

USING READER RESPONSE APPROACH TO GET ENGAGED IN ENGLISH TEXTS OF THE PAST

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Abstract: This study investigates the students' interpretations of English literary texts produced in the heyday of British and American Literature –the Victorian Age and Modernism. The fact that the texts are so distant from the students' time and cultural contexts often becomes the obstacles in understanding, in particular, canonized literary texts. Moreover, in EFL classes where students do not use English in daily basis, the problem is multifold. On the other hand, despite the advice to use texts that are more contextual and meaningful to EFL learners, it is unavoidable for EFL students majoring English literature to read some canonical texts. Although the use of canonical works may present ideological and political bias (see (Said, 1979) and (McCallum & Stephen, 2011)), Lazar (2005) argues that literature, among others, opens access to cultural background, expands students' language awareness and develops students' interpretative abilities. Confronting with time and space so different from the students' own, this study employing reader response theory and analyzes how these EFL students majoring English literature construct meaning from three texts they read and its effects towards their interpretative abilities. The data were collected through students' responses, questionnaires and focus group discussions.

Keywords: English literature, canonized literary texts, EFL contexts, reader response

PENGGUNAAN PENDEKATAN RESPONS PEMBACA UNTUK MENDALAMI TEKS SASTRA INGGRIS KLASIK

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki interpretasi mahasiswa terhadap teks sastra Inggris yang ditulis pada masa keemasan kesusasteraan Britania dan Amerika – yaitu pada Masa Victoria dan Modernisme. Fakta bahwa teks-teks tersebut begitu jauh dari konteks waktu dan budaya yang dialami oleh mahasiswa sering menjadi hambatan untuk memahami teks sastra, khususnya sastra kanon. Lebih dari itu, permasalahan tersebut menjadi bertambah besar di kelas-kelas EFL yang tidak menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam kegiatan hariannya. Di sisi lain, meskipun terdapat anjuran untuk menggunakan teks yang lebih kontekstual dan bermakna bagi para mahasiswa EFL, mereka yang mengambil jurusan Sastra Inggris tentunya akan membaca beberapa teks sastra kanon. Meskipun penggunaan karya kanon dapat menunjukkan ketimpangan ideologis dan politis (lihat (Said, 1979) dan (McCallum & Stephen, 2011)), Lazar (2005) berpendapat bahwa sastra, begitu juga beragam hal lain, dapat membuka jalan untuk mempelajari latar belakang budaya, memperluas kesadaran bahasa para mahasiswa, dan mengembangkan kemampuan interpretasi mereka. Dengan adanya perbedaan ruang dan waktu yang begitu berbeda dengan yang dialami oleh mahasiswa, penelitian ini menggunakan landasan teori respons pembaca dan menganalisis metode yang digunakan mahasiswa EFL di jurusan Sastra Inggris untuk membangun makna dari tiga teks yang mereka baca dan dampaknya pada kemampuan interpretasi mereka. Data penelitian ini diperoleh melalui respons mahasiswa, kuesioner, dan diskusi kelompok.

Katakunci: Sastra Inggris, teks sastra kanon, konteks EFL, respons pembaca

During the years of teaching English literature in a college, the present researcher found that many students do not really like reading, let alone English literature. Literature is not a popular subject among many Indonesian students. More often than not, the English stories they had read before college were fairy tales such as Cinderella or Rapunzel and Indonesian folktales such as Malin Kundang or Sangkuriang. Only a few of the students have read more than five novels by the time they go to semester four. It is quite ironic since taking English literature as a major requires the students to read a lot in English. Moreover, in a course such as Survey of English Literature, the EFL college students must deal with canonized texts that are often considered difficult. Canonized texts frequently use sophisticated English vocabulary and expressions which many are not familiar for today's generation, let alone non English speakers. In addition, the canonized works present settings, issues, and ideas that could be far from what –in this case, Indonesian college students have experienced. Many of them are left clueless on understanding literary works of the past, such as Shakespeare, Dickens, or Woolf. In other words, they have to read texts which are not only different in terms of language, but also different in terms of culture.

In dealing with the barriers of language and culture, literature for teaching literature in EFL (English as Foreign Language) settings suggest the use of 'friendly' materials. 'Friendly' materials here mean selecting texts that are relevant to the students' language proficiency as well as the students' context. Marcus (2006) and Kilduff, Hamer and McCannon (2010), for example, select texts which are relevant for a particular level of English proficiency and include exercise on building students' language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and critical thinking.

On the other hand, Collie and Slater (1987), Bushman and Bushman (1997) and Maley (2001) argue that literature should be taught in a relevant and meaningful ways so that the students are able to engage and later appreciate it more. In result, they are concerned with creating classroom activities that improve students' engagement in literature.

Furthermore, Lazar (2005) and Carter and Long (1991 in Maley, 2001) believe that literature enable students to engage and appreciate cultures and ideologies that might be different from their own. Although Said (1979) and McCallum and Stephen (2011) assert that literature conceives ideologies and political bias, literature opens up dialog (Enciso, 1997 in Athanases, 1998). Literary discussion encourages multiple interpretations and reflections.

Reading literature, hence, posits different attitudes from reading to get information. According to Rosenblatt (1988/2007), reading literature is an 'aesthetic' reading that requires readers to interact 'emotionally and experientially with the text (Maley, 2001). However, the emotional and experiential interactions depend on the reader's background schemata. Different schemata will create different interpretation. As the act of reading involves readers' active transaction (Rosenblatt, 1988/2007), a proficient reader will produce more critical response and interpretation than a less proficient one. Garrison and Hynds (1991) find that proficient readers are able to reflect personal experience with the text they read. They rethink of their own personal experience, connect it with the world of text, and draw conclusion on the meaning of the text. On the other hand, improficient readers are not able to connect personal experience with the world of text. Similar research on reading response by Purcell-Gates (1991) finds that less proficient

readers fail to construct meaning from the literary texts they read.

Departing from the challenge of reading English literature and the notion of reader responses to literature above, the present study aims to investigate 1) how EFL college students construct meanings from the canonized texts and 2) the interpretive abilities derived from this construction. Employing descriptive textual analysis, this study analyzes students' responses to three so-called canonized works of English literature: *Jane Eyre*, *An Occurrence at the Owl Creek Bridge*, and *The Rocking-Horse Winner*.

METHOD

The study involved 15 - 9 girls and 6 boys-students who volunteered for this research. They were 13 sophomores and two seniors majoring in English literature. They had intermediate to advanced English language proficiency and were active in classroom discussion. They claimed that they loved reading (73%), but only half of the respondents have had read more than 10 books or short stories in English. All enrolled in a course called Survey of Contemporary English Literature which discussed the Victorian Age and 20th Century English Literature; yet, only two respondents have heard such periods and read books written in Victorian Age.

The materials used in this study are three works written in Victorian Age and Modernism: *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte (1847/2006), "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce (1891/1999), and "The Rocking-Horse Winner" by D.H. Lawrence (1922/2005). None of the respondents have read the texts.

The three texts were given as part of the course required readings. Before reading each text, the respondents got explanation on the socio-historical background of the texts. After reading, there was a classroom discussion in which the respondents could ask questions and

share opinions about the text. Next, they wrote a response about the text. Finally, they attended a focus group discussion to share their responses. This data collection is in line with Docter (2011) and Applebee (1993 in Smagorinsky and Coppock, 1995) who argue that students' oral and written responses are linguistic tools to mediate meaning from a text.

In analyzing the data, the study follows Garrison and Hynds (1991) categories of responses. Garrison and Hynds propose five categories of responses, namely (a) text bound or literal statement without interpretation; (b) text-focused reflection; (c) integrative paraphrase; (d) reader-focused reflection; and (e) reader-bound responses. From the categories, a proficient reader falls into the fourth category, since a reader-focused reflection shows personal exploration of textual event.

Meanwhile, the analysis of meaning making process uses Langer's (1989 cited in Purcell-Gates, 1991) proposition. Langer finds that readers go through four stages of meaning making: (1) being out and stepping into envisionment; (2) being in and moving through an envisionment; (3) stepping back and rethinking what one knows; and (4) stepping out and objectifying the experience.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of responses made by the fifteen respondents reveals two findings. First, the responses fall into category four: the reader-focused reflections with different degree of critical thinking which show different proficiency. Second, the respondents construct meaning based on their background schemata. The more culturally distant the text is from the respondents' experience, the harder they find connection.

The Making Meaning Process: Reader-focused Reflections

With regards to the meaning making process, this study found that the respondents follow Langer's process and hence, the responses fall into the reader-focused reflections. The respondents first go out and step into envisionment. In this stance, the respondents establish initial understanding of the content, genre, language, characters, etc. They did this by reading the title and guessing the story. Before-reading activities help them to set this understanding. For example, before reading *Jane Eyre* (JE), they made guess that it would be a story of a girl named Jane Eyre. They predicted that the story would be a kind of 'lovey-dovey' (to borrow one respondent's expression). One responded that having read another classic genre, she guessed it would have anything to do with the difficulty of having a love relationship since the girl is poorer than the man. On the second text, *An Occurrence at the Owl Creek Bridge* (AOOCB), the respondents found it more difficult in predicting what the text is about. However, they tried to do so by guessing from the illustration. Similarly, the third text, *The Rocking-Horse Winner* (TRHW) was approached through making prediction. It was harder since the text did not have any illustration, but they said that it must be a story about a child.

In being in and moving through the envisionment, which is the second stance, all respondents were able to retell and make judgment towards several scenes in the texts. The second stance requires readers to respond to the text using their personal experiences. The respondents elaborated and made connection among ideas. For example, in scene where Jane leaves the mansion, Respondent 7 said,

"Jane knew better than stayed in the house. Although she loved Mr. Rochester, she respected herself more. That's why she left."

Another example is when Paul in TRHW

"... only gave a blue glare from his big, rather close-set eyes. He would speak to nobody when he was in full tilt. His mother watched him with an anxious expression on her face." (Lawrence, 1922/2006).

R10 commented, "Paul was fearful when he was riding the horse." Meanwhile, R12 said, "Now his mother seemed to be worried. Perhaps she showed her love?"

Although text AOOCB seemed to be the most difficult to deal with, most respondents were able to connect to the text, especially in appreciating the Bierce's style. They were interested in this excerpt:

"Striking through the thought of his dear ones was sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or nearby -- it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. [...] What he watched was the ticking of his watch." (Bierce, 1891/2005)

Respondent 6 found these lines intriguing. She said, "I can feel the tension and fear. The sound must be very loud, while actually it was so soft." In addition, Respondent 4 said that these lines showed Bierce is a very good writer because he can describe the tension well when a man facing his death. The others agreed with both statements. This also proves that students have shown 'signal of awareness' where students "look at the way language was being used and moved from the position of mere observation to that of self-reflection" (Zyngier & Fialho, 2010).

Nevertheless, only 6 respondents (R1, R4, R7, R11, R13, R14) consistently went through stance 3—stepping back and rethinking one knows. In this stance, readers step out to reflect upon their own lives or their knowledge outside the text (Langer, 1990 in Purcell-Gates, 1991).

After reading *JE*, for example, these respondents commented on women issue in general and present time. One said, that she read in India how women are still treated as lower subjects, let alone if they come from lower castes. Another argued that in Indonesia, although living in big cities and having good career, some women do not have equal rights as men, such as in terms of salary or respect. Some related the story to Kartini's struggle for emancipation. Respondent 1 added, "I remember R.A Kartini because they have some similarities in attempts to assert their own identity within male-dominated society. I think without women like them, there will be no gender equality." Yet, Respondent 11 reminded the others,

"But, even today, a woman like Jane would be thought to be too straightforward and unlady-like because many people still think that a woman should be gentle and soft-spoken. *JE* was quite a shocking novel I guess, when it was published. Do you think so, Ma'am?"

Later, when discussing *AOOCB*, these respondents could make comments on the war situation portrayed in the text. Respondent 14 said that he used to think that war involved violence, but now he understood how it affected even a life of a simple man that was not even a soldier.

Meanwhile, *TRHW*'s issue on materialism was also commented by the respondents. Referring to the lecture on modernism prior to reading this text, this group of respondents was able to make connection. They commented how money disillusioned Paul's mother, which highlights the theme of modernism. As they could reflect on what they know with the text they read, the response fits in the fourth category of Garrison and Hynds' (1991), the reader-focused reflections. According to Garrison and Hynds (1991), this type of response requires readers to reflect on their experience(s) before they connect it to the context of the reading.

However, from these 15 respondents, only four (R4, R7, R11 and R13) have consistently moved to the fourth stance of meaning making. The fourth stance is the 'stepping back and objectifying the experience.' Langer (1989 cited in Purcell-Gates, 1991, p.5) asserts that these readers "distance themselves from their final envisionment and reflect on their reading activity, their understandings, and their reactions." The four respondents in the present study also went through this stage. For example, Respondent 7 said that she hated Paul's mother for lack of love, but she admitted that the story was moving and written beautifully.

Similarly, Respondent 11 said that reading *JE* opened her eyes on the woman's condition during Victorian Age and today's era. She said it was very brave to be Jane either in Victorian Age or today, since even today many women still suffer from discrimination. Meanwhile, she wrote that she understood what realism was after reading *AOaOCB*. On the other hand, after reading *TRHW*, she wrote that the message which grabbed her attention was "humans are selfish, easy to be obsessed, and will die on their own hands."

Likewise, the other boy, S13, always distanced himself from the texts and objectified them. After reading *JE*, he simply said that it was a story "of love overcomes logic. Also, I always like the idea of fighting for your rights and freedom." On *AOaOCB*, he commented that it is about "life and death, right or wrong, it's out of one's power to control and to judge." Furthermore, after reading *TRHW*, he wrote that "the story is like, 'what is the purpose of life?'" In other words, he did not use his personal feelings, but stated things a matter-of-factly.

Just like Purcell-Gates (1991) and Garrison and Hynds (1991) agree, these respondents move from one stage to another, but it takes a proficient reader to move to another quickly and fall into the reader-focused reflection easily. It can be

said that all respondents move along well and were quite proficient. Nevertheless, only four have been consistently reflecting and objectifying their reflections. In other words, the degree of their critical reading differs considerably. This then leads to the second finding of interpretive ability.

Interpretive Ability

From analysis, it is revealed that the texts offered different challenge for the respondents. The challenges stem from different background knowledge of the respondents about each text presented to them. It proves that readers approach a text differently based on what they have already learned (Rosenblatt, 1988/2007). Readers bring with them the knowledge, values and assumptions to make meaning of the texts. The closer the theme to the respondent's life, the easier they respond to it, and vice versa. It also confirms that "literary interpretation is a form of aesthetic reading and can be influenced by verbal intelligence and student motivation" (van Schooten, Oostdam and de Glopper, 2001). This then leads to the second finding.

Although JE has difficult English structures and expressions, it was easily understood since it presents conflicts familiar to the students. To most first time reader of JE, it is a story about a girl's struggle to live happily and more specifically, to get married or to be with the man she loves. The respondents, therefore, sympathized for Jane's poor childhood and understood her decisions regarding the man she loved.

Almost similarly, TRHW also engages the respondents because of its moving story of a child lacks love from his mother. At the first reading, most respondents did not like the story because the mother is 'cruel' since she cannot love her children:

"How can a woman be like that? Is that because of her marriage?" (R2)

"I don't like it. A mother is supposed to love her children. It fears me." (R7)

"I believe the one who deserved to die in this story is Paul's mother!" (R9)

These respondents found it hard to believe that such thing could happen: in their assumption a mother loves her children naturally and unconditionally. Even though the respondents found it ridiculous at the beginning that a mother could not show her love, they sympathized with Paul's predicament. In addition, to some degree they could relate to materialism issue in the story. They commented that money was quite important in modern life, but they said it was not the most important thing in the world.

In the process of interpretation, studies reveal that cultural background, social, institution and rhetorical contexts play significant role to produce particular interpretation (see Earthmann, 1992; Miller, 1993 (in Athanases, 1998, Jeffries, 2001, and Swann and Allington, 2009). In the case of AOOCB, many respondents could not relate to the story easily since the text is distant from the subjects' cultural background, social and rhetorical contexts. Rhetorically, Bierce uses expressions and jargons unknown for the subjects, such as "a sentinel [...] stood with his rifle [...] vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest -- a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body" Bierce (1891/2005, p.1). There are other long, complicated sentences which seem to be Bierce's style that made the respondents confused. The respondents complained those sentences are difficult to understand. Moreover, the setting of American Civil War was unimaginable for these subjects. They did not have sufficient reference on why the war took place or its impacts towards the civilians. Unlike the other texts –JE and TRHW, which the subjects could predict the social contexts more easily, they were less successful in predicting the context of the story in the first reading. It was only

after second reading did the respondents understand the text.

This fact is in line with Miall's (2002) proposition that literature should excite readers' empathy towards the characters. Even though the texts given were written in the past, two were produced more than 100 years ago; the respondents could easily feel this empathy. Furthermore, although most respondents could not relate well to the political and cultural issues of the periods in which the texts were produced, they were able to connect to the characters' predicaments. In the respondents' eyes, the texts present universal themes of love and struggle for better life –most specifically present in JE and TRHW. The two themes are quite easy to create emotions. In fact, the respondents felt the emotion of the characters from the author's style. As has been mentioned above, although AOOCB is rather difficult to understand, the respondents admired Bierce's writing style which made them feel for the main character's situation.

The discussion sessions held after first readings revealed the source of most respondents' insufficient ability to come up with thorough understanding about a text. They had relied heavily on the text alone. They constructed meaning based on what they have known about life and the texts they read. This is not wrong, and in fact good, considering the first finding has shown that they are proficient readers. However, in doing so, they haven't been critical enough to analyze the texts. For example, as it seemed that they have experiences about love, the constructed meaning of JE was simply 'a love story.' Many failed to understand that JE has feminist ideology. Similarly, in dealing with AOOCB, although they loved the author's style, most failed to sense the irony and its significant message of questioning patriotism.

Apparently, the distant setting and culture of TRHW and AOOCB add to the difficulty. In their first readings, it was

quite difficult for most respondents to understand why money was so important in TRHW. They could not relate it to the social class system in Britain in the 20th century. It was even more difficult for them to relate to the issue of the impact of civil war that becomes the background of AOOCB. To some, the fact that Americans experienced a civil war was news. In other words, the more culturally distant the text, the harder the respondents make meaning out of the text.

Interestingly, in contrast to most respondents, three respondents show more critical responses. These respondents could relate to more subtle themes of materialism and feminism after the first readings. To two of them, JE is not simply a love story, but it implies feminist perspective. Likewise, in responding TRHW, this group of respondents was able to articulate the theme. Take a look this response by Respondent 13:

"The idea of materialism in detail clearly can be seen through the narration and characterization in the story. For example, "The father went into town to some office. But though he had good prospects, these prospects never materialized." (paragraph 3, line 6-9). Prospects are abstract. In that passage, there is a contrast between abstract and materialized things. It says like materialized things are more valuable than abstract things, such as prospects."

And another response of TRHW,

"[...] Paul was haunted by "the voices", the "greed", in the house saying "There must be more money!" It was like he had gone crazy but he himself didn't know that he had gone out of his mind thinking about money himself even though it was not for him but for his mother. The allusion of Oedipus trying to prove his love for his mother can be considered as a comparison for Paul's longing to prove himself to the mother." (R11)

It shows that these readers “make meaning through projecting psychologically into the perspective of text-world construction and are able to switch very quickly between their own, reader-centered perspectives and perspectives of different characters during reading” (Whiteley, 2011).

These two respondents (R11, R 13) were considerably the top of the class due to their cognitive knowledge and English proficiency. These respondents have read more English texts than the others as well as showed more enthusiasm in studying literature. This proves in interpreting these texts they worked harder than the others and their English proficiency helped them read the texts more easily. While the others were satisfied with having understood the storyline and felt empathy for the characters, these two dug information about the setting of the story, asked questions regarding the ways people live in a particular era, and made connection with the experiences or observations they had. These readers in the study have assumed aesthetic readings, in which they “adopt an attitude of readiness to focus an attention of what is being live through during the reading event.”(Rosenblatt, 1988/2007). Their absorption in the texts they read enabled them to have moved to cultural responses where they have taken steps to “draw from historical, discursive, ideological, and social contexts” (Brooks, 2006 in Crumpler and Wedwick, 2011). In consequence, their responses are richer with intertextuality and self-reflection than those the rest of the group. What they have done is what Probst (1987 in Bushman and Bushman, 1997) believes that “literature provides us not knowledge ready-made but the opportunity to make knowledge.”

The overall findings reveal that texts play an important part in reader/text relationship. Furthermore, the findings above present some corroboration with previous studies on reader response and thus, call for implications to the teaching of literature, especially in reading canonized

works. On the whole, the findings reveal respondents’ strengths. The reader-focused responses produced by the respondents show that they are in general, proficient readers. In line with Garrison and Hynds’ (1991) study, these proficient readers are able to explore the texts without getting trapped in telling their own life or worse, retelling the text only. Instead, they went into the ‘world-text,’ take the ‘world-text’ point of view, but return to their own and make connection.

Another strong point is respondents’ ability to engage to the text. This confirms Miall’s (2002) findings that literature invokes feelings which are aroused by fictional events or artifact. This is shown by how the respondents could relate to JE and TRHW’s characters’ plights. Moreover, even when the respondents could not understand the story in the beginning, they could feel the strength of the language style of AOOCB.

It should be noted, however, that the findings reveal the respondents’ weaknesses. In the making meaning process, only four did make the four stages transition consistently. Objectifying the reading (stage four) seems to be a skill that most respondents have not acquired yet. The respondents have not been accustomed to reflecting on their readings and stand out from them. This suggests that they are inexperienced readers of literature because they sometimes are unsuccessful in getting the literary meaning, especially of text with ideologically and culturally-embedded such as JE and TRHW. They relied heavily on the text, without trying much to find other sources when stumbling with comprehension. It takes many readings both from the same text and other sources to make meaning comprehensively about a text, but unfortunately, only two respondents have tried to do so. Only after discussions could many get the meaning of the text, which confirms Hunt and Vipond’s (1991 in Miall, 2002) finding.

Therefore, these findings necessitate teaching implications in literature courses. First of all, given that the respondents are generally proficient readers, they are able to deal with any texts –canonized or contemporary works, quite easily. Even though contemporary texts may be handled more easily, it would be beneficial to read canonized or classic texts. The classic texts prove to be difficult, but at the same time they are challenging. Even if the students cannot get the meaning in the first reading, classics still reach out the students for their language style, as the finding in this study shows. Moreover, although they might have to reread the text more than once, this rereading will sharpen their skills to process the meaning. In addition, all the respondents apparently had opportunity to encounter social and cultural contexts other than their own. As evidenced in the findings, some of the respondents started to question commonplace assumption in text and life such as the mother-children relationship, woman's role in life, gambling, and even death. In so doing, the readers use 'critical lenses' (Appleman, 2000 in Lewis and Dockter, 2011) which enable them to be critical thinkers about what happen in their life. It supports an argument of Hans Robert Jauss, a German reception theorist, which put forward that literature can have an emancipatory effect to the readers as they not only reflect, but rethink existing prejudices and values (Pope, 2002). Bearing most of the subjects were sophomores and relatively new to reading English texts, let alone English literature, this fact shows promising attitude towards reading literature.

Secondly, in dealing with the findings' weakness, literature classes should provide more time for rereading and discussions. Rereading is a good activity to understand a literary work (Hunt and Vipond (1991) in Miall, 2002). Furthermore, the bulk of literature on teaching literature (see Collie & Slater, 1987, Bushman and Bushman 1997, Maley, 2001, Lazar, 2005, Kilduff et

al. 2010, Delbanco, 2011, etc.) suggest variety of activities to approach a text. Students should be encouraged to share thoughts and feelings, to read other sources so that they can enrich their existing schemata. Pre-reading activities should empower the students' background knowledge, while-reading activities should involve more discussions, and post-reading activities should enable them to reflect on their readings. This way, whatever the text, no matter how distant the settings and themes are, the students can cope with them well.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to find out the EFL College students' responses of the canonized works and their interpreting ability. The result of the study reveals two things: 1) the responses fall into reader-focused reflections; and 2) the closer the text's settings and themes to the readers' background knowledge, the easier it is to interpret. These findings entail implications. The first finding shows that the respondents were generally proficient readers who can reflect on their personal experience with the text's world. They could feel empathy and understood the characters' decisions. On the other hand, most of the respondents are inexperienced readers of literary works. As a consequence, the second finding shows that they were able to relate better with texts whose themes are close to their personal experience such as love and struggle for better life. Nevertheless, they found it quite difficult to understand texts that are politically and culturally distant from their own. It takes more critical readers to interpret such text successfully, which in this study were achieved by two of the respondents.

Bearing in mind that the respondents were still in fourth semester and the course was the first experience for them to read canonized works, the findings are promising indeed. Proficient readers are

good installment for understanding literature. The second finding, although wary, implies immediate action. With more exposure on different texts, these respondents can improve their interpretive skills. They could handle any texts, even when the texts are from the culturally and ideologically distant.

Therefore, to develop readers of literature so that they become more proficient readers and at the same time critical, courses of literature should encourage students to engage more in literature. It would be beneficial to give variety of texts from classics to contemporary ones.

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