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## THE ENORMITY OF LITERARY ANALYSIS TO TEACHING AMERICAN LITERATURE

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### Abstract

Some indispensable factors influencing in students' motivation are such as their interest in and enthusiasm for the material used in the class and the level of their persistence with the learning tasks. Those factors are going to applied in American Literature class through some literary analysis. Literary analysis invites students to the ongoing debate about the place of the theory and practice in the literature classroom. This article helps students develop and articulate their interpretations from a variety of theoretical approaches by equipping them with the critical tools for reading. The writer only highlights four literary analysis on American literature in views of poems and prose. These primary texts include Joseph Bruchac's poem "The Circle of Thanks", Thomas King's "Border", Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance, and Whitman's "Crossing Brooklin Ferry". Not all theories but some are discussed in details in this article. As a final point, these types of involvement are something that can not be imposed; it must come from the materials and courses that are implemented in the classroom.

*Keywords: Literary analysis, criticism, interpretation, American literature, theory and practice*

### A. BACKGROUND

American Literature class is initiated in this semester at Faculty of Language in UNISSULA. It is undeniably true that a few students are keen on this course. Many students found difficulties in giving analysis, mainly several essays from American outstanding authors, Henry David Thoreau, for an example. It was

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a logical response cause they got it for once. To get better understanding of American literature, they have to comprehend the meaning of American studies first; besides they are familiar with literary analysis.

American Studies stresses on the synthesis of knowledge. It also employs the interdisciplinary analysis used to analyze American experiences from multi-disciplinary perspectives, namely historical, philosophical, sociological, political, and cultural disciplines. This approach is to depict the cultural identity in America like in literature work. If one applies the interdisciplinary approach, he can bridge the concept of tense: past, present, and future.

Let me offer an example, Emerson's "Self-Reliance", he has given great contribution to depict the American cultural identity that still hold by most American nowadays. It is individualism. The development of individualism as an American mind can not be parted from phenomenon living in the society at a particular time. Individualism as a living concept has its connection with history, politics, economics, sociology, and culture of the society where it is nurtured. By looking at the progress of individualism and its spread, it can be assumed that individualism might exist in the future.

Hence, for many university teachers of English as a foreign language, the study of literature is indispensable because it exposes students to meaningful contexts that are replete with descriptive language and interesting characters. In addition to developing students' English skills, teaching literature also appeals to their imagination, develops cultural awareness, and encourages critical thinking about plots, themes, and characters.

Regrettably, many teachers focus mainly on language teaching methodology and offer little guidance on the analytical methods that are crucial to interpreting literature and designing effective classroom activities. This means that both the

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teachers and students lose out. They can not open the windows to travel across the world in comprehending the deep meaning of literary work.

This article presents a basic review of four approaches to teaching American literature and literature in general, and includes a discussion based on my own experiences as well as feedback from colleagues in many different universities which are familiar with the different approaches.

## **B. FOUR APPROACHES TO AMERICAN LITERARY ANALYSIS**

The writer highlights on prose analysis rather than drama and poetry in this chance. Some essays will be explored in the context of literary analysis. Five frequently discussed approaches to literary analysis mainly prose include: (1) New Criticism, (2) Structuralism, (3) Reader-Response, and (4). Critical Literacy.

### **(1) New Criticism**

New Criticism begins by assuming that the study of imaginative literature is valuable; to study poetry or any literary work is to engage oneself in an aesthetic experience (the effects produced on an individual when contemplating a work of art). This approach to literary analysis provides the reader with a formula for arriving at the correct interpretation of as text using only the text itself. Such a formulaic approach gives both the beginning student of literature a seemingly objective approach for discovering a text's meaning. Using New Criticism's clearly articulated methodology, any intelligent reader, say the New Critics, can uncover a text's hitherto hidden meaning (Bressier, 1999:37)

The New Criticism approach to literary analysis appeared in the United States after World War I. According to this theory, meaning is contained solely within the literary text, apart from the effect on the reader or the author's intention, and external elements are disregarded when analyzing the work. The reader's role

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is to discover the one correct meaning by a closing reading and analysis of formal elements such as rhyme, meter, imagery, and theme.

According to Thomson (1992), the world of a literary work is self-contained, and readers must exercise total objectivity in interpreting the text. In other words, the social, historical, and political background of the text, as well as the reader's reactions or knowledge of the author's intention, distract from and are not relevant to the interpretation of the literary work.

Still borrowing ideas from the writing of Thomson (1992), the major drawback of New Criticism is that most class activities are dedicated to identifying formal elements and literary devices such as symbolism, metaphors, similes, and irony. This turns the study of literary terms into an end in itself rather than a means to discover the beauty and value of a literary work. This excludes looking at the connection between the text and the reader's experiences and the historical and sociolinguistic influences that become apparent during the reading process.

Some who criticize the approach feel that readers inevitably relate to aspects of what they are reading and become subjectively involved the text. This can, of course, include the study of literary terms, but it does not make that technique an end in itself but rather a means to discover the beauty and value of a literary work. Some students responded that "Literature concerns the soul. Each person has a distinctive soul that can not be totally identical."

The writer also felt that without a subjective response to the meaning of the text, and with the heavy dependence on the teacher to decipher the literary work, students will not progress in building their language skills. Therefore, the application of the New Criticism approach offers students little enjoyment or recognition of the value of literature, and perhaps worse, creates a negative attitude towards literature.

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## Sample of Essay and Poem

In choosing acceptable texts, there are several things to consider. First is the difficulty of the vocabulary and syntax, and teachers should look for works that match the level they are teaching. Other things that make literature difficult are historical, social, and political references that add complexity for non-English speakers. The students' cultural unfamiliarity with texts causes problems and makes the students dependent on the teacher's interpretation. As a result, students often have to study literature by listening to the teachers' translation and writing down aspects of the analysis. The teacher, who speaks mostly in the students' native language, monopolizes a large part of the classroom time, which is an unproductive way to learn English.

The combination of difficult language and cultural material creates passive students and negatively affects their motivation due to the lack of enjoyment or benefit from the experience. At the points, the work should not be too long, too linguistically difficult, too culturally or historically unfamiliar, and have few or no points of connection with students' lives. Therefore, the writer chose the uncomplicated poem from Joseph Bruchac, for an example, as follows:

### The Circle of Thanks

As I play my drum  
I look around me  
and I see the trees.  
The trees are dancing  
in a circle about me  
and they are beautiful

As I play my drum  
I look around me  
and I see the sun and moon.  
The sun and moon are dancing  
in a circle about me  
and they are beautiful.

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As I play my drum  
I look around me  
and I see the stars.  
The stars are dancing  
in a circle about me  
and they are beautiful

As I play my drum  
I look around me  
and I see my people.  
All my people are dancing  
in a circle about me  
and my people, they are beautiful

*Micmac, Northeast Coast*  
*Native American Poem and Songs of Thanksgiving by Joseph*  
*Bruchac*

If Joseph Bruchac's poem "The Circle of Thanks" were be taught in American Literature Class, the teacher would probably begin the discussion with a set of questions that contain most, if not all, of the following: What is the meaning of the title?; What is the title's relationship to the rest of the poem? Are there other words in the text that need to be defined? What words connote sharpness? How are these words related to the my people discussed in the poem? Is Bruchac discussing any particular people or all people in general? Can this word be an allusion to some other people in the canon of Western literature? Is Bruchac establishing any other relationships between words or concepts in the text? What of the poem's physical structure? Does the arrangement of the words, phrases, or sentences help establish relationships among them? Based on the answers to these questions, what does the poem mean? In other words, what is the poem's form or its overall meaning and interpretation?

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By borrowing the ideas of Bressler (1999:37), upon close examination of these discussions, a distinct pattern or methodology quickly becomes evident. This interpretive model begins with a close analysis of the poem's individual words, including both denotative and connotative meanings, and then moves to a discussion of possible allusions within the text. Following the discussion, the critic searches for any patterns developed through individual words, phrases, sentences, figures of speech, and allusions. The critic's sharp eye also notes any symbols, either public or private, used by the poet.

Other elements for analysis include point of view, tone, and any other poetic device that will help the reader understand the dramatic situation. After ascertaining how all the above information interrelates and coalesces in the poem, the critic can, then, declare what the poem means. The poem's overall meaning or form, then, depends solely on the text in front of the reader. No library research, no studying of the author's life and times, and no other extraneous information is needed, for the poem itself contains all the necessary information to discover its meaning.

Another literary work example in New Criticism analysis was an intellectual diary from one student in responding the essay of "**Border**" by Thomas King (Cherokee). The three following paragraphs are as student's commentary as follows:

"I think that the title "Border" has a deep meaning. Maybe, it is as a symbol of family value or blended culture, which is very different Laetitia and her mother. There are two cultures in this family, American and Indian. Which one is dominant, it depends on how long they receive their culture. For example, her mother, I think that she still hold her culture tightly, meanwhile her daughter, Laetitia who ahs gotten the other culture (American) can receive both cultures. "Dad's American, "**Laetitia told my mother, "so I can go and comes as I please"**".

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Culture and society, I think that those items has great influences on how someone receives other culture. Laetitia decide to move to Salt Lake City because she is bored in reservation. I think that she is more tolerant than her mother. Because she grew up in reservation which offers other style of life. So she can receive American culture in her life. Meanwhile her mother is more dominant to Indian culture. We can see when she wanted to look for her daughter and stopped in borders between America and Canada. She was asked by the border guard:

*“Morning, Ma’am.”*

*“...”*

*“Citizenship?”*

*“Blackfoot,” my mother told him.*

*“Ma’am?”*

*“Blackfoot,” my mother repeated.*

*“Canadians?”*

*“Blackfoot.”*

I think that it is normal mainly for parents who still hold their culture tightly. Commonly, our parents always try to implant our culture. We must respect our culture. If you go to anywhere, do not leave your identity or family value. But I think they found that it is very difficult for them because most of us are more tolerant with other culture. And we grew up in a different culture. In this story that her mother felt “Home Sweet Home”. She wanted to come back in reservation area. It is normal for everyone especially for parents. Even though her daughter beg her to stay a few days again.”

Based on the above student’s intellectual diary, I think she can focus upon the generational difference between the mother and the daughter, and she might have mentioned that this is another “border” that gets crossed in this story. With the simple theme of essay, it will help students to open their minds in crossing the world of literary work easily without any library research.

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## (2) Structuralism

Structuralism is an approach that gained importance in the 1950s; instead of interpreting a literary text as an individual entity, this approach determines where a literary text fits into a system of frameworks that can be applied to all literature (Dias and Hayhoe, 1988). By using the techniques, methodologies, and vocabulary of linguistics, structuralism offers a scientific view of how we achieve meaning not only in literary works but also in all forms of communication and social behavior.

Borrowing linguistic vocabulary, theory, and methods from Saussure and to a smaller degree from Peirce, structuralists—their studies being variously called structuralism, semiotics, stylistics, and narrotology, to name a few—believe that codes, signs, and rules govern all human social and cultural practices, including communication. Whether the communication is the language of fashion, sports, education, friendships, or literature, each is a systematized combination of codes (signs) governed by rules. Structuralists want to discover these codes which they believe give meaning to all our social and cultural customs and behavior (Culler, 1975)

Like New Criticism, Structuralism emphasizes total objectivity in examining literary texts and denies the role of readers' personal responses in analyzing literature. It requires learners to approach literary texts scientifically and to use their knowledge of structures and themes to place the work into a meaningful hierarchical system. According to Culler (1982, 20), Structuralism does not focus on the aesthetic value of literature, but on the different processes and structures that are “involved in the production of meaning.”

Structuralists find meaning, then, in the relationship among the various components of a system. When applied to literature, this principle becomes revolutionary. The proper study of literature, for the structuralists, involves an inquiry into the conditions surrounding the act of interpretation itself (how

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literature conveys meaning), not in-depth investigation of an individual work. Literature needs no outside referent but its own rule-governed but socially constrained system.

Carter and Long (1991, 183) summarize the criticism of Structuralism when they write that “instead of being concerned with how a literary text renders an author’s experience of life and allows us access to human meanings, the structuralist is only interested in mechanical formal relationship, such as the component of narrative, and treats the literary text as if it were a scientific object.” This focus on Literature as a scientific system rather than as one containing individual and subjective meaning downplays the individual’s role in constructing meaning.

However, literature should contribute to students’ personal development, enhance cultural awareness, and develop language skills. Though Structuralism does make literature more accessible than New Criticism by connecting a work to an overall thematic structure, it over-emphasizes the linguistic systems and codes as “the sole determinous of meaning” (Thomson, 1992:15). Structuralism therefore is less relevant for the teaching of literature because the teachers and learners possess inadequate skills and knowledge to approach the text scientifically, which makes the study of the process fruitless and results in a lack of motivation for reading literature.

### **(3). Reader-Response**

Like most approaches to literary analysis, reader-response criticism does not provide us with unified body of theory or s single methodological approach for textual analysis. But believing that a literary work’s interpretation is created when a reader and a text interact or transact, these critics assert that the proper study of textual analysis must consider both the reader and the text, not simply a text in

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isolation. For the critics, the reader + the text = meaning. Only in context with a reader actively involved in the reading process with the text, they decree, can meaning emerge (Bressler, 1999:67-68).

The principle of Reader-Response approach include attention of the role of the reader and a process-oriented approach to reading literature. Reader-Response supports activities that encourage students to draw on their personal experiences, opinions, and feelings in their interpretation of literature. According to Davies and Stratton (1984:3) “Reader-Response addresses this problem by making the learners “active participant(s) in the learning proceeds”. Furthermore, Dias and Hayhoe (1998,15) point out that “it is precisely the role of the reader in the act of reading that has not been sufficiently and properly addressed.”

The crucial connection between the reader and the text is explained by Rosenblatt’s (1978) theory of literary reading, which describes the transactional relationship between a reader and a poem. The events that take place in a literary work occur at a particular time and place, and different readers react to these events in different ways, depending on their unique interests and experiences. Each reader attaches his or her own personal interpretation to a work; thus, a poem is “an active process lived through during the relationship between a reader and a text” and “should not be confused with an object in the sense of an entity existing part from author or reader” (Rosenblastt, 1978:20-21)

This perspective emphasizes the two-way relationship between texts and reader, a perspective that has a much in common with theories of top-down reading, where students use their schemata or familiarity with the topic from background knowledge and personal feelings to help them understand the work and improve their comprehension and interpretation of new information (Price and Discoll, 1977; Schwartz et al. 1998). Because each reader has distinctive experiences and feelings, an author’s idea about a work may be described in a multitude of ways. This is why Wright (1975:17) objects to “the notion that poems can be pinned

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down once and for all, paraphrased, translated into some statement which is What the Poem means, and that this statement is then all you need to understand and appreciate the poem.

To get better understanding between meaning and reading. The following paragraphs by borrowing the writing of Bressler (68-69). Meaning itself is context dependent and intricately associated with the reading process. Like literary theory as a whole, several theoretical models and their practical applications exist to explain the reading process, or how we make sense of printed material. For example, all focus directly on the reading process. What happens, they ask, when a person picks up printed material and reads it? During this interaction, reader-response critics investigate and theorize whether the reader, the text, or some combination finally determines the text's interpretation. Is it the reader who manipulates the text, they ponder, or does the text manipulate the reader to produce meaning? Does some word, phrase, or image trigger in the reader's mind a specific interpretation?

Such questions lead reader-response critics to a further narrowing and developing of terminology. For example, they ask, What is a text? Is it simply the words or symbols on a page? How, they ask, can we differentiate between what is actually in the text and what is in the mind of the reader? And who is this reader, anyway? Are there various kinds of readers? Is it possible that different texts presuppose different kinds of readers? And what about a reader's response to a text? Are the responses equivalent to the text's meaning? Can one reader's response be more correct than some other reader's, or are all responses equally valid?

The concerns of reader response critics can best be summarized in one question: What happens during the reading process? Some prominent factors influencing it are such as the reader, the text, and meaning. How Reader-Response

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critics define and explain each of these elements determines their approach to textual analysis. Furthermore, such answer also help determine what constitutes a valid interpretation of a text for each critic. Although many reader-response critics allow for a wide range of legitimate responses to a text, agree that reader-response criticism does not mean that any and all interpretations are valid or of equal importance. The boundaries and restrictions placed on possible interpretations of a text vary, depending upon how the critic defines the various elements of the reading process.

### **Discussion of the Reader-Response Approach**

The Reader-Response approach makes an important contribution to learning by demystifying literature and connecting it to individual experience. Researchers and teachers support making literature more accessible by activating students' background knowledge so they can better predict and decode the language and themes of literary texts. The Reader-Response approach is also supported because it takes advantage of the crucial fact that emotional reactions from reading a story, poem, or a play can be harnessed for classroom instruction (Bleich, 1975).

Activating students' creativity in reading literature is important and that personalizing the learning experience increases student participation and motivation. In fact, these are core principles that are known to encourage language learning through student-centered and process-oriented activities. Students with their creativities can see a literary work from their own perspective and interpretation, It is any chance for them to get better understanding about the concept of tense which is one of the characteristics in American Studies.

As one example, a colleague described a pre-reading exercise he used before his students read Edgar Allan Poe's poem "Annabel Lee." He asked the students to think about a time when they lost or had to separate from something or somebody they liked or loved very much, and what their feelings were at that moment. When students read the poem, their pre-reading reflection allowed them to immediately

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understand its theme, much more so than if the teacher had skipped the reflection and simply begun the class with “Today we study ‘Annabel Lee’. Turn to page 5!” After the class analyzed the poem together and conducted follow-up activities, the students teased the teacher by saying: “Ah, your love is your Annabel!”

The writer also recognized a positive change in my students’ attitudes towards literature when I connected the material with their lives. I saw joy sparkling in the students’ eyes, thoughtful reflection in their answers, and interest and curiosity for literature when they came to class, feeling free and relaxed. When I allowed students to interpret and respond to literature within the framework of their backgrounds and life experiences, they were empowered to give opinions without the fear of having responses different from the teacher, work collaboratively in pairs or groups to debate a topic, and read poems aloud and perform scenes from plays, which brings smiles, laughter, and contemplation into the classroom.

The writer was very impressed when my class gave analysis on American literature about Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” and Walt Whitman’s “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” The writer gave an illumination about one of the American identity in culture. It was individualism. The students with their backgrounds explored the individualism values due to their lives. They were enthusiasm before I gave the readings. Herewith, an example of student’s work after corrected

“What Emerson means when he said **“whose would be a man must be a nonconformist”** (p.1162). I think that self-reliance itself has a meaning identical to the idea of individualism. In the beginning of the essay, Emerson stated that our soul always hears something, which is original, not conventional, whatever the subject is. Therefore, we have to speak of what we, not what other people think. “to believe your own thought.” Emerson says **“to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, that is genius”** (1160)

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Emerson also courageously points out that in every man, there is a unique power, which enables him to face his destiny. Man has to do his own best else this power will lose its strength, and he will have no peace nor can he achieve any success. A man is a being to whom God has given ability or inherent strength to trust himself. **“Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string” (1161)**. If a man realizes this and develops self-trust, he will have a new power. On the other hand, if a man is always governed by society in his every action, he becomes weak, turns into a depending person, as well, and will never be satisfied with himself. Emerson writes **“Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members” (1162)**

A man can keep his genuine thought as long as he is in solitude, but it slips away as soon as he enters society. To become a real man, one must be a non-conformist, **“whose would be a man must be a non conformist.”(1162)**. The most important thing in the world is the integrity of one’s own mind. If the man absolves himself and promises to himself that he will be good, he will then have the suffrage of the world.

When the Romantic movement flourished in America in the nineteenth century, some people became increasingly dissatisfied with the idea of rationalism, which dominated intellectual life in the eighteenth century. From the above discussion, it is seen that Emerson’s individualism in his “self-reliance” was influenced by the romantic individualism which proclaimed that feeling and imagination were central. Individualism or self-reliance was connected with the idea that dignity of man requires that a man has to insist on himself and never imitate on the men.

Having pointed out Emerson’s man idea in his ‘self-reliance’. It concludes that he believes in individualism or non-conformity absolutely. He has a strong belief that a man has to trust himself, since he has his own power, mind, and originality of thought. It is very interesting to compare between Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” and Whitman’s “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”. Both of them are in the Romantic era which their work supports each other. But in Whitman’s work, his poem contains wider meaning about individualism dealing with society. He stresses the idea of personality. An individual does not stand alone. An individual has to be a member of society. This membership involves both the rights or duties that accompany freedom. Whitman wants to identify the principle of equality and individuality. He admits his self-identity clearly as the section 7:

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*Closer yet I approach you  
What thought you have now, I had as much of you-I lasid in my  
stores in advance  
I consider'd long and seriously of you before you born  
Who was to know what should come home to me  
Who knows but I am enjoying this  
Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you  
now, for all you can not see me*

He also stresses to breakdown resistance friendship as the section 6:

*It is upon alone the dark patches fall  
The dark threw its patches down upon me also  
...  
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety  
Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd  
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared to speak*

After read this poem, I also found one interesting aspect to be discussed. It was the idea of transcendence. I know that Walt Whitman is one of American Romanticism's greatest names. So he is also one of transcendentalists like Emerson in that era. Of course most of his writings and poets are still influenced by romanticism such as sentimentality for nature, stress over relentless change, and the domination of all by individual. And one aspect of his poet, "Crossing Brooklin Ferry" that adheres to the American Romantics characteristics is the ideas of transcendence. I am also interested in this point because Walt Whitman differs from other Transcendentalists in regard to the fact that he did not take himself out of society like Thoreau, nor did he completely submit to a higher Divine Power like Emerson.

After teaching an American literature class, the writer received feedback that indicated students' positive attitude towards literature and suggested that they would continue to read American Literature in the future. Nevertheless, some problems with the Reader-Response approach have been identified as follows: (1) Student's interpretations may deviate greatly from the work, making it problematic for the teacher respond and evaluate, (2) Selecting appropriate materials can be problematic because the level of language difficulty and unfamiliar cultural

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content may prevent students from giving meaningful interpretations, (3) The lack of linguistic guidance may hinder students' ability to understand the language of the text to respond to it, (4) The students' culture may make them reluctant to discuss their feelings and reactions openly. Therefore, even though Reader-Response has many advantages for learners, it still presents problems that need to be tackled in actual practice.

#### **(4) Critical Literacy**

Critical Literacy is drawn from a variety of theories such as feminism, critical language studies, and educational sociology (Luke and Freebody, 1997). In many cases, the language teaching profession ignores or inadequately addresses how texts deal with important issues of ideology and power relations in society (Cummins, 2000). By borrowing the ideas of Fairclough (1992:9), critical literacy facilitates students' critical awareness about the role of language in producing, maintaining, and changing social relations and power, and it is considered "a resource for developing the consciousness" about the relationship between language and society.

Another objective of critical literacy is to encourage learners to explore how social and political factors shape the language they are learning so that students are more aware of the sociopolitical reasons behind their choice to use certain language varieties. One recommended critical literacy model is "Transformative Pedagogy", a collaborative interaction between students and teachers that leads them to achieve a critical awareness of the sociopolitical use of language and to acquire and use language in a powerful and meaningful way to react to and change social reality (Cummins, 2000)

Critical Literacy is both valid and necessary for the teaching of literature and the students should be conscious of how texts relate to issues of identity, culture, political power, gender, ethnicity, class, and religion. On the other hand, students need to be aware of the ideological assumptions underlying the texts they read, but

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on the other hand, they also need to feel safe. A teacher using critical literacy approach must take into account the students' social experiences and worldviews but must also consider the degree of openness in different societies and cultures. The use of the critical literacy approach in the classroom might not work as well with students raised in such a milieu.

### C. CONCLUSION

When evaluating the relevance of approaches to teaching American Literature to university language students, it is useful to consider the following mainstay principles as follows: (1) **The purposes of learning.** Teacher firstly should give the purposes of learning as well as the definition of it. The students with their curiosity will embrace the course through their experiences. In addition, they will inevitably forge strong connections with the plots, themes, and ideological assumptions of literature and will become active learners that embrace critical thinking; (2) **Activities in the classroom.** The study of American literature is amenable to student-centered activities that offer opportunities for debate, discussion, and interpretation. Therefore, the choice of texts and activities is crucial because these selections will make the difference between passive reading and active involvement with a literary text; (3) **The place of Meaning.** Meaning is the result of the two-way relationship between texts and readers, depending on readers' experience, the reading context, and the difficulty, style, and form of literary language. Meaning is also influenced by how students relate to the author's portrayal of identity, culture, gender, and social class; (4) **Role of the teacher.** The teacher is an important facilitator and guide when it comes to offering a choice of texts and ways to interpret them. He or she must plan and prepare to involve students in lessons and encourage them to express their viewpoints; (5) **Role of the student.** American literature has the power to create opinions and individual

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meanings for students; hence, they will typically be the ones to initiate and sustain activities based on the literary themes that resonate with them. This will help students become active classroom participants and will lead to autonomous learning.

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