to stretch their critical skills. This has detrimental effects on the learners, who are likely to be more detached from the teaching-learning process and more reluctant to release their pent-up feelings and thoughts about the literary work. Indeed, their cognitive abilities will remain stagnant and wither with the passage of time.

### **8- Close Reading VS Readings About the Text**

#### *8-A-Reliance on Critics' Views About the text*

Teachers and students often come to the class memorizing what famous critics have said about the literary text. Students are even given titles of some critical books to read. In Rosenblatt's view, the belief in an existing right interpretation makes students "anxious to have the correct labels-the right period, the biographical background, the correct evaluation. They read literary histories and biographies, critical essays, introduction to editions, and then, if they have

time, they read the works. The quest is for the sophisticated interpretation and the accepted judgment.” (2005, p. 68) To save time and flee from the herculean efforts the act of reading demands, students resort to glaring critics in search for the valid and right interpretation. The belief in correctness, and may be the lack of motivation, makes students diffident about giving alternative views to those authoritative ones. This compels them to slavishly memorize the teacher’s and others’ critical views about the text, and then regurgitate them in the day of the exam.

Robert E. Probst, in turn, sharply criticize this method of approaching literary works. By suggesting for their students a list of glaring critics, teachers, in fact, reinforce “the notion that there [is] a perfect reading hiding out there somewhere.” (1994, p.38) So, only “the best, the most widely-published critics, might lead [students] to it.” (p.38) Probst adds that the first thing students learn quickly is that their “own, private, personal experiences would do little to help [them] find it. They were idiosyncratic, unique, almost deviant, and the poet clearly could not have had them in mind as he wrote, so they were better disregarded and ignored if [they hope] to find the right reading, the correct interpretation.”(p.38) This traditional method is likely to detriment the learning process because it puts students at the periphery, and devoid the teaching-learning process from its humanistic aspect.

There is an urgent need to tergiversate this teaching method whereby teachers give an ideal interpretation of the foreign culture and ascribe a single meaning to the text, which always parrots the one intended by the author himself. Students must be prevented from being slaves to the York Notes, which represent the critical views of others. This, in fact, makes them prey to the danger of losing their critical abilities and audacities. Students need to be convinced that the literary text needs readers not readings. If they read the York Notes, it should be just to see the variety of interpretations and to compare between multifarious points of view. In other words, literature might be a very effective means to develop students’ critical thinking and enhance their motivation because students learn better if they feel that they are responsible and that their opinions are valued.

Teacher’s undermining of the interactional experience between the text and the learner and of what happens in this transactional process is in sharp contrast with the communicative approach’s increasing call for a process-oriented approach. B. Kumaravivelu states that the radical refinement of communicative language teaching “focused more on the psycholinguistic processes of learning rather than the pedagogic products of teaching. This resulted in what was called a ‘strong’ or a ‘process-oriented’ version of communicative language teaching.” (2008, p.132) Jack C. Richards quotes Jacobs and Farrel, who identify the key components of the shift towards a CLT. One of these components is “Focusing greater attention from on the learning process rather than on products that learners produce. This shift is known as the move from product-oriented to process-oriented instruction.” (2006, p.24) Very much like the CLT, transactional approach accords more importance to the learning process than to the final product.

### *8-B- Literature as Biography and history*

Another method which students use to reach the text’s meaning is to read about the author’s life and the socio-historical context in which the text was composed instead of making a close reading of the text. This is mainly because reading the text demands an intellectual cogitation from which our students always flee. As Rosenblatt points out, “It is much easier in the classroom to deal with ideas and information about literature than it is with literature itself.”

(2005, p. 68) So, students are prone to avoid the intellectual efforts the literary text demands and resort, instead, to mere concerns with the text's history and its author's biography. Approaching the text in this way is likely to sterilize and vitiate students' critical audacities, making them unable to handle their emotional and intellectual responses. Hence, their critical abilities will ooze away in the mist of time.

Biography and history should not be central to the literature class. They should rather serve the ultimate aim, which is literary experience. According to Rosenblatt, "Literary history, the history of ideas, biography, technical analysis, are all, of course, valid and essential subjects for study, when they provide a context for literature and illuminate the literary work-the literary experience-itself." (1960, p.310) Though it might involve references to literary techniques, history and biography, which are peripheral matters, interpretation should start from the immediate encounter between the reader and the text. The text needs readers, not readings about the text.

In discussing the drawbacks of the exclusive focus on biographical and historical readings about the text, James Moffett and Betty Jane Wagner state that spoon-feeding the learners with knowledge about the text is likely to create boredom and ennui. In their denunciation of this method of teaching, they write:

By focusing readers at the outset on preselected frames of reference, both historical and thematic approaches meddle terribly with reader response. Such approaches have made too many students dislike both reading and literature. While taking control of texts away from readers, they also misrepresent literature, which affects people personally, what they think and feel. It is a figurative, artful mode of discourse, an experience itself as well as a perception about experience, created not merely to be understood but to be undergone. (1991, p.70)

Indeed, this focus on the things outside the text and not on the text itself will not just sterilize students' critical thinking but also makes reading literature a repulsive task.

## 9-Aesthetic Vs Efferent Reading

### *9-A-Efferent Reading*

Rosenblatt identifies two kinds of reading: the aesthetic and the efferent one. "The efferent stance [...] is involved primarily with analyzing, abstracting, and accumulating what will be retained after the reading. Examples would include reading to acquire information, directions for action, or solutions to a problem." (1993, p.383) In the efferent reading, literary experience is reduced to informational readings in which the soul of literature is lost. A predominantly efferent reading is useful in reading texts, which are scientific, expository, argumentative, and historical, but they do not serve a lot in literary texts. An efferent-oriented reading focuses mainly on acquiring factual information or analyzing the work's structure. It is mainly concerned with identifying the setting, characterization, recalling details, paraphrases, summaries, literary techniques, the plot, imagery, symbolism...etc.

In her comments on the traditional method of teaching literature, which is based on this mode of reading, Rosenblatt writes: "Reading was taught as a set of disparate skills to be demonstrated largely through answering multiple-choice questions. Stories, and even poems,

were often used for that purpose.” (1993, p.378) Literature, accordingly, is deemed a means to build up one’s vocabulary and improve one’s language. Asking superficial questions about facts makes literature more akin to a scientific document. It trains students to view reading as an act of eliciting and accumulating fact.

This informative or efferent-oriented aspect of reading is still widely spread in the Algerian universities. It is crystal clear in the exam questions, which are still given in the form of multiple choice questions or close-ended questions about factual information. According to Eric Paulson,

if we are interested in readers learning facts from literature, then worksheets and multiple choice tests can ascertain whether the students have read the book. But if we believe that authors hope we walk away from their books with more than just a mental list of trivia, we must approach reading pedagogy in a way that reflects that purpose. (2002-2003, p.11)

An efferent-oriented approach, for Rosenblatt, makes students “ignore or even distrust their own responses to literature. They may therefore reject literature altogether as irrelevant to themselves. Or they may divert their original interest in literature to studies around and about literature.” (2005, p. 68) So, students will be demotivated to read literary texts because they view reading as a mere act of collating facts or information. This efferent reading denies students any voice to give their own interpretations. They, instead, restrict and limit the freedom of self-expression. Applying this routine approach is likely to hinder students’ cognitive development because focus, in this approach, is on easily checked information.

### *9-B-Aesthetic Reading*

According to Rosenblatt (1993), “In the aesthetic stance, attention is focused primarily on experiencing what is being evoked, lived through, during the reading process.(p. 383) So, in the aesthetic mode of reading, the reader becomes emotionally and intellectually involved with the text; in other words, he experiences ‘a living through’.

Transaction theory gives primary importance to aesthetic reading because it engages students intellectually and emotionally. According to Rosenblatt,

Past experiences, prior knowledge, social and psychological assumptions, surrounding circumstances, may play an important role in the making of meaning even with the seemingly most objective or impersonal or logical of texts [...] Nevertheless, since the aim in efferent reading is to eliminate the personal and emphasize the public, referential, testable interpretations, there is greater possibility for the kind of consensus in construing the literal meaning that we have found not decisive for aesthetic readings. (1986, p.78)

In the efferent reading, which implies factual knowledge, there is no disagreement among students; hence, it is the aesthetic reading, which is of utmost importance. In order to motivate students and give them a more active role in the classroom, literary texts must be read aesthetically; in other words, reading should promote a personal and reciprocal interaction between the reader and the text.

In order to promote a positive attitude towards literature, aesthetic reading must be encouraged. In emphasizing the importance of aesthetic reading, Rosenblatt (1986) states: “Literary conventions, critical terminology, 'analysis' of plot, character, metaphor, symbol — such concepts are vacuous without recognition of the basic, the primary, aesthetic convention, the aesthetic stance that links words and their referents with their experiential base.”(p. 82) If teachers of literature want to save literature from its increasingly dwindling importance, they should put at the top of their aims the fostering of a vital symbiotic relationship between texts and readers. Hence, aesthetic reading must be a prime concern.

### **10-Classroom Interaction and Dialogue via Transactional Approach**

Since the literary text has different layers of meaning, literary transaction enhances students’ interaction and fosters dialogue and communication in the classroom. This theory is confluent with the CLT because of its focus on communication and interaction, which are central to the pedagogy of the learner-centered approach. Kumaravadivelu (2008) posits that “classroom procedures of learner-centered pedagogy are largely woven around the sharing of information and the negotiation of meaning. This is true not only of oral communication activities, but also of reading and writing activities.” (p.128) In comparing the traditional method with CLT, David Nunan and Clarice Lamb assert the importance of classroom dialogue as a major tenet of the communicative approach. According to them, CLT “engage[s] learners in communication [It] involve[s] processes such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction.” (2001, p.31) The classroom interaction, which involves discussion of meaning makes learning a real process.

Transaction allows students to interchange with each other, to compare their responses and to develop their perspective on the literary work. From a longitudinal study applying transaction theory, Eric Paulson (2002-2003) observes that his students “examined their own interpretations, shared their thoughts, and synthesized others’ viewpoints while maintaining their own unique perspective; they saw that meaning is constructed—that they are an integral part of the constructive process.” (p.11) In this interactional and cooperative approach, students are encouraged to share and discuss ideas with each other. They will find similarities between their reactions; but if the work evokes divergent and contradictory emotional and intellectual responses, they will argue to explain and defend their stance. In fact, transaction theory aims at developing students’ ability to respond to texts and discuss them as they discuss films and songs.

### **11-The Usefulness of Transaction in Real Life Situations**

Reading a literary text in a foreign language, which is embedded in a foreign culture, enables students to come to a better understanding of themselves and of their culture. In reading a text, the student is, in fact, “recreating these works, living through them intensely and personally, is freed to discover his own capacities for feeling, his own sense of the world, and his relation to it (Rosenblatt, 1960, p. 310) Reading, in this sense, makes students more cognizant of their own culture; at the same time, it broadens their horizons and outlook by transgressing the finitude of their own culture.

In discussing the purposes that literary transaction might serve in the students’ life Rosenblatt (1960) writes:

Thus through literature, the business of self-discovery and self-organization can go hand-in-hand with imaginative participation in the

cumulative experience, the keenest sensitivities, the highest aspirations of few cases, it is also the record of the trials and successes as man found some answers, which worked for him and which may work for other men. Language is not only the means by which man lives, it is also a record of patterns by which living may be meaningful. (p. 310-311)

So, transaction impels students to adopt and imbibe some patterns and modes of life, which might solve their real life problems. Literature fulfils this aim mainly because it is a mimetic art.

Reading literary texts, in Rosenblatt's theory, helps learners deepen their understanding and be in close vicinity to their socio-cultural context and to that of the target language. Sometimes, as she puts it, "the young reader's attempt to understand his response to the work raises pressing questions about the difference between his own times and the context in which the work was written." (2005,p. 68) In addition to enhancing students' understanding of themselves and of human and life problems, literature indoctrinates students with cultural knowledge of the society where the target language is spoken. It is a means of improving multicultural understanding. Hence, literature should be conceptualized as a personally meaningful experience. Viewing literature as such makes reading literary texts a lifetime habit

Rosenblatt highlights the role of literature in the students' intellectual and emotional growth. If the choice of the literary texts is compatible with the students' age and interests, the literary work is likely to offer "a significant and enjoyable experience for [them] and experience that involves [them] personally and that [they] can assimilate into [their] ongoing intellectual and emotional development." (1960, p. 307) Literature will be interesting for students if they find it in connection with their personal life.

## 12-Role of the Teacher and Students in the Transactional Approach

If students' responses are valued, reading literature will not just be a pleasurable activity but a lifelong habit. Respect for students' responses will help them develop a personal relationship with books and improve their interpretative abilities. According to Rosenblatt (1986), "Respect for what each reader has actively made of the cues offered by the text engenders self-respect and confidence. A personally lived-through evocation, no matter how incomplete, can be the starting point for growth in reading ability." (p.82)] Probst, also, points out that "Implicit within this vision of literary experience is a *respect for the uniqueness of the individual reader and the integrity of the individual reading.*" (1994, p.38) Trusting students and respecting their views will lead to more freedom of expression and result in critical readings of a high quality. On the basis of a longitudinal study, Paulson comes to the following conclusion:

Much trial- and- error later [...] I discovered that acknowledging, valuing, eliciting, and discussing my students' connections to our texts, experiences that related to the texts, background knowledge that clarified their interpretation of the text and other aspects of the reader's side of the reading equation resulted in more effective and efficient reading. (2002-2003, p. 1)

To improve the quality of literary experience, literary texts should relate to the students' personal experience and background. This will enable them to give more valid and plausible interpretations. To this effect, Rosenblatt (1960) writes:

To lead the student to have literary experience of higher and higher quality requires constant concern for what at any point he brings to his reading, what by background, temperament, and training he is ready to participate in. Literary sensitivity and literary maturity cannot be divorced from the individual's rhythm of growth and breadth of experience.(p. 307)

To lead students towards a more effective literary transaction, the teacher might ask questions about the impact of the literary work on them and the feelings and thoughts, which the literary text evokes in them. The literary work must be conceived as something, not just to be understood, but also to be lived and experienced.

The student has to make herculean efforts in order find where the novel fits into his personal life and experience. Since reading literature is something lived-through, the student must live inside the world of art. According to Rosenblatt (1960), the student "needs to fit the work into the context of his past encounters with literature and with life. The teacher's task is to help him better to carry out such responsibilities of the reader in the process of literary communication." (p.309).

## **Method**

### *Subjects*

The target population of this study was students from Mila University Centre and Mentouri University. The sample selected consists of four groups of second year students from Mila University Centre. From Mentouri University of Constantine, we had chosen, as a sample, a group of second year students (out of 14 groups) and three groups of third year students, who are studying literature and civilization (There are only three groups in this option!) All our participants are graduate EFL students, who are preparing for a BA degree within the LMD system. The choice of two universities is to make the results more reliable and to see if there are differences in students' attitudes and the teachers' methods of teaching.

Our participants, also, include teachers of literature from three different Algerian Universities: Mentouri University of Constantine, Badji Moukhtar Annaba University, and Guelma University.

### *Instrument*

The instrument used for this study is the questionnaire. It was impossible to conduct a longitudinal study because of time constraints. A questionnaire was designed to students of Mila and Constantine Universities, and another one for the three teachers from the aforementioned universities. For students, the three kinds of questionnaire were used: open-ended questions, close-ended questions and Yes-No questions. Teachers' questions were open-ended.

### *Procedure*

Students of Mila University were asked to complete the questionnaire during a lecture in the Amphi theatre after having the teacher's approval. Some students were absent. So, the actual sample is composed of 62 students. From Mentouri university of Constantine, we had chosen randomly one group of second year students out of 14 groups. But the questionnaire was given

only to 16 students. Since there are only three groups from the Civilization and Literature option (Most of students there opt for applied linguistics and science of language), the three groups were chosen; however, some students were absent because the questionnaire was given to students in the Amphi during a lecture after having the teacher's approval. So, the selected sample consists of 33 students. The questionnaire, students were asked to complete, is composed of two parts. Part A consists of 10 items, whereas Part B is composed of 2 items.

The three teachers from Constantine University, Annaba University and Guelma University, will be called A, B, and C respectively. These teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire composed of 6 items. The aim of the questionnaire is to know whether teachers implement transactional theory in their class or not. The questions were intended to be as implicit as possible.

## Analysis of the Students' Questionnaire

### Part One

1-Do you find literature a very interesting subject matter?

Yes	No	No answer
103	7	1

Most of students (92, 73%) find literature a very interesting subject matter. But this by no means implies that they are voracious readers. Perhaps what students enjoy and find interesting is the summary or the comments on the texts, which are made by the teacher or other critics. This is crystal clear from their response to questions 5 and 6. Very few students (6, 30%) find literature uninteresting. We assume that those students do not have any motivation or interest in learning English as a foreign language, especially if they come from a scientific stream. Since the LMD system prepares students for either an academic or a professional life, it is reasonable to say that those students are prone for the second option.

2- What do you think is the importance of literary texts?

a- Literary texts help me build up my vocabulary and improve my English.

B-Literary texts are related to my personal life and real life in general.

C-Literary texts help me get new information about history and the author's life

D-Literary texts help me think critically.

A	B	C	D	No Answer
87	32	71	28	1

The overwhelming majority of students (78,37%) view literature as a means to an end, which is reinforcing their language skills. They seem to apply an efferent mode of reading. It is plausible to say that the teaching method, which is efferent-oriented, instills this belief in students' minds. Few students (28,82) find literature relevant to their personal life. We suppose that these are the students who read the text aesthetically. They find in the literary text a kind of vicarious life. Some students' view of literature as irrelevant to their personal and real life might stem from decontextualising literature and impersonalizing it. Some teaching practices, which are embedded in traditional approaches like New Criticism and Structuralism, are likely to deter students from enjoying reading literary texts. Those approaches focus exclusively on the formal and structural aspects of the text. It is also reasonable to say that this attitude is due to the status of reading in our culture, which is relatively low. Students who opt for answer C (63, 96%) are those who divagate from the text to concerns with other things about the text like the author's biography and the historical context in which the text is composed. They do not transact with the text and make a close reading of it. Very few respondents (25,22%) view literature as a means of developing their critical thinking. This might be due to the efferent method or to their belief that literature, unlike science, is fictitious and imaginary; it has nothing to do with cognition and critical thinking. Literary texts are perhaps seen, by those students, as a means of procuring pleasure, but they will not serve any purpose in their personal or professional life.

3-Do you find the literary texts of the literature course interesting?

Yes	No	No answer
100	7	4

Like in questions 1, most of students (91,89%) find texts of the literature course interesting. One might think that what they enjoy is what is said about the text rather than reading the text itself. Their emotional response is a passive one. But the selected literary texts, by and large, appeal to students' interests and needs. We recorded few students (6,30) who view the literary works included in the literary course uninteresting. One possible reason for such a response is their lack of motivation to learn English in general or literature in particular. Other few students in this sample (3,60%) are unable to fabricate an attitude towards literature.

4-Does reading literary texts have any effect on your feelings and emotions?

Yes	No	No answer
74	36	1

The majority of students (66,66%) admit that literary texts have an impact on their emotions. We suppose that those feelings and emotions are not conjured up directly from the transaction between the reader and the text. The teacher's or other critics' interpretations might evoke these feelings in the reader. Some students (32,43%) deny that literary texts have any influence on their emotions and feelings. A probable explanation is that those students are not intrinsically motivated to read literary texts. It might be assumed that the teaching method, which is a traditionalist or an efferent-oriented one, is behind students' articulation of such an attitude.

5-Do you often read the literary texts included in the course of literature before class?

Yes	No
24	87

Very few students (21,62%) admit that they read texts before class. Most of our respondents (78,37%) indicate that they do not read literary texts included in the course. We opine that these students do not have any intrinsic or extrinsic motivation for reading. They wait for a ready-made interpretation, which they get from the teacher, from the critical books or from the internet. It is plausible to say that the LMD system, with its compensation system, encourages passivity and laziness. Added to that, the spoon-feeding method might account for their unwillingness to read the texts before class. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, students might find the language difficult to understand; this makes them bored and fed-up. Also, their lack of faith in themselves to find the right interpretation may greatly account for their avoidance. Worthy of mention is the fact that literature is not accorded a very important place in the fundamental unit within the LMD system.

6-Do you often read literary texts outside the classroom without being asked by the teacher?

Yes	No
34	77

Most students (69,36% ) do not take the initiative to read literary texts outside the classroom. We suppose that some students (30, 63%) read texts, which are not included in the course because they find them more interesting than those included in the literature course. This is confirmed by comparing the number of respondents to those of the previous question. In response to the question “why do not students read?”, Louis Rosenblatt (1960) states: “A more realistic explanation, surely, is that the student [...] has not been led again and again to literature as relevant to his ongoing life, offering him, here and now, esthetic pleasure in the actual reading and help in organizing his sense of himself and his world” (p. 308]

7-What are the ways that you use in order to understand the literary text’s meaning before class?

a- I read the text attentively and patiently before class.

b-I read the York Notes (Cliff’s Notes) or others’ critical views about the text.

c- I just wait for the teacher’s interpretation.

d- First, I read others’ critical views, then, I read the text.

A	B	C	D
22	24	84	00

Few students (49, 81%) read the text without reliance on the critical books or the teacher’s interpretation alone. Most of them (75, 67%) rely on the teacher to grasp the text’s meaning. This

might be attributed to the lack of confidence in their abilities to interpret it. Students' reluctance to read the text is due to their belief in the existence of a correct interpretation, which only the teacher or other glaring critics can provide. Another reason might be the difficulty of the text.

8-In the literature class, do you often express your emotional and intellectual responses to the texts freely?

Yes	No
30	81

While few students (27, 67%) admit their aesthetic response to the text, the majority of them (72, 97%) do not take part in literary interpretation. It is possible to say that they fear the teachers' reaction if they make mistakes. Because of their lack of self-confidence, they believe that whatever interpretation they give is worthless. It is worth mentioning that this lack of participation is due to the lack of motivation or to the lecture method.

9- Do you have confidence in your ability to interpret the literary text alone?

Yes	No
26	85

There are only few students (23,42%) who feel self-confident to interpret texts. The majority of our respondents (76, 57%) lack this self-confidence. We assume that these students seldom or never try to interpret the text. Their lack of self-confidence may also be rooted in their belief in the existence of an authoritative view and interpretation, which is stronger than theirs. This answer further confirms the answer to the previous question. Another reasonable justification is that the teacher belittles their responses.

10-Do you like the exam questions to be in the form of an essay (paragraph) or in the form of questions that must be answered in short statement? Justify

Essay Form (paragraph)	Questions that must be answered in short statements	No answer
26	82	3

Essay (paragraph) form:

Very Few students (23,42%) prefer the essay (paragraph) form, while some of them did not justify. Others say that they prefer this kind of questions to express themselves freely. So, these students seem to have emotional and intellectual responses to literary text, which we called, in the theoretical part, aesthetic reading. Some students admit that they like this kind of questions to improve their writing skill. Those students seem to have an efferent-oriented approach. Literature for them is just a means to improve their language skills. Only one student says that it does not matter whether questions require answer in the form of an essay (paragraph) or in short statements. This student seems to be self-confident.

## Short statements:

Some students did not justify why they prefer questions that need to be answered in short statements. For most of students (73,87%), who prefer short statements, writing is a difficult skill. Indeed, students find writing difficult because they do not read. Reading helps students develop their writing skill; however, this should never be the ultimate aim of teaching literature. For some students close-ended questions are better than writing an essay (paragraph) because they may not give the right answer, which the teacher expects. This justification indicates that the teaching method is that which ascribes the literary text a single meaning. Few students admit that they cannot memorize; it seems that those students are probably spoon-fed with critical views, which they must learn by heart and regurgitate in the day of the exam. Some students say that they may not be precise. This evinces that their critical thinking is not mature; it is still undeveloped. This is why when we ask students precise questions, not just in the literature subject, they find it difficult to stick to the given topic; they jot down all what they know about or what is related to this topic. Few students admit that writing an essay (paragraph) makes their mind work. This answer implies that writing demands high cognitive abilities, which the students lack. Some students respond that close-ended questions make it possible for them to get a better mark. This is because those questions, which need to be answered in short statements, are about factual information which are easily checked.

*Part Two*

11- Does your teacher use the lecture method instead of encouraging students' participation in the class?

Yes	No
80	31

While some students (27,92%) admit their teachers' encouragement of their participation in the classroom, most of them (72, 07%) seem to deny. The use of the lecture method is, perhaps, due to the problem of large classes, which has become very rife since the application of the CBA in the secondary schools. Each year the Algerian universities welcome a huge number of students. Also, teachers might not be aware of the pedagogy of transactional approach. Teachers' use of this method might also be attributed to their belief in the difficulty of literature as a subject matter; and therefore, they tend to lack confidence in their students' abilities to take part in the literature class and to interpret the text. Another reason, which might lie behind the teachers' discouragement of their students' participation, is their belief in a correct or right meaning, which the students will never reach. Hence, they belittle students' responses. Because they are not participants in meaning-making, students will feel that their role is peripheral and that literary interpretation is not their responsibility.

12-What kind of questions do you get in the literature exam?

A-multiple choice questions.

B-questions about factual information that must be answered in short statements.

C-An essay (paragraph), which elicits your intellectual and emotional responses.

If none of these options, please state the right one.

A	B	C	No Answer
18	71	20	2

Some students (16,21%) reply that the exam questions are in the form of multiple choice questions. The majority of them (63, 96%) admit that exam questions, that need to be answered in one statement, are about factual information. Seemingly, most of the questions are based on an efferent mode of reading. They are direct questions (comprehension questions), which do not make students squeeze their minds and use their critical thinking. In Bloom's taxonomy, multiple choice questions and factual/direct questions are used to test the students' comprehension of the text. The use of multiple choice questions or close-ended questions might stem from the lack of awareness of the pedagogical implications of Rosenblatt's theory. It may also be due to the rife phenomenon of large classes. Rosenblatt, who shares our view, states that "the pressure of increasing numbers in the schools creates a trend toward larger classes and therefore toward the kind of teaching that can be done for large groups sitting in rows, passively receiving information." (2005, p.62)

Teachers use these kinds of questions, which are based on an efferent method, because of the lack of time, especially under the reign of the LMD system in which students have one exam, an interrogation test, and one make-up exam in each semester. So, these types of questions make the task of correction easier for the teacher. It is plausible to think that multiple choice questions or factual information questions are likely to reduce the number of students in the make-up exam and combat time constraints.

From the results of the students' questionnaire, it seems that the role of the reader in the literature class is not a very active one. Students do not seem to have a strong interest or motivation for reading literary texts. This subject matter is, by and large, viewed as irrelevant to their personal life and not really pertinent to their socio-cultural reality. Literature is mainly deemed as a means to develop students' language skills; it does not have any intrinsic value except for few students. Teaching methods, generally speaking, seem to be traditional in orientation despite the LMD system and the communicative approach's rallying cry for learner-centredness. Indeed, there is a mismatch between the principles of learner-centredness and what actually takes place in the literature class.

### Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire

1-Is your classroom teacher-centered or student-centered? How would you prefer it to be?

In response to this question, teacher A says that his classroom is "teacher-centered" He adds that "In a different world, I would have liked to work in a students-centered situation, but in our country, the time allotted to the literature module (1x1h30 a week) often imposes a different situation which tends to be more teacher-centered. Add to this the number of students and their lack of interest in and knowledge of the subject-matter. This is the problem of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year classes. " Teacher A, though he prefers a student-centered approach, thinks that situation in his university makes a teacher-centered approach inevitable. Opting for such a teacher-centred approach is mainly due to the lack of time allotted to literature (mainly in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year),

the problem of large classes, and the lack of students' interest in literature. A reasonable justification for students' lack of interest in literature is the traditional teacher-centered method and the insufficiency of time allotted to this module, which makes it peripheral in the curriculum in relation to the other modules. In addition to that, the low coefficient of literature might help develop a negative attitude towards literature. Though it is one of the four language skills, reading is undermined in the curriculum.

In response to the same question, teacher B considers his classroom teacher-centred, in general, but he thinks that "The teacher is important in making it, but students must be cooperating for a better teaching." So, for teacher B, students' participation in the literature class is important if one wants to improve the quality of his teaching, but his answer does not imply the wide array of benefits that a student-centred approach might bring about for students.

Teacher C, similar to A and B, admits that her classroom is teacher-centred and that the kind of classroom that she prefers is a "student-centred" one. "The reason", according to her, "is that studying literature depends on discussion. The teacher knows lots of information but without the participation of students he may skip many important details in his lesson." Like teacher B, teacher C's response implies that students' participation is important just for reminding the teacher of some points and details that she spoon-feeds to his students. The 'What' rather than the 'How' seems the thing which matters most.

2-In the literature class, do you take into account the students' personal life and their socio-cultural context in the interpretation of the literary text? Justify.

With regard to this question, teacher A's reply was as follows: "Personal life, sometimes; but socio-cultural context, quite often; with references to family, habits or customs and traditions." So, this teacher endorses the significance of students' socio-cultural make-up in literary interpretation, and this is one of the tenets of Louis Rosenblatt's pedagogy. Yet, this teacher does not view the students' personal life as important in literary interpretation. This, in fact, is not confluent with the pedagogy of transactional theory, which gives cardinal importance to students' emotions, thoughts and personal views. Interpretation should start from the immediate encounter between the reader/student and the text.

In response to this question, teacher B says: "In some cases yes, in others no. When we discuss a text we try to deal with regardless to any influence if not it becomes biased. "The text is what the reader makes it." " Teacher B's response sounds interesting for it gives account to any factor or influence (personal, social, or cultural) which is likely to infuse the text with rich ramifications and multiple shades of meaning. The teacher's ending statement, "The text is what the reader makes of it", sums up the whole concern of reader-response theory.

In responding to the same question, teacher C says: "Personally, I did not encounter such a situation. However, in case this happens, I may accept such interpretation as one of the possible readings and we may discuss it briefly but I will not consider it in the summary of the lesson." Teacher C's response indicates that he seldom considers the students' personal life and their social and cultural background in meaning-making. This vindicates that the text is dealt with as a closed system, which is immune from the learners' personal life and real life in general. This is likely to demotivate students and make literature uninteresting and irrelevant to their life. This teacher's response seems to be teacher-centered.

## 3-What do you do in order to motivate your students?

In her answer to this question, teacher A states: “Show them that they are important and that they can develop their own interpretation by using their unique individual experiences; that literature is not really something difficult by relating it to their own daily lives and culture; by making them understand that the writers they are studying are just human beings who used their writing in order to communicate with their readers and that if those writers failed to communicate, then there was no point in writing at all.” One might venture to say that teacher A endorses two major principles of Louis Rosenblatt’s theory. First, he should make them feel that they are able to construct their own meanings without reliance on the teacher or others’ critical views. From their experiences, they can enrich the text’s interpretation. Second, in order to simplify or facilitate literary interpretation, which is always deemed a difficult task, teachers should help students relate the text to their everyday life. The teacher can make students understand that the text is a means which allows communication between the reader and the writer, who is also a human being. Thus, the text’s meaning lies somewhere between the text and the reader.

Teacher B, in order to motivate his students, “speaks to the mind by the use of rhetoric and purely artistic tools.” Though this method makes the students impressed, we wonder if it really encourages their participation. It seems to make spoon-feeding less boring and more stimulating.

In order to motivate students, teacher C suggests “interesting readings; refer to movies based on classics in literature and bring them such movies in case they are available for me; and I try to make them feel the pleasure of reading literary texts.” Indeed, the ways this teacher uses to motivate her students make the latter less industrious. By suggesting interesting critical books or referring to movies, the teacher makes the learners get far from the text, which is a focal element in literary interpretation.

## 4-Do your students read the literary texts included in the course of literature? Justify.

Teacher A admits that his students, “in general, do not do. Some try to cheat, but they seldom succeed.” He adds that students read when they are given “extra work to do as part of the TD.” As teacher A’s response points out, students’ motivation to read texts is mainly extrinsic, to get a good mark. We might opine that the lack of reading is inherent in the CBA, which is now applied in the middle and the secondary schools. This new approach, which has failed in the Algerian context, makes the students’ level dwindle. And in order to hide this reality, the Ministry of National education has reduced the number of the drop outs. It has used the so-called “un bac politique” to hide the extremely worrying level to which CBA has been of no contribution.” (Mohamed Miliani, 2010, p.71) So, how can we expect those students to come to the university with a high potential and intrinsic motivation for reading? The other plausible reasons for students’ lack of reading has already been discussed in students’ response to question 5 above.

Teacher B’s response to that question was as follows: “Not really, this is the problem, because the text we deal with are too dark and difficult for them. Conrad or Joyce are difficult to penetrate, so they tend to use the internet for literary criticism and summaries, rather than reading the text. THIS IS VERY VERY VERY PITY. THEY LOSE THEIR OWN

UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEXT.” Teacher’s answer indicates that students hardly make efforts to understand the text. By relying on the internet, they will remain consumers rather than productive, very much like in the traditional method. We think that the difficulty of the text might be overcome if we can make students transact with the text and urge them to develop their reading habits. We think that these texts, which the teacher describes as difficult, are confluent with the students’ level; the same texts are taught in many universities worldwide. The difficulty of the text is, contrariwise, an incentive for the learners to be partners in interpreting it. The students, in this case, will exert all their critical and literary skills to unveil the text’s meaning which is to be sought beneath the surface.

Responding to the same question, teacher C says: “Not many. There are many reasons for this: 1) literature is often considered as difficult and boring field thus students lose interest in it without even trying to read or analyze texts; 2) the alleged difficulty of the language and style of the selected texts prevents them from feeling the pleasure of reading; and 3) the lack of motivation for studies in general that nowadays students suffer from toward literature and the humanities.” According to this teacher, the context or the culture of the students instills in their minds the erroneous idea that literature is of little interest and benefits in their daily life; this socially formed negative attitude will make the act of reading very repulsive for them. But we think that the university has a very important role in shaping many of students’ attitudes. Concerning the lack of reading, which the teacher attributes to the difficulty of the texts, we suppose that the texts are concomitant with the students’ level; the problem is in the Algerian students’ level, which is dwindling and withering under the LMD system.

5-Do you think that the LMD system might help students develop a positive attitude towards literature and promote their interest in this subject matter? Justify.

For this teacher, who continued his post-graduate studies in a British university where the LMD system was applied, the “The LMD system depends on the students’ personal contribution and work inside and outside the classroom. It’s a system which encourages students to learn how to be independent and rely only on themselves. Here, things do not work because students have been brought up in a (traditional) system that has made them heavily dependent on teachers and so they tend to receive only and not to give anything. Besides, literature is about reading and the LMD system encourages people to read.” For this teacher, the LMD system is in tune with the principles of the learner centeredness. It encourages students’ autonomy and self-directed learning. This teacher also believes that the LMD system encourages reading. The crux of the problem, according to him, is that students are still under the hypnotizing influence of the traditional spoon-feeding method. So, though it sounds good theoretically, this system will not thrive without the contribution of the students and the teachers.

In response to this question, teacher B says: “It could or seems to be.” The absence of any justification from the part of the teacher implies that he does not know a lot about the LMD system. But the fact that it is a new one makes him optimistic about it.

Like teachers A and B, teacher C’s answer was a positive one; he says: “Yes I think so” In an attempt to proffer a reasonable justification, she says that “the inclusion of the literature module in the first year is very productive because students will be aware of the importance of this module and hence will give it appropriate interest” Teacher C thinks that since literature is included in the first year, this subject seems to hold a very important place within this system.

But as teacher A points out, the success of the ideals of that system depend on the students' and teachers' contributions and on the overall conditions as well.

6-Do you think that it is possible to implement a reader-response approach to literature in your literature class? How would you accomplish that?

In regard to this question, teacher A thinks that "it is quite possible if one succeeds in getting the students involved in the construction of the meaning or the interpretation of the literary text and share their unique experiences. The whole point is about making them collaborate and realize their importance as readers as well as the importance of their role in the making of the text." So, for teacher A, a reader-response approach might be applicable if the teacher motivates students to generate meaning by showing them the importance of their responses, and by making them cognizant of their abilities to interpret the text.

In response to this question, teacher B says: "No comment, because, I think, literature does not need theories. It needs self-disposition." It seems that, for him, it depends on the circumstances and the overall conditions and atmosphere of the classroom.

Teacher C's response was as follows: "Reader-response approach is important for literature and so helpful in developing the students appreciation and understanding of texts. However, the fear of not being academic when students' interpretations are very subjective makes this approach unsupportable by me. Although I welcome students' opinions concerning a text, I prefer other approaches like psychoanalyses, Marxism or formalism." Teacher C is not a fervent advocate of reader response approach as a part of daily classroom pedagogy. More importantly, she seems to prefer three approaches namely: psychoanalytical criticism, which includes dealing with the author's life, Marxism, which includes a close attention to the author's socio-historical context, and formalism, which focuses on the formal, structural and technical matters. These approaches are, indeed, in contrast with the pedagogy of Rosenblatt, which impels students to make a close reading of the text rather than divagating from it to other matters, which are peripheral.

On the basis of the teachers' questionnaire, one might venture to say that teacher A, to some extent, endorses a transactional classroom philosophy. For him three main factors preclude the application of this approach. First, the problem of large classes, which imposes a traditional way of teaching. Second, people's negative attitudes towards literature and its irrelevance to their real life. Third, the insufficiency of the time allotted to the literature module in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Because of the overall conditions, theory and practice constitute an ill-matched pair. Teachers B and C are less faithful to such an approach. Though some of their responses reverberate with reader response approach, their teaching practices do not dovetail with it.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

The following suggestions are likely to help implement or incorporate a transactional approach and thus to enhance learner-centeredness.

1-To engage learners in the literature class, the teacher must encourage them to make use of their schemata and personal experience. He must be a facilitator of the reader-text transaction by familiarizing students with the aesthetic mode of reading texts and asking questions, something

which they might find difficult at the outset. The teacher should also transact with the text and show students that the text is a “living-through”.

2-The syllabus must be based on a deep respect for the students’ views and their role as meaning-makers. By respecting students’ views on the text, the latter are likely to infuse the text with multiple shades of meaning. When given an interpretation, which differs from his own or which is entirely invalid, the teacher should never say it is wrong. He should try, instead, to encourage, guide and show them how to develop their own interpretation. Each student is unique and has a different personal viewpoint which is not necessarily wrong.

3-To create a collaborative atmosphere in the classroom, group work is suggested. The teacher might divide the group into small groups to make them express their feelings and views freely and compare between different interpretations. Each student, in this case, will vie for a more plausible interpretation. He will argue in order to vindicate the verity of his own viewpoint. So, group work is likely to sharpen students’ critical skills and to lead them towards more valid interpretations.

4-Teachers must select literary works, which can be fitted into the students’ context. These texts must capture their interests in order to stimulate them and foster their motivation. Literature will fail to provide aesthetic experience if it is totally alien and detached from the students’ main preoccupations, emotions, needs and interests. The personal factor must be a main concern to insure a successful curriculum.

5-Teachers’ questions must be as open-ended as possible to provoke discussion and interaction. Under the reign of the LMD system, particularly, teachers, not just of literature, should avoid the multiple choice questions in order to lessen the detrimental effects of the compensation system, which encourages passivity and laziness. We suggest an urgent return for the old method of grading, which is still used only in the ENS schools.

6-The administration should take into account the problem of large classes. This problem is a formidable obstacle, which precludes the implementation of a transactional approach to reading. It is likely to make students more remote and detached from the teaching-learning process. Teachers, in turn, will opt for the traditional lecture method to combat this problem.

7- Some types of activities which make the implementation of transaction theory possible are:

A-The teacher must encourage students to write literary response journals (reading journals) In the reading process, students pause to jot down their thoughts, emotions and understandings freely on a sheet of paper. These reading journals might engender many advantages. First, they make students reflect on their own learning. Second, they promote autonomous learning, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning. Third, journals create teacher-students and student-student interaction beyond the classroom context.

B-Teachers can encourage students to think aloud orally.

C-Teachers might ask their students to annotate their response while reading the literary text. Recording their reading experiences through annotations helps students remember them later.

8-It would be very interesting to ask students to write interpretative essays (paragraphs), which are argumentative. In other words, essays (paragraphs) on topics, which raise debates and on which students would disagree. This will prompt them to make herculean intellectual efforts to defend their stance.

9-Literature must be given a larger amount of time, and it should be accorded a more pivotal place in the curriculum.

10-Since the teacher's philosophy of teaching and his teaching method has a great impact on the students' learning attitudes, teachers must be trained on Rosenblatt's transaction theory.

11-At the end, we suggest the use of this approach in a longitudinal study.

### **Conclusion**

To round off, teachers' assumptions and beliefs about the students' role must be compatible with the pedagogy of the learner-centered approach in which the student is the fulcrum around which the teaching-learning process turns. Indeed, Learner-centered approach and transaction theory can be validly combined by giving students voice to express their personal responses to the text, which include their personal experience and socio-cultural background. In its emphasis on the reader and its denial of meaning as firmly rooted in the text, transaction theory, very much like the communicative approach, gives the students a more active and productive role. Thus, transactional approach to reading literature is likely to enlarge the contribution of literature to communicative language teaching and help in the achievement of its goals. Of utmost importance, it will help develop process-oriented learning.

If applied in the Algerian universities, Rosenblatt's approach might be an incentive for students to read frequently and voluntarily. It is likely to fill students' hearts with a never-ending love and passion for literature. This theory will end spoon-feeding and parasitic learning and promote their critical thinking, self-feeding and autonomous learning. Students' underlying emotional and socio-cultural preoccupations must be an integral part of any course or syllabus design to ensure and foster positive attitudes, to rise motivation, and above all, to render the learning situation efficient and interesting as well. Indeed, transactional theory would constitute great gains if applied in the literature class.

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### Appendix 1

#### Questionnaire

Dear students, you are kindly invited to complete this questionnaire about your attitudes towards reading literary texts. We would like to assure you that your answers will be anonymous and that they will be used just for research purposes. Please, if you have any question, feel free to ask your teacher.

#### Part One

1-Do you find literature a very interesting subject matter?

Yes  No

2- What do you think is the importance of literary texts?

A- Literary texts help me build up my vocabulary and improve my English.

B-Literary texts are related to my personal life and real life in general.

C-Literary texts help me get new information about history the author's life

D-Literary texts help me think critically.

3-Do you find the literary texts of the literature course interesting?

Yes  No

4-Does reading literary texts have any effect on your feelings and emotions?

Yes  No

5-Do you often read the literary texts included in the course of literature before class?

Yes  No

6-Do you often read literary texts outside the classroom without being asked by the teacher?

Yes  No

7-What are the ways that you use in order to understand the literary text’s meaning before class?

- a- I read the text attentively and patiently before class.
- b-I read the York notes (Cliff’s Notes) or others’ critical views about the text.
- c- I just wait for the teacher’s interpretation.
- d- First, I read others’ critical views, then, I read the text.

8-In the literature class, do you often express your emotional and intellectual responses to the texts freely?

Yes   No

9- Do you have confidence in your ability to interpret the literary text alone?

Yes   No

10-Do you like the exam questions to be in the form of an essay (paragraph) or in the form of questions that must be answered in short statement? Justify

.....

.....

.....

**Part Two**

11- Does your teacher use the lecture method instead of encouraging students’ participation in the class?

Yes No

12-What kind of questions do you get in the literature exam?

- A-multiple choice questions.
  - B-questions about factual information that must be answered in short statements.
  - C-An essay (paragraph), which elicits your intellectual and emotional responses.
- If none of these options, please state the right one.

**Appendix 2**

**Questionnaire**

Dear teachers, you are kindly invited to complete this questionnaire about your teaching beliefs and practices in the literature class. The questionnaire requires answers, which really reflect your teaching attitudes and methods. Your responses are very pivotal and important for our research paper.

**1-**Is your classroom teacher-centered or student-centered? How would you prefer it to be?.....  
.....

**2-**In the literature class, do you take into account the students' personal life and their socio-cultural context in the interpretation of the literary text? Justify  
.....  
.....  
.....

**3-**What do you do in order to motivate your students?.....  
.....

**4-**Do your students read the literary texts included in the course of literature? Justify.....  
.....  
.....

**5-**Do you think that the LMD system might help students develop a positive attitude towards literature and promote their interest in this subject matter? Justify .....

**6-**Do you think that it is possible to implement a reader-response approach to literature in your literature class? How would you accomplish that?.....  
.....  
.....