

Vanessa Everson  
School of Languages & Literatures, French Section  
Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town

# Getting under their Skin: towards a Cross-cultural Approach for the Teaching of Literature<sup>1</sup>

«Les livres ne font que rendre ce qu'on leur donne ...»  
«Books simply give back what is given to them ...»<sup>2</sup>  
Jean Guéhenno

**A B S T R A C T** The article starts with a brief overview of what and how French is taught in South African universities and attempts a critical appraisal of this teaching. Reference is made to the evolution of French didactics and methodology which has taken place in language teaching at tertiary level in this country and mention is made of the relative absence of any concomitant development within literature teaching. Chevallard's didactic triangle is explained and curriculum planners are advised as a consequence to establish learner profiles; the University of Cape Town's learners of French are used as an example of a typical South African tertiary student population. Reasons are advanced in justification of the teaching of literary texts written in French and a corpus of texts is suggested. Current assessment procedures are evaluated critically and a classwork-assessed, cross-cultural model with examples of pedagogical activities is proposed as the most appropriate form of literature teaching for French Sections of South African tertiary institutions.

Keywords: South African tertiary education, French didactics, didactic triangle, French literature teaching, Moroccan women's fiction, cross-cultural approach

## Introduction

This article begins with an overview of what and how French is taught in South African universities with reference being made to the evolution in French didactics and methodology at tertiary level in this country. The didactic triangle will be explained, student needs will be assessed using the University of Cape Town's students of French as an example, and reasons

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<sup>2</sup> All translations are my own.

advanced in justification of the teaching of literary texts written in French. Thereafter, a corpus of texts and a cross-cultural model with examples of pedagogical activities will be proposed as the most appropriate form of literature teaching for French Departments of South African tertiary institutions.

"As it was in the beginning"

Since their inception, Arts Faculties, now Faculties of Humanities or Human Sciences, of South African universities have offered French courses to their undergraduate and postgraduate students. This language was for many years housed within autonomous French Departments. More recently, with the democratisation of South African society in general, and the education system in particular, there have been demands on government to undertake social reform and dig deep in its collective pocket. One of the knock-on effects of this has been the policy adopted by government to cut considerably its subsidies to universities and to induce tertiary institutions to increase both their learner/teacher ratio and the through-put rates of their graduands in scientific and technological subjects. The reduction in university income and the privileged status of scientific disciplines have given rise to the impetus to be cost efficient and more responsive to market forces. Formerly independent French Departments have tended to be seen as being less costly if absorbed into larger entities; by and large, they have become French Sections existing within larger departments, or "schools", stars in constellations of modern and foreign languages, national languages, classical languages and communication-related disciplines.

Traditionally, university French lecturers have been native French speakers who have studied and qualified in metropolitan France. Such academics have studied French language, literature and culture under the French education system, with the emphasis being placed on in-depth study of literary texts, for which the main pedagogical activities and methods of assessment have been textual analysis and literary dissertation. Few such academics have training in pedagogy or didactics either in French for first language speakers or French as a second or foreign language (FLS – Français Langue Seconde, FLE – Français Langue Etrangère). It is perhaps quite natural that such academics should have perpetuated the methods by which they themselves were taught; indeed, by and large, French Departments of South African universities have lectured French as though they were teaching French mother tongue speakers.

However, it is somewhat of a paradox that, following as they did the educational traditions of the Métropole, such French departments should have remained largely unaffected by the Great Debate which took to the streets of France in the late 1960s, the ramifications of which are felt even today. Then, nationwide strikes and protests, in which intellectuals and educators were very much to the fore, sent shockwaves through French educational establishments.

Many of the concerns which troubled protesting pedagogues and teaching practitioners were raised at the ground-breaking Cerisy-la-Salle conference of July 1969, during which delegates dared to interrogate long-held beliefs and educational practices, including the positioning, as first articulated by Montaigne, of literature as an indispensable part of the education process. On that occasion Jean Cohen, addressing the delegate Franco Ferruci, stated: "Ferruci has asked a question which has been suppressed since the conference started: why teach literature? But, by asking that question, he is making the assumption that literature should be taught; that is

in itself an assumption which presupposes that literature can be taught" (Doubrovsky/Todorov, 1971: 591, underlined by Cohen). Inherent in Cohen's statement is the notion that literature is essentially unteachable because it belongs to the realm of the emotions and the irrational and, as such, cannot be reduced to a piece of factual knowledge capable of being transmitted through the teaching act. Of course, Cohen's statement is the result of a particular definition of what constitutes literature and what teaching is.

Nevertheless, he was far from being alone in thinking that literature could not be taught. Among likeminded delegates, the most influential was probably the great pedagogue Doubrovsky who asserted: "The truth, awkward though it may be for a teacher of literature, is that literature cannot be taught. Whereas in principle, you come out of an Arithmetic or Art class, able to do sums and drawings, you don't leave a literature class able to write, not even in theory" (1971: 16). Interestingly, French academics in South Africa have not been plagued by the kind of soul-searching which was first articulated at Cerisy. Of course, a variety of reasons could be put forward to explain this but such considerations would not be relevant to the main thrust of this article. What interests us here is the fact that French courses at South African universities (and at secondary school level until the last decade) have continued to include the study of significant numbers of literary texts, taught and assessed according to the long-standing French metropolitan system.

"As it is now"

Little has changed within many French Sections on South African campuses. Those changes which have taken place have in the main been reactive, a direct consequence of financial constraints and of the favour accorded to certain disciplines at secondary school level, and have tended to be confined to language teaching. In recent years, secondary schools which formerly had French as part of their curriculum have become increasingly cash-strapped. This has put them under pressure to terminate "uneconomic" subjects, such as modern foreign languages and music, where the educator/learner ratio is deemed to be extravagant. The knock-on effect on universities is that increasingly fewer first year students have Senior Matriculation in French. Therefore, French intensive courses which are designed for students with no prior knowledge of the language are now in greater demand than before on the campuses of South African universities. Whether by design or default, the majority of these universities continue to lecture French (and since the 1980s Francophone) literature.

Since students must spend more time on intensive language acquisition, they may now be required to study fewer literary texts and in lesser depth but such courses will be run in much the same way as in the past, with textual analysis and the literary dissertation being retained. An apparent contradiction lies in the fact that, whereas French metropolitan thought regarding the unfeasibility of teaching literature has not impacted on academics in South Africa, reflection on language didactics seems to have made itself felt. Could one surmise that this is more a predictable reaction to the greater demand for French intensive courses rather than a burgeoning interest in the evolving didactics of FLS or FLE? To a certain extent, then, French lecturers have abandoned the grammar/translation approach for undergraduate French teaching, (although they may retain it at postgraduate level, sometimes – and in our view misguidedly – as part of Translation Studies). Instead, manuals compiled by specialists in FLE didactics and designed

for rapid language acquisition are now prescribed books for language courses<sup>3</sup>. The positive spin-off of this is that the approach to French language teaching is more communicative than in the past.

"And ever shall be [?]"

That the teaching of French at South African universities has evolved relatively little over the years does not, however, justify maintaining the status quo. The great pedagogue Todorov's assertion that any educator who aspires to deserve that title should examine constantly what s/he does and how (Doubrovsky & Todorov 1971: 628), holds as true now as it did when he uttered it at the Cerisy-la-Salle conference and leads quite naturally to reappraisal and, if necessary, readjustment and/or radical reform. The logical starting point for such a review is, in our view, teaching itself. As the scholar and pedagogue Chevallard (1985, 1988) has demonstrated in his research on the didactics of Mathematics, each teaching activity, whatever the discipline, is a triangular process involving three elements – the learner, the educator and the subject matter, with didactics being the relationship between these three poles.

The educator must be aware that all didactics correspond to needs and that these needs do not exist within a vacuum but within a specific context which will differ in complexity in accordance with varying historico-political and socio-cultural parameters. There will, therefore, be as many systems of didactics as there are countries and universities; these will then be further multiplied by temporal and spatial considerations. The constant in this equation must be the recognition that at the core of any system of didactics are the learners' needs and abilities. The educator who ignores the three-pronged nature of the teaching act by fashioning a course primarily around his/her own interests, prioritises both him/herself and the subject matter at the expense of the learner. This occurs frequently at tertiary level since academics often base teaching on their own research; in this way, they may well be able to further their own research output, which they are under increasing pressure to increase, but they will not have participated fully in the learners' language apprenticeship.

"Each according to his ability"

In essence, the educator whose task is, after all, to maximise on the learners' potential, must place those learners at the heart of the didactic process. Not only is such a stance in line with the latest research on didactics but it also complies with the South African Department of Education's guidelines. This requires establishing a learner profile. By way of example, the 2nd year class is truly representative of students of French at the University of Cape Town and is similar in many respects to learner profiles at other tertiary institutions in South Africa. Since 2002, there are on average 12.5% students who have begun their study of French upon enrolling at university and who have barely one hundred and fifty notional hours of French. An average of 78.5% have studied French at secondary school but following a variety of syllabi, which include the South African Department of Education and the Independent Examinations' Board matriculation examinations, 'O' and 'A' levels for the Zimbabweans and British in the class.

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<sup>3</sup> Among those published during the last decade are : Capelle G. & Gidon N., *Le Nouvel Espaces*, Hachette Livre, Paris, 1995 ; Capelle G. & Gidon N., *Reflets*, Hachette Livre, Paris, 1999 ; Baylon C., Campà A., Mestreit C., Murillo J. & Tost M., *Forum*, Hachette Livre, Paris, 2000 ; Bérard E., Canier Y. & Tagliante C., *Studio*, Didier, Paris, 2001 ; Girardet J. & Pécheur J., *Campus*, CLE International, Paris, 2002.

In addition, there are on average 9% francophone students for whom French is the home language and/or medium of instruction.

There is, then, a great disparity in skills and knowledge of French. This lack of parity is matched by just as broad an ethnic heterogeneity: Americans, Angolans, Botswanans, British, Chinese, Congolese, Germans, Mauritians, Mozambicans, Norwegians, Poles, South Africans, Zambians and Zimbabweans are all represented in the UCT student body. Although on average 66% are South Africans, they do not share a home language since there are first language speakers of Afrikaans, English, Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu, a linguistic factor which is further complicated by the fact that they have not necessarily been schooled exclusively in that language. Given such a multifaceted learner profile, it is vital that the educator to whom falls the responsibility of course curriculum planning for those learners, take into account that, whilst there is an absence of any obvious shared element affording cohesion, the group exhibits in parallel an extremely rich linguistic, and therefore cultural, diversity. One of the very important aspects of this cultural heterogeneity is concomitant religious diversity. Present in the UCT student body, along with other belief systems, are the three great monotheistic faiths – Judaism, Christianity (predominantly Protestant but also Roman Catholic), and Islam.

"To each according to his need"

Once such a socio-linguistic profile is established, learners' needs must then be identified. The student who is enrolled in the French section of any university obviously needs to learn to operate successfully in that language. For this to occur, the educator must determine which aspects of the language are required by the learner in order to understand and communicate (aural, oral, written comprehension and production). We have already referred to the often fortuitous incorporation into university curricula of French manuals designed by FLE specialists specifically for non native speakers; this has fortunately often engendered among French academics a greater awareness of the need for their teaching methods to reflect language as a tool for communication. Such manuals (examples of which are given in footnote 3) are readily available and are updated in line with current research in didactics. They give prominence to authentic documents such as transport tickets, travel timetables, advertisements and may be accompanied by other learning supports such as sound bytes and film clips. The American model has sometimes found favour with French academics in South Africa. This model prefers artificial learning supports, fabricated by the compilers of the text book<sup>4</sup> to fit the learner's linguistic competence in French.

The disadvantage of such an approach is that an inauthentic French, fabricated around what the learner already knows, obviously does not sound, read or look like French as it occurs in the twenty first century. Such learning supports are not to be found in the text books published in France over the last three decades which are, in our view, far superior. Along with the rejection of the artificial in favour of the real, and also motivated by a desire for authenticity, is the emphasis that has been placed in recent years by specialist didacticians on learner empowerment. This signifies giving the learner the guidance and tools to manage independently his own language

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of the American model, described by its advocates as "an interactive approach", include: *Langue et langage*, Pucciani-Hamel, 1964, 1967, 1974, 1979, 1986, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Texas; *Entre amis*, Oates & Oukada, 1994, Houghton Mifflin, Boston; *Contacts*, Valette J.-P. & R., 2001, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

apprenticeship, in much the same way as he coped with learning his mother tongue, by acquiring the navigational skills to skirt a barrage of unknown words and safely reach meaning.

"Once upon a time the world was sweeter than we knew. Everything was ours; how happy we were then (...)"

Given that learners need to manipulate, with increasing autonomy, authentic aural, oral and written French, how necessary is the study of literature to their language apprenticeship? Let us not lose sight of the fact that, as indicated earlier in this article, the question first posed nearly four decades ago by specialist didacticians (Doubrovsky, 1980: 43) on the feasibility and the desirability of teaching literature remains unanswered. All the more reason, then, that those involved in education in general, and more particularly in disciplines where there has traditionally been a sizeable literary component, should give this serious thought. It is perhaps simplistic to justify the teaching of a literary text on the grounds that it too is an authentic document and to contend, as does Amor Séoud, that this is not because it contains "a piece of information but an emotion, not meaning but feeling – the effect of a combination of sounds and meanings, moving because of the felicitous or unexpected way in which they meet (...) in line with nature, authentic." (1997: 64)

More convincing, to our mind, is the argument that, when one reads literature, one interacts emotionally with the text. More than any other activity, that of reading and writing demands a personal investment; this is totally in keeping with learner centred education which is at the heart of the didactic triangle and of South Africa's Outcomes Based Education. The self is paramount; books are the arena of self-discovery<sup>5</sup>. Here Amor Séoud's point of view is compelling. His accessible analysis of Roland Barthes' theory of "plaisir du texte" is a useful tool for understanding reader / discourse interactions. Séoud reminds us that Roland Barthes postulated that the first form of pleasure comes from self-projection and self-recognition within the text but that, even when a text disturbs the reader by introducing him to the unknown or making him call into question long-held behavioural patterns and beliefs, it still affords him pleasure because it engages him emotionally. This reader arousal also conforms to the learner centred approach. Moreover, as Jean Alter had already demonstrated so ably in 1971 with his incisive analysis of how to teach literary texts, reading literature fosters the development of life skills by requiring the reader to make the same effort of comprehension, as he grapples with quandaries and predicaments in the text, as he would in real life (Doubrovsky & Todorov, 1971: 142).

Yet perhaps the most compelling of all arguments in favour of teaching literature is the polysemy of all literary texts<sup>6</sup>. This is of particular value when learners' needs and skills are disparate. Plurality of meaning signifies that there are as many possible interpretations of any one text as there are readers; literature thereby acquires a democratising function and that alone is valid enough reason to justify its teaching in the South African context. One might reasonably

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<sup>5</sup> The work *Lectures* by Françoise Sagan (1984) is illuminating in this regard, as the author charts her voyage of self-discovery in parallel with the books that she reads.

<sup>6</sup> Amor Séoud, in his analysis of the polysemy of literary texts, excludes Social Realism. He contends that literature which is based on ideology is, because of its univocal message, by definition monosemic, which is "why it seems so little like literature" (1997, 49). To what extent this remark is applicable to other bodies of texts, Maghrebi fiction for example, where the focus is partly ideological or which aim in part to sensitise the reader to a particular social reality, requires further investigation.



hypothesize a link between this democratising plurality of meaning and the universal appeal of the literary text as posited by Roland Barthes when he claims that " all classes, all human groupings have their stories and these stories are very often enjoyed by people from different, even antagonistic, cultures: international, trans-historical, cross-cultural, stories are there, like life itself." (1977, 7-8)<sup>7</sup>

It is with these reasons in mind that we advocate the inclusion of literature in the curriculum of French Sections of South African secondary and tertiary institutions.<sup>8</sup> Then arises the question of which literary texts the course developer should use. Within any French department, the literature selected must obviously be written in French but which other criteria should guide the choice of literary works? Our experience with students of French at the University of Cape Town has indicated that contemporary Moroccan women's fiction affords certain advantages. It does, of course, provide just one corpus and should not exclude others.

Nevertheless, it is our contention that students in South Africa can only benefit from seeing that other societies – and this is particularly true of Morocco – also evolve in a painful struggle to reconcile tradition and modernity and to empower certain previously disadvantaged sectors of the community, specifically women. Moroccan women writers, such as Touria Hadraoui, Amina Lhassani, Lina Moulay (Moroccan by choice), Rachida Saqi, Fadéla Sebti, and Rachida Yacoubi, incorporate into their fiction social issues which resonate within those living in South Africa: abuse of power, customary law, divorce and alimony, illiteracy and the education of women, inadequate health services, poverty, rural exodus and unemployment, polygamy, prostitution, and the challenges of multilingualism. It is important that the educator take cognisance of the ideological aspect of using such texts as pedagogical supports, and that s/he be prepared to act as facilitator, guiding the learner through self-knowledge to an understanding of others.

Within the South African context, such an undertaking can lead quite naturally to the desirable conclusion that cultural diversity need not be problematic but that, on the contrary, it can enrich and strengthen the social fabric. It is again Séoud who has most convincingly analysed the teaching of such literature as a means of encouraging actively social, ethnic and racial integration (1997: 60). The educator who embraces willingly the ideological dimension of his profession will, furthermore, appreciate the value of Moroccan literature written in French at a linguistic level. As Mohammed Miled's scholarly investigation into examples of Tunisian literature written in French demonstrates so competently, the writer who, for whatever reason, adopts a language, and so a culture, which is not his, retains notwithstanding the narrative legacy of his mother tongue (1985: 39, 1996) as a source of inspiration for his creativity. At a purely linguistic level,

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst we acknowledge that narratology as a science has disappeared from the cultural landscape as have many other ephemeral phenomena of the 1960s, there is evidence that the universal dimension of narration has been retained by critical and cultural theoreticians. Lyotard's analysis is illuminating in this regard.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it is interesting to note that, shortly after the literature component had been excised from the curriculum for Senior School-leaving Certificate in French, Yvan Gut, in collaboration with Gauteng secondary school teachers of French, edited a volume of literary texts for use at secondary school level, significantly entitled *Plaisir de lire* (Reading for pleasure) which was published by Protea Book House, Pretoria, in 2002. Furthermore, the DELF (Diplôme Élémentaire de Langue Française) and the DALF (Diplôme Approfondi de Langue Française), which are internationally recognised examinations compiled by the Alliance Française in Paris and backed by the French Department of Education with the aim of measuring French language proficiency, will be incorporating literary texts from the end of 2005.

then, Moroccan fictional narratives are useful for those teachers of French in South Africa who see value in demystifying the dangers of cultural diversity and promoting integration.

"The best way [out] is always through"

If the aim is to assist learners to achieve linguistic competency while respecting their socio-cultural profile and centring learning activities on them, then how best could this be achieved? The University of Cape Town is no different from other South African tertiary institutions in having retained (whether by default or design) the traditional method of formal lectures and tutorials for the teaching of French and Francophone literature. This involves the lecturer using lecture periods to explain in French the position of a work of literature within its broader literary and historical context, while commenting on genre and plot, character and stylistic technique. For the most part, students are passive listeners, occasionally asking for clarification and noting down relevant comments and clues to meaning given by the lecturer.

Depending on the linguistic competence of the learners, literary analysis is sometimes taken to a more complex level. This entails the lecturer introducing students to the intricacies of discourse analysis prior to scrutiny of selected texts. During tutorials students typically participate more actively since lecturers frequently ask them to analyse passages in advance and to expound on them before lecturer and fellow students. With this system neither lectures nor tutorials appear to provide the student with much incentive to communicate. Lectures delivered in French may well aid the learner to improve his aural comprehension skills in a literary context but tutorials afford him little opportunity to practise his spoken French other than in what could be described as an artificial manner, because of the very nature of the pedagogical activity prescribed. It is our contention that this methodology is in keeping neither with a learner centred approach nor with the prescriptions of the Department of Education's language policy; furthermore, it pays scant attention to learner needs or profile. We can then conclude that it should be reworked.

Before suggesting how this may best be done, and running in parallel, let us review briefly current assessment methods. Any form of assessment is obviously designed to measure to what degree course objectives have been met and reveals, therefore, what those objectives truly are, although they may be articulated differently elsewhere. Graham Gibbs and Claire Simpson in their article "Does your assessment support your students' learning?" cite Rowntree who stated that "if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must first look to its assessment procedures" (2005: 2).

At UCT, which is not unlike other South African universities in this respect, typically assessment takes the form of an oral exposé which learners present during tutorials on the literary work being studied in addition to one or more written assignments. The latter consist of a dissertation littéraire, literary essay, and/or a commentaire de texte, text analysis, of a short passage. The same assessment tools are used for tests, end of semester and final examinations. These are exercises which have been mastered, to a greater or lesser degree, by countless generations of French school pupils and university students alike. Indeed they are still used during the latter years of high school and at tertiary level in France and French-speaking countries. Both are formal exercises which require the writer to adhere strictly to several clearly defined steps. With the dissertation littéraire, the introduction must first introduce the subject by formulating one



or more statements and expounding on their interest in order to justify the study of the problem that they imply. The introduction will then announce the development and at least some, if not all, of the sections which will follow.

Each part of the development which follows must constitute a complete whole with its own introduction and development and must lead on naturally to the next part but remain completely coherent in its own right. Finally, the conclusion provides a rapid summary of the result of the enquiry as posed in the introduction and then highlights the interest of having put the subject under interrogation by leading on to allied questions of a more general nature. The *commentaire de texte* is equally rigid in its requirements. It consists of an introduction and of the analysis of the *centres d'intérêt*, or centres of interest which, for the most part, number three but can be limited to two, followed by the conclusion. The text commentary must indicate the correlations between form and meaning.

In our view these exercises test only the learner's ability to master a particular technique; such mastery can even be independent of any interaction with the literary text. Whilst they may have a place for French first language speakers, postgraduate students or aspirant literary critics, they are inappropriate tools for educators to measure advancement in the target language at undergraduate level. Furthermore, they do not equip the learner to gauge his own progress or linguistic autonomy. For these reasons, then, we would advocate that textual analyses and literary dissertations be replaced by more appropriate assessment tools.

In our opinion this would involve solely continuous assessment of pedagogical activities undertaken both in class and at home in preparation for class. In this we are guided firstly by our decision to place the learner at the centre of his own language apprenticeship. Not only do students prefer classwork assessment (Star cited by Gibbs, 2005: 4, UCT student course evaluations: 2002 – 2005), but they also find it fairer and more conducive to time management training (Kniveton cited by Gibbs, 2005: 4). As educators, we must be mindful of the significant body of research which points to the unreliability of examinations as performance predictors (Gibbs 1995, Bridges et al, 2002) and embrace continuous assessment as a more dependable predictor of long term learning of course content (Conway et al, 1992, Tynjala, 1998). Since it is our belief that literature is also language, we suggest that the most appropriate way of teaching and assessing it, is to adhere to the seven pedagogical steps advocated by DL-C (*Didactique en Langues – Cultures*).

We have already identified the value of a learner-centred approach; all activities should, therefore, take place in small groups to create a feeling of security before sharing with the group as a whole. It should be stated from the outset that it is vital with any course designed to teach a foreign language, that all instructions be crystal clear while at the same time encouraging autonomy in the learner; the language apprentice should not have to spend time trying to decipher what is being asked of him, since that will impact negatively on his performance in the target language. As all activities take place in French, what follows is a translated summary of some suggested learning activities.

The aim of Step 1, Anticipation, is to create a need or a desire in the learner. This desire is akin to the erotic desire described by Barthes as being aroused by contact with the text. It can be a desire to discover something, how to do or be something (the distinction in DL-C between

savoir, savoir-faire and savoir-être). It is the educator who, in his role as facilitator or guide, will provide the means and propose the tasks which will allow this desire to be fulfilled. In this instance, the task will be to read a novel written in French. "Look carefully at the cover of the book. What can you see? You haven't yet read the novel. Does the title give you any clues to what the book is about?" Simple though the above activity may be, it unfailingly arouses interest and fosters discussion among learners.

Step 2, global comprehension, is designed to make sure that students have understood characters and plot and can take the form of that tried and tested but useful exercise, oral questions and answers to be followed at home by the completion of a plot and character grid.

Step 3, detailed comprehension, presents the learner with certain tasks which are prompted by the narrative but which require him to examine himself and his own experience. Let us take as an example a novel by the Moroccan woman lawyer and activist, Fadéla Sebti, *Moi Mireille, lorsque j'étais Yasmina*. The heroine, a young French woman, a lapsed Roman Catholic married to a Moroccan Muslim and now settled in Casablanca, recounts her terror of dying on foreign soil (Sebti, 1995: 33–35). Learners are asked to speak to each other about their own fears and the physical sensations they experience when they are afraid.

A further activity, centred on the importance of Islam for the heroine's in-laws, requires learners to interview a practising Muslim from the student body or from within the local community to find out why, when and how Ramadan is observed. Another possible activity can centre on stereotypes; in the same text, we read, "It is true that in Prado Avenue where Marie Laure's and Catherine's parents lived, the word 'Arab' grouped together, any old how, everyone who was slightly swarthy and curly-haired." (Sebti, 1995: 12) Learners are asked to rephrase this by replacing the ethnic label "Arab" by a different one, such as "Afrikaner", "Zulu", "Cape Coloured", "Jo'burg Yuppie" and so on. This can lead on to a group discussion of stereotypes, their origin, use and inherent dangers, to be followed by a television-style debate.

Step 4, Identification, differs from the closely text-based Detailed Comprehension in that it is designed to enable the learner to identify concepts linked to the narrative. At this stage Multiple Choice Questions can be a particularly useful tool for the comprehension of abstract notions or text-related concepts. (In the case of the novel already cited the legal differences between repudiation and divorce, for example, or the professional fields in which adoul, public notaries, work). Furthermore, MCQs enable the educator to work indirectly on the lexis. Up until this point, language apprenticeship happens at the level of comprehension.

With Step 5, Conceptualisation, learners are required to extend their ability to comprehend to an ability to conceptualise. Role-play is an invaluable device at the stage of conceptualisation. Since educators are familiar with this pedagogical activity, we will give a single example for "Orages" ("Storms"), the last short story in Lina Moulay's collection *Un jour, l'Alcyon...* (Moulay, 1996: 127–137): "Role play. Work in groups of 2. You are two friends, A and B. A. realises that s/he is homosexual but is afraid to inform her/his parents. B. gives advice." At a later stage, the educator can transform such role plays into written exercises by asking learners to write them down as dialogues.

Step 6 is Systemisation. It is designed to enable learners to hone their conceptualisation skills. Simulation exercises are ideal at this stage. The latter resemble closely role plays but with one

crucial difference. With any role play, learners have preparation time with their partners during which they negotiate which role play they will choose, who will play each role and reach a consensus on what the role play will consist of; they then act it out, refine it and become comfortable with it. During this time, the educator is moving about the room, aiding or guiding if necessary. Then learners perform their role plays in front of the whole group.

With simulations, however, there is no preparation time whatsoever. Learners see the instructions for the first time (as always they must be clear and precise), stand up and simulate in accordance with them. It is obvious why simulations are the penultimate step in the didactic process. They are only successful as tools for language apprenticeship if relationships with fellow learners have been forged. Learners then feel unthreatened and confident in the group's willingness to cooperate as there is already an established pattern of negotiating, sharing, and reaching consensus.

The final step is that of Production. Certain specialists in French language didactics contest the desirability of the Production phase. To date Production exercises for the study of literature written in French have been limited. At tertiary level they are traditionally literary dissertations and text commentaries, as described earlier. There is also the type of exercise which requires the learner to "continue the story", "to write a poem in the style of Jacques Prévert or Paul Eluard" or "a fable in the style of La Fontaine"<sup>9</sup>.

We contend that such exercises are too prescriptive because they impose a particular style on the learner. Any valid production exercise must surely solicit authentic production on the part of the learner and stem from a real desire to communicate. Personal diaries and log books spring to mind for language learning; they are learner-centred, operate at an emotional level and so meet the pleasure criterion. They can also provide one of the rare moments when an undergraduate in a South African Humanities Faculty can produce a piece of creative writing which also crosses both culture and gender. By way of example, we would cite a possible production activity for one of the very rare plays written by a Moroccan woman, Amina Lhassani's three act tragedy *Nour ou l'appel de Dieu* (Lhassani, 1994). For this theatrical work which recounts the religious calling, martial exploits and burning at the stake of a young shepherdess, a Moroccan Joan of Arc, learners can compose an interior monologue for Nour to deliver during the few minutes preceding her execution.

"Telling stories for the greater good"

Traditionally Humanities Faculties have seen their mission as imparting knowledge; indeed, literature has long been viewed as the key to unlocking the mysteries of humankind. Should the current South African Minister for Education, Ms Naledi Pandor, walk in her predecessor's footsteps, and assert, like Mr Kader Asmal, that the only true vision of life can be found in and through the sciences, then literature will no longer have its place in tertiary institutions.

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<sup>9</sup> For examples of such production exercises, see Ensemble Littérature, Comeau R., Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Orlando, 1990; Panaché littéraire, Baker M., & Cauvin J-P, Harper Collins, NY, 1990. Although Yan Gut, editor of *Plaisir de lire*, Protea Book House, Pretoria, 2002, is to be praised for frequently using role play, letter writing and drawing as exercises for the production phase, he (to our mind unfortunately) also includes imitative activities, like the exercise which concludes Paul Eluard's poem "Liberté": "Model your writing on the same syntax and write a poem about a quality or a feeling that moves you emotionally" (107), (our underlining).

Why then persist? Our experience, when reading through what learners produce as a result of having interacted with a work of literature written by a contemporary Moroccan woman author, has been moving. The original text becomes their personal property; they have given themselves to it, discovered themselves within its pages and those pages have, in turn, given something back to them - an image of themselves, altered in some way and maybe more ready to embrace themselves and to accept others. The democratising effect of the polysemy of the literary text, the personal involvement of the learner-writer achieved through a cross-cultural approach and the obvious pleasure derived from autonomous language manipulation are positive outcomes. Reason enough surely to teach literature cross-culturally at tertiary level – books do indeed simply give back what is given to them.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vanessa Everson was employed by the University of Cape Town as Senior Lecturer in French, since when she has been involved in the teaching of language, literature and translation with special responsibility for curriculum development. She is researching actively the didactics of literature with special reference to Moroccan women's fiction.

Vanessa Everson  
School of Languages & Literatures (French Section)  
Faculty of Humanities  
University of Cape Town  
UCT P Bag  
Rondebosch 7701  
Cape Town  
Western Cape  
eversonv@humanities.uct.ac.za