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# ‘Doing’ literature in the language classroom

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# Background

- Grammar-translation method: use of literature as a 'noble' form of language.
- Communicative method: focus on spoken language and texts reflecting 'practical' uses of language (Littlewood, 1986).
- Today: renewed interest in the use of literature in the language classroom – multiple values: linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, emotional.



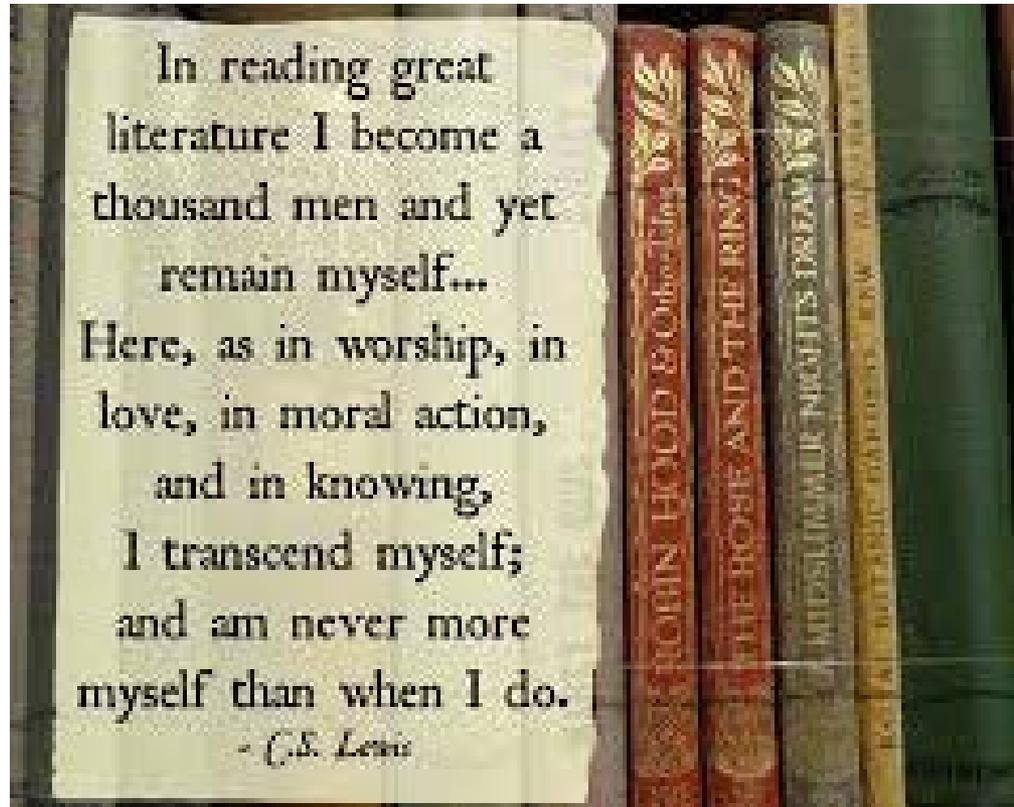
# Background

- Modern Languages: lack of integrated approach – literature often reserved to ‘literary option’ of syllabus + advanced learners (Paran, 2008).
- CEFR: literary texts included in reading skills from B2 but creative writing already introduced at level A2 (simple poems).



# Questions

- Why use literary texts?
- What kind of texts?
- How?



In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself... Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.  
- C.S. Lewis



# Why use literary texts?

- Practice at Essex University.
- Rich material for study and practice of language: range of styles, registers and text types at different levels of difficulty.
- Don't become out-of-date the way informative texts can.
- Facilitate discovery and understanding of individuals and cultures.



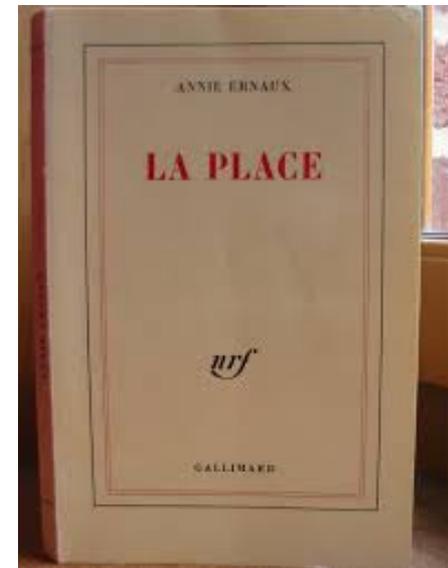
# Why use literary texts?

- Lend themselves to different interpretations > conducive to exchange of impressions and discussions.
- Emotional impact can promote learning (Shanahan, 1997).
- Objection: ‘deviant’ use can confuse learners – but ‘liberating’ + leading to development of learning strategies.



# What kind of texts?

- Considerations of length and level of difficulty.
- Dimension of the 'affect'.
- Example: Annie Ernaux's *La Place* (1983).



# How to use literature?

Level A2: Apollinaire, *Calligrammes* (1918).

Je suis la lunette de soleil  
je n'en vois de toutes les couleurs  
je dissimule les yeux pochés  
je masque les yeux fermés  
je cache les yeux  
le filtre les U.V.  
les verres et des pas mûres



# How to use literature?

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Sentence parsing, vocabulary building,  
creative writing.



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# How to use literature?

Level B1: Prévert, *Déjeuner du matin* (1946).

## *Déjeuner du matin*

Il a mis le café  
Dans la tasse  
Il a mis le lait  
Dans la tasse de café  
(...)  
Il a allumé  
Une cigarette

## *Breakfast*

He poured the coffee  
Into the cup  
He poured the milk  
Into the cup of coffee  
(...)  
He lighted  
A cigarette



# How to use literature?

(...)

Sans me parler

Sans me regarder

(...)

Il a mis

Son manteau de pluie

Parce qu'il pleuvait

(...)

(...)

Without a word

Without looking at me

(...)

He put on

His raincoat

As it was raining

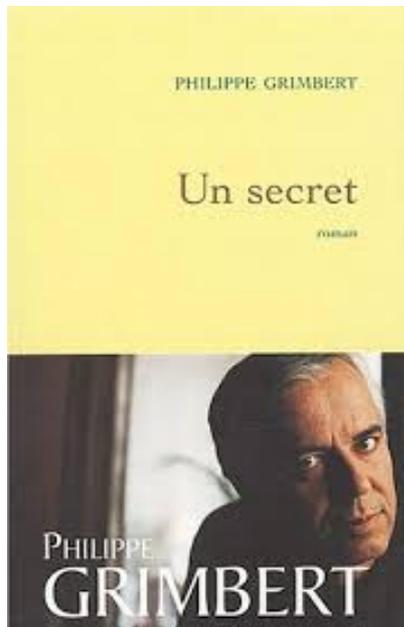
(...)

Miming/acting, reading aloud, translating,  
contrasting perfect and imperfect tenses.



# How to use literature?

Level B2: Grimbert, *Un secret* (2004).



Researching history, drawing family tree, comparing book and film adaptation, discussion: how would you have felt? what would you have done? writing: imagining what happened before, what will happen next.

# How to use literature?

Level C2: Duras, *L'Amant* (1984).



Analysing poetic language: broken narrative, imagery, rhythm; researching colonial history; discussing Duras's perspective on social, sexual, racial and family relationships; reading aloud.

# How to use literature?

Group activities:

1. Drawing on your teaching experience, share some successful language activities involving the use of literary texts.
2. Discuss how best to exploit the first paragraph of John O'Farrell, *The Best a Man Can Get* (2000). For what type of learners would it be most suitable?



- Littlewood, W.T. (1986) 'Literature in the School Foreign-Language Course', in C. Brumfit and R. Carter (eds), *Literature and Language Teaching*, OUP, p. 177-183
- Paran, A. (2008) 'The role of literature in instructed foreign language learning and teaching: An evidence-based survey', in *Lang. Teach.*, 41:4, CUP, p. 465-496
- Shanahan, D. (1997) 'Articulating the Relationship Between Language, Literature, and Culture: Toward a New Agenda for Foreign Language Teaching and Research', in *The Modern Language Journal*, 81, (ii), p.164-174

