

## How to Grade Literary Competence in Gymnasium Literature Classes

Alenka Žbogar

### Abstract

This article<sup>1</sup> considers the reading of Slovene short stories based on students' reception of a text and its context and cognitive theory of literary character, and then the findings are applied to grading in gymnasium literature classes. Literary competence (and literary knowledge as part of competence) are understood as resulting from deliberately constructing a system (context), which the learner does relatively independently through research into and/or creative engagement with fiction (a literary text). In teaching literature, indicators that result from (meta)cognitive, critical reading—knowledge of literature and cognitive level of literary competence—are the most valuable.

**Key words:** contemporary Slovene short story, grading, literary competence, reception, cognitive theory

### Reception of literary works

The reception of contemporary Slovene short stories is a complicated and complex process that places demands on grading. Open beginnings and endings make unambiguous understanding of narrated events impossible. In addition to initial emotional and experiential reactions, evaluating a reading also include (meta)cognitive and critical reading. Knowledge of literature (literary-historical and theoretical concepts for interpreting it) are integrated into the processes of comprehending, analyzing, and evaluating a reading. Only systematically developed literary context can aid in accurately addressing lacunae, an adequate horizon of expectations, and critical expansion of a reader's initial reaction to a story. Therefore, in teaching literature we can in particular grade indicators of literary competence linked to the cognitive level—that is, literary knowledge that facilitates solving literary problems and carrying out research. Grading knowledge of literature<sup>2</sup> should account for the major part of a final grade, while about ten (at most

---

<sup>1</sup> The author acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding No. P6-0239).

<sup>2</sup> I take the definition of knowledge from *Izhodišča za prenavo učnih načrtov v osnovni šoli in gimnaziji* (Principles for revising lesson plans in primary and secondary schools): Knowledge “includes and enables broad, general awareness and flexibility of spirit, convictions, ability to relate, identify problems provocations, pose questions, access and intellectually handle (process) relevant facts and their meaning, evaluate, interpret, and use” (Rojc, Slivar et al. 2022: 4).

thirty) percent of a final grade is represented by the emotional and motivational levels of literary competence, which include a student's outlooks, values, and readiness for active engagement in learning, as well as the discovery level of literary competence—that is, the student's ability to activate his potential<sup>3</sup> in complex situations, such as when reading an unfamiliar text.

Reception is the receiving, transfer, distribution, and impact of literature in given national, comparative historical, critical, psychological, and sociological conditions (as they apply to a literary work and its readers). In teaching literature, we engage in reception when uncovering the context (literary historical and theoretical positioning and using knowledge from related disciplines) and dealing with a text (with emphasis on close reading of a literary work and nascent interpretations). Less attention is devoted to considering conditions influencing an author who we can show knew another author on the basis of his or her statements and other evidence, and even less to reminiscences, which is difficult-to-prove evidence that two authors were in contact. In teaching literature, we mostly deal with passive (reader) reception, less so with reproductive (critical) and productive reception. We focus primarily on analysis of the influence of world literature on Slovene literature and vice-versa, as well as on the temporal alignment of influences. More specifically, influence is a unidirectional action of one literary text on another and the latter's transformation; for example, in its motivation and theme, stylistic, and/or the ideas it conveys. We are less interested in whether reception of Slovene literature occurs through existing judgments, criticism, or opinions about it; the nature of its reception by different readers with different horizons of expectations and predispositions (e.g., how Germans, Serbs, Italians, and Americans receive Slovene literature); in reading habits; in which Slovene works of literature were read in different historical periods and/or social strata, and to what extent Slovene literature is self-sufficient and independent of author and reader.

Different young readers come to learn about literature: they differ by reading level, horizon of expectations, receptive predispositions, and reading habits. We must consider all of these conditions, because reading processes, understanding, and explanation of a literary work depend upon contact between the reader and the literary work and the reader's decoding of it. All of this has an effect on the young reader and his or her reading process, including on the ways he or she fills lacunae and concretizes the imagined fictional world of the literary work. We have to be aware of to what extent and how, if at all, students construct the meaning of a literary text with respect

---

<sup>3</sup> When in an essay on a chosen research topic he formulates a literary problem or thesis and attempts to test it, he takes a position on it, makes comparisons and evaluations, and so forth.

to the framework of the literary system and integrate that into the grading stage when teaching literature.

Of course, reading literature is an aesthetic experience, but questions remain as to which are the productive, receptive, and communicative phases of the experience, how aesthetic distance influences concretization and the reader's subjective reading experience. Keeping in mind that young readers certainly read not only artistic works but also popular ones, future research might look at how both affect young readers and the specifics of their fictional structuring and characteristics, as well as how ambivalent or blank spots are filled (including according the literary historical context?). In this respect, when teaching literature, it is worth noting an author's creative reception, understanding of the world, and horizon of expectations, as well as a literary work's objective contents. This encourages students to think about relations between authorial intention and a literary work, literary studies and their research subjects.

### **The learner**

The most recent pedagogical approaches emphasize the coherent interdependence of transmissional and transformative teaching at the center of which is the learner subject, which charges the teacher of literature with respecting students' individual sensibilities and emotional and intellectual reactions to readings.<sup>4</sup> How can that be graded? Indicators from objective intellectual criteria—literary knowledge and cognitive level of literary competence—are most heavily weighted (i.e., from 50% to 60% of a final grade). For this reason, the reading curriculum systematically proceeds from an initial experiential and emotional response to a reading to (meta)cognitive and critical reading of a text. In addition, the cognitive level of literary competence is systematically strengthened with structured teaching about the literary system: building up literary historical and theoretical knowledge, which facilitates understanding, interpreting, and evaluating a literary work. Although contemporary literary didactics assigns the student as active learning subject the central role in teacher-learner communication, the teacher remains the organizer and coordinator of the learning process, as well as the evaluator of learning standards and criteria. A chief task of literary

---

<sup>4</sup> What is the author's view of the reception of his or her work, or how does that influence further writing? To what extent does authorial intention determine the meaning of a literary work and to what extent is meaning a result of an individual reader's understanding? What is the role and meaning of the literary canon in the twenty-first century: what, who, and why does a work enter or leave the Slovene literary system? Why read fiction at all in the twenty-first century?

didactics thus continues to be equipping teachers (Krakar Vogel 2020: 35–43), especially with the ability to effect quality differentiations and individualizations in the classroom—that is, to recognize differences between students based on their reception and cognitive abilities, students' cognitive profiles, their ability to work independently, and differences in levels of reading strategies they have acquired. Differentiation and individualization also determine the choice of books for home reading, oral presentations, additional and home assignments, the amount of material, difficulty and length of literary texts, and independent research assignments. All of this significantly influences planning and planned testing of the level of reception development and cognitive abilities (e.g., at the beginning and end of the school year), and naturally the evaluation of literary knowledge and competence.

### **(Meta)cognitive, critical reading**

During the phase of (meta)cognitive, critical reading of works in the curriculum, students are acquainted with applicable methods and ways of working with a short story—for instance, with reading strategies. By applying metacognition to their own reading process, students think about their reading effort, reflect upon and evaluate it: they think about what reading strategies enabled deeper insight into what they read and what suggested a different view of the short story. The interpretive process facilitates and makes sense of all this. It helps build up their knowledge of literature and prevents the effort at reading from becoming resistance to reading. Cognitive-critical reading enables students to think about their initial reading response and build upon it with objective, critical, intellectual (logical and analytical) insights into the literary text by completing tasks and doing exercises, answering questions, and solving literary problems. Examples of such questions are: 1) At the beginning of the story, does the protagonist have the same view of life and the world as at the end? If it changes, how does his personal transformation take place and what do you think significantly motivates it? 2) Fear often drives people into extreme situations. Which characters in the story confront incapacitating fear and at what points in their lives? What are the results of their fearfulness? Find the passages that are romantic, dramatic, realistic, and lyrical, and explain them.

Cognitive-critical reading is also supplemented with various creative activities that encourage students to be thoughtfully engaged. They build knowledge by their own efforts; for example, by independent creative activities based on what was read. About 20% of a final grade can be made up of elements on the emotional-motivational level of literary competence, including viewpoints, values, and preparedness for active work in learning about literature. The remaining portion (from 20% to 30%) can be allotted to the cognitive level of literary competence—that is, a student's ability to

activate his or her potential (especially knowledge of literature and literary competence) in complex situations, such as reading an unfamiliar text.

### Contemporary Slovene short story

Slovene short story is included in both the primary and secondary stages of education. The gymnasium educational plan (2008) also includes contemporary Slovene short story, but only up to 2000 (assuming elective treatment of Drago Jančar's "Death at Mary of the Snows" [1985] and Andrej Blatnik's collection *Zakon želje* (The law of desire 2000). For that reason, we are considering collections already included in the plan (e.g., Blatnik's *Zakon želje* and Cankar's "Skodelica kave" ("A Cup of Coffee"), as well as some that have not yet been included (e.g., Igor Bratož's *Pozlata pozabe* [Gilded forgetting] and Mojca Kumerdej's collection *Fragma*, Maja Novak's *Zverjad* [Beasts], and Suzana Tratnik's *Na svojem dvorišču* [In my yard]). Women writers are prominent in this group because for a long time the Slovene public has focused on their position in the school curriculum.

Older Slovene short story constitutes the largest portion of works. This article focuses especially on the reception of contemporary short story because I intend to show that in the postmodern period particular literary texts have appeared that activate particular reading processes. The fundamental features of contemporary Slovene short-story collections are reduction (of story, event, space, time, language, style, subjects, motifs, and themes) and compression (condensing, omitting, and abstracting). This leads to unusual constriction of the narrative field, which is reduced to subjectivity, intimacy, lyric atmosphere, and oppressive mood (Žbogar 2020: 287).

Average urban dwellers who live in dysfunctional families, in empty and superficial relations, and unfulfilled relationships with partners often appear in contemporary Slovene short narratives. They suffer from false friendships, lack of success at work, and hollow family relations, all of which pushes them to a great variety of attempts to compensate (and to addictions to media, illicit drugs, and bodily and psychological abuse). The subjects of contemporary Slovene short story are isolated, frequently contemplate suicide, and are oppressed by the thought that they lack control over themselves and their surroundings. They are oppressed, helpless, and condemned to just get by. The postmodern reality of vapid existence and a world in which there is no longer one truth and authority requires the desubjectivized and individualized literary character to trust only his or her own abilities and to battle everyday difficulties, such as unemployment, inflation, low wages, and discordant and empty relationships.

Such are, for example, Blatnik's literary characters in the collection *Zakon želje* (2000). They are helplessly trapped in a web of time that they cannot escape, aware of quickly changing time and the resulting impossibility of understanding and explaining the world and reality. The narrator describes

seemingly insignificant, banal moments or slices of time from their lives, which are threatened by insecurity, lack of control, and instability. There is no absolute truth: the subjects of contemporary Slovene short story search for it in vain. Since it does not exist, they are weary, disappointed, and spent. They thus conclude that words cannot express anything and silence cannot hide anything. Despite the fact that they speak a great deal, music expresses more than words in Blatnik's stories—e.g., “Billie Holliday,” “Električna gitara” (The electric guitar), and Pankrti igrajo ljubezenske pesmi” (Pankrti play love songs). The speaking subjects are fragile, passive, and develop at a moment of realization (epiphany), when seemingly insignificant forces shape their lives, while great (historical, societal, religious) events do not touch them. Everyday adventures influence them. They realize that in fact nothing takes place or changes in their lives. The realization does not affect them inwardly; they do not try to save the world because that is not possible and they try to save themselves, their everyday lives. For instance, the first-person narrator in Igor Bratož's short story “Café do Brasil: jutranji impromptu” (Café do Brasil: a morning impromptu) from the collection *Pozlata pozabe* (1988) thinks about how many people were sacrificed so that he can drink a morning cup of coffee, “confusedly asking himself whether he can drink it and start his day writing beautiful short stories” (99). The ending is open and readers do not learn whether the narrator could do anything more than ponder: “THE REST ISN'T IMPORTANT” (100). If the first-person narrator in Ivan Cankar's “Škodelica kave” 1935: 256–60) changed his moral and ethical stance when he had deeply hurt his mother by declining a cup of coffee, in Bratož's story this is no longer possible. Fifteen years later, Cankar's first-person narrator still bitterly recalls the moment he snapped at his mother, “‘Leave me alone!’ I said harshly. ‘Don't bother me now! I don't want any coffee!’” (1935: 259). Bratož's narrator only considers how to continue his day. In Cankar's story we read, “Sin is a sin, whether it's committed once or a thousand times, whether it's ordinary or unknown... Heavy beyond measure, a sin that has remained only in the heart, unnamed and without form, bleeds until the final hour... That is why the heart is a just judge and does not admit of trifles...” (257). In contrast to Cankar's narrator, Bratož's thinks about victims, but that “isn't important” (1988: 100).

### **The literary character in post-modernism**

The focus in teaching literature is on reception of the context and text. Therefore, in what follows I will elucidate the complexity of reception of contemporary short story and show that (meta-)cognitive critical reading must be built into grading literature. Literary characters' manner of acting is particularly relevant to defining contemporary Slovene short story, and they receive most attention in teaching works in the curriculum. For this reason, I take a semiotic and cognitive theoretical look at literary characters. Slovene literary theory has infrequently reflected on the latter. Non-mimetic

theoretical approaches mostly study literary characters on the basis of stylistic, lexical, thematic, and structural elements. Contemporary mimetic theories of the literary character are, among others, semiotic (deriving from the theory of possible worlds) and cognitive (from reception theory). The semiotic model of the literary character develops Fokkema in analyzing American and British post-modern novels. It holds that traditional ideas about the literary character do not conform with post-modernism, especially because of findings that literary representation is not straightforward, but is negotiated. Mimetic reading is the basis of traditional ideas about the literary character, who, as Hochman states (Fokkema 1991: 29), is fully integrated into a literary text and at the same time completely excluded. Literary characters in postmodernist fiction are marked either professional activities as a focus of their self-awareness or as victims of their own speech. The literary character in post-modernism is a quite problematic concept, according to Fokkema, because it appears that post-modernism undermines fixed and usual understandings. If before, a literary character could be rounded or flat, in post-modernism it is either flawed or failed (Fokkema 1991: 14). Schneider proceeds from the cognitive assumption that readers apprehend literary characters dualistically: they recognize in them real life experiences while at the same time literary characters result from literary constructions. Thus, it is an interactive process of readers' life experiences and experiences they derive from a literary text. Although, according to Schneider, some theoreticians—e.g., Iser, Perry, and Phelan—emphasize the dynamic nature of the reading process, textual analysis still often proceeds from a static, structural position. He notes that it is not important to a reader whether he or she apprehends a literary character dynamically or statically. Both Schneider and Gerrig,<sup>5</sup> who studies the cognition of fiction, underline that cognitive understanding of literary characters depends on numerous conditions—for example, a reader's preparedness to accept and understand literary personages, motivations for doing so, understanding and explaining literary characters' actions, and the horizon of expectations attached to literary characters' behavior and reactions to it. All of this depends upon readers' previous life experiences, which is called social cognition, their knowledge of the field of literature, as well as information about literary characters provided in a text. He believes that in the process of mental modelling—that is, the interaction between readers' experiences, information from the literary text, and thinking about what has been read—it is necessary to consider the dynamics and limits of reader processing. The theory of mental modelling holds that readers' mental images of what has been read form on the basis of their life experiences, which significantly influence mental constructions (as well as readers' imaginations). He compares reading fiction with reading scenarios: during reading, implicit and explicit mental

---

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Gerrig and Rapp (2004).

foci are activated. Explicit focus includes literary characters' speech in a given scene; implicit focus covers readers' mental images attached to literary characters speaking in a scene (including the relative significance of their roles in a scene). Reading fiction demands a dual effort: a reader directly connects his or her prior knowledge and life experience with information from the literary text while information from the literary text is stored in memory (without being immediately analyzed). The processes constantly interact on all levels of reading, from decoding graphemes to understanding words, sentence structure, and content. The cognitive theory of literary characters draws on findings from social psychology, which deals with the influence of interpersonal relations on the individual (in larger and smaller groups), especially centering on individual behavior, thinking, and formation of stereotypes and individual points of view. Schneider criticizes so-called reader identification with a literary character because he thinks that so-called literary empathy in the process of reading. He relies on Zillman (1967), who defines empathy as a web of reader abilities—to feel for a literary character, foresee the course or results of events for a literary character, and be able to take a position on the resulting situation. In contrast to identification, empathy does not require the reader to cull features of a given literary character or to adopt the role of observer (2001: 613).

### **Defining characters' cognitive status**

According to Emmott (Herman 2003: 296), the use of personal pronouns also influences the understanding of what has been read, because they may result in readers either feeling closer or more distant. Literary texts, especially short ones, present only fragments connected to social relations between literary characters. The reader's task is to fill in the blanks based on context and decide what sort of relations they have and what those relations expose. Emmott's key operative concept is the cognitive status of a literary character. A literary character's cognitive status is not linked to how often it appears in a literary text, but to the relationship the main character cultivates with it. In deciding the cognitive status of a literary character, the reader must take into consideration literary characters' relations: the most important ones, such as the role of a given literary personage, and related and less explicit linguistic forms, meaning that we can justifiably expect the main character to be frequently named by a pronoun, and the opposite—a minor literary character to be (frequently) introduced by personal name or a noun. The amount of linguistic information about a literary character should not be given excessive attention; style is more important. The use of pronouns (instead of personal names) in short stories results in increased proximity to characters. In the short story "Roka" from the collection *Fragma* (2003) by Mojca Kumerdej, the first-person female narrator is thus characterized in the first sentence: "I am twenty-nine years old and weigh one hundred seven kilos. I have the feeling that from now on I won't get any fatter" (119). In the second

paragraph, we learn the narrator had not inkling “what a powerful sound the body makes when it slams against concrete. Her body was strangely twisted, it seems to me that only the face was left of the head. Moving around her body, I had the sense that her eyes accompanied and followed me” (119). The final paragraph of the short story dispels all doubts: “It was my mom. And I loved her boundlessly” (137).<sup>6</sup> The result of proximation is often an emotional reaction. In this short story, it also arises from the influence the deceased father has on the mother and narrator’s lives, as well as the mother’s psychological and physical abuse of her daughter (one of the results of which is overeating). Relations between mother and daughter are cold and distant, although the daughter tries to make her mother love her: “I didn’t understand then that even with the best intentions you can’t warm a person that hates you, that you can do whatever and the result will always be the same. I didn’t know that for yet some years, almost a whole decade, it seems to me, and the whole time I tried mightily and unsuccessfully” (128). The most varied information is preserved in the context of reading—for example, about the presence of literary personages in a given literary space and time (the deceased father) and about interpersonal relations (the cold and aggressive mother, injured daughter, and unsympathetic police). Because of being overweight, the daughter is the target of their humor: “When I got into the elevator with them, since they wanted to view the apartment and talk with me, I caught how the young policeman whispered to this partner how it was hard to imagine the small elevator bearing such a heavy load. It didn’t hurt me, such comments haven’t hurt me for a long time” (12). The mother is unhappy: the daughter is supposedly at fault because despite the fact that the father died in a tragic car accident, she blames her for being guilty of his death. The first-person narrator says, “But after his death he was certainly no longer in your home, which didn’t mean that he wasn’t constantly present in other ways—as someone who wasn’t. And for that I’m guilty—that my father is gone” (120).

### **Relations between readers and characters**

According to cognitive theory, interpersonal relations in a literary text depend upon social proximity, and especially in short narratives relations are not completely revealed but are part of a puzzle the reader constantly completes. Emmott (1997) calls this completing the contextual frame and states that the following cognitive processes are engaged during reading: 1) familiarization with the literary characters, 2) observation of literary characters in a given scenes, 3) supplementing missing information, 4) consideration of linguistic means, 5) observation of literary characters that leave a given scene or do not enter it, and 6) consideration of social relations between literary characters.

---

<sup>6</sup> Mother is most often “she,” while secondary characters are named with nouns (e.g., policeman, detective, neighbor).

All of this brings readers to the conclusion that 7) they literary characters' actions and utterances have social consequences for those present, who see the actions or hear the speech, and that 8) changes in the spatial or temporal settings can radically shift an existing interpretation.

Schneider (2001) also believes that contextualizing is a dynamic process, asserting that readers constantly adjust their cognitive images of literary characters. Thus, it is a complex process that includes collecting information about a literary character, arranging the information, and changing and correcting ideas about a literary character. These processes take place according to cognitive strategies, such as categorization, de-categorization, personalization, and individuation, during which readers employ sources in the literary text, their knowledge of the field of literature, and emotional reaction to a literary personage. All of these approaches influence the reception of a literary character and this enables reinterpretation of literary characters: reconstructing information about them can take place so that readers reserve certain information to later include it in their image of a literary character, or they can immediately supplement preserved information with new information from the text. Categorization occurs when they arrange it gradually and include reserved information about a character. Individuation takes place when readers apply information about a character to their own prior knowledge or horizon of expectations. When knowledge of the field of literature does not influence the construction of a character's image, we have personalization. Categorization provides an effective information flow because it is an automated process, while personalization requires conscious and careful observation of details, logical arrangement of facts about a character and a good deal of patience with contradictory information. A literary narrative is often peppered with numerous blank spots, and literary characters are a sort of connector that allow readers to automatically fill them in (without acquiring any additional information from the text). An example are classic love stories in which an attractive and honorable youth falls in love with a beautiful and innocent young woman but must overcome numerous obstacles on the path to their union; for instance, effect a peace between hostile families, travel the world, or find a cure for her dangerous malady. The fixed structure of classical love stories testifies to the successful filling in of blanks and unimpeded reception of such texts. When a literary text's information demands of readers adaptation of set cognitive models, we are dealing with individuation, which in Schneider's (2001) opinion is the norm rather than the exception. When readers are forced to fundamentally revise a cognitive model of a literary character—for instance, if a text provides information about a character that completely contradicts foregoing information, we are dealing with de-categorization (2001: 624). De-categorization results in heightened reader attention: because of information that does not match the horizon of expectations, a process of so-called de-automization of understanding occurs.

An example of this is the story “Kurje uši” (Chicken lice) in Suzane Tratnik’s collection *Na svojem dvorišču* (2003). The story thematizes the abuse of a girl, the first-person narrator, who is around five years old. It takes place in a religiously mixed village: we learn that villagers are “papists..., real Catholics” (29) and believers of other religions. The first-person narrator lives with her grandmother, most probably during summer vacations, because she is especially intrigued that her friend Meri takes care of pigs, chickens, and rabbits. The former is afraid of ladders and dislikes chicken lice, so she leaves the egg gathering to Meri. When Meri goes to the upper level of the chicken house for eggs, she passes from an open to a so-called hidden context, and her father takes her place in the open context and begins to abuse the narrator. Despite the hidden context, Meri at least indirectly party to the event: she is simultaneously present and absent (or elsewhere).<sup>7</sup> The father probably knows that Meri is above but at the same time knows she is not present, and he touches the narrator around her waist and midsection. In this extremely unpleasant situation, Meri momentarily passes from the hidden to the open context with the rhetorical question, “Where are you?” (30), which indicates that Meri knows that something is happening to the narrator, but she does not enter the scene more actively. The narrator expresses the distance that arises between the friends, saying “I don’t see her anymore” (30). Left to her own devices, she tries to free herself from Meri’s father’s grasp: “I want to put my other foot on the rung. I can’t. He pushed me against the barn, he’s big and fat, with a huge belly and breathing hard. He grunts” (30). The girl again calls her friend to help: “Meri, come down right away!” (30). When Meri finally appears in the open context, the narrator is saved, and the abuser leaves the scene.

Maja Novak’s short story “Vstajanje z levo” (Getting up on the wrong side) in the collection *Zverjad* (1996) also requires a correction to an existing cognitive model of a literary character. The introductory statement is, “There lived a beautiful and powerful princess who liked nothing more in the world than to flirt” (1996: 7). The first sentence can trigger automatic approaches tied to typical classical fairytales (in which a princess is either a clearly good or clearly evil person, and evil will be punished, good rewarded, and the ending happy). But the second clause of the initial utterance requires deautomatization: the princess enjoys flirting. The reader perceives the character by personalization as well. With categorization, the reader includes prior knowledge (social experiences or knowledge of the field of literature) in modeling the character. In personalization, emotional and cognitive reactions to a character are activated. Specific (individual) memories are activated, so a theoretical explication of this approach is difficult. Literary characters for whom it is impossible to derive simple categorizations demand

---

<sup>7</sup> The narrator’s deceased father has a similarly ambivalent status in the short story “Roka” (Hand; Kumerdej 2003).

from the reader compassion and empathy. These are socially or otherwise isolated characters (also possibly psychologically or physically abused, as we saw in the examples of the short stories “Roka” and “Kurje uši”). Since personalization demands a greater degree of reader attention—that is, interaction of cognitive effort and intense emotional engagement—it has a special effect on the reader. Main characters should especially trigger personalization, and minor characters categorization (although not necessarily).<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion

We can conclude that in gymnasium literature classes, especially in grading school essay,<sup>9</sup> it is possible in particular to evaluate indicators of literary knowledge and elements of literary competence on the cognitive level (tied to solving literary problems and research into literature). This can constitute 50%–60% of a final grade. About 20% of a final grade can be made up of elements on the emotional and motivational level of literary competence, including point of view, values, and a student’s readiness to work actively in learning about literature. The remaining portion of a grade (20%–30%) should belong to the behavioral level of competence—that is, the student’s ability to activate his or her potential (especially literary knowledge and competence) in complex situations, such as reading literature.

University of Ljubljana

### Works Cited

- Blatnik, Andrej. 2000. *Zakon želje*. Ljubljana: Študentska založba.  
 Bratož, Igor. 1988. *Pozlata pozabe*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga.  
 Cankar, Ivan 1935. *Moja njiva. Črtice (1914)*. Ljubljana: Nova založba.  
 Emmott, Catherine. 1997. *Narrative comprehension: A discourse perspective*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
 ———. 2003. Constructing social space: Sociocognitive factors in the interpretation of character relations. In *Narrative theory and the*

---

<sup>8</sup> Schneider assumes that wide reading influences the reception of a literary text because he observes that most readers who do not read widely focus in particular on the mimetic fictional world and the literary characters in it more than on, for example, the time and place of the action.

<sup>9</sup> I suggest that contemporary forms of grading, such as of simulations (i.e., roundtables, exhibits, recitals, and poetry evenings), reconstructions (situating an unfamiliar text in a literary-historical context), quizzes, and discussion be integrated into teaching literature.

- cognitive sciences*, ed. David Herman, 295–307. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Fokkema, Aleid. 1991. *Postmodern characters: A study of characterization in British and American postmodern fiction*. Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi.
- Gerrig, Richard J. and David N. Rapp. 2004. Psychological processes underlying literary impac. *Poetics Today* 25.2: 265–81.
- Gradišar, Ana and Sonja Pečjak. 2012. *Bralne učne strategije*. Ljubljana: ZRSŠ.
- Herman, David. 2003. *Narrative theory and the cognitive sciences*. Stanford, Calif. : CSLI Publications.
- Krakar Vogel, Boža. 2020. *Didaktika književnosti pri pouku slovenščine*. Ljubljana: Rokus.
- Kumerdej, Mojca. 2003. *Fragma*. Ljubljana: Študentska založba.
- Novak, Maja. 1996. *Zverjad*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba.
- Rojc, Jasna and Slivar, Branko et. al. 2022. *Izhodišča za prenavo učnih načrtov v osnovni šoli in gimnaziji*. Ljubljana: Zavod RS za šolstvo.
- Schneider, Ralf. 2001. Toward a cognitive theory of literary character: The dynamics of mental-model construction. *Style* 35.4: 607–640.
- Tratnik, Suzana. 2003. *Na svojem dvorišču*. Ljubljana: Škuc.
- Žbogar, Alenka. 2020. Razmerja v izbrani sodobni slovenski kratki prozi. *Jezik in slovstvo* 3–4: 287–94.
- Zillman, Lawrence John. 1967. *The art and craft of poetry: An introduction*. New York: Collier Books.

## POVZETEK

### KAKO OCENJEVATI LITERARNO ZMOŽNOST PRI KNJIŽEVNEM POUKU V GIMNAZIJI?

*Branje sodobne slovenske kratke proze osvetljujemo z vidika recepcije (kon)teksta in kognitivne teorije literarne osebe ter spoznanja apliciramo na ocenjevanje pri književnem pouku v gimnaziji. Zanima nas zlasti ocenjevanje šolskega eseja. Literarno zmožnost (in književno znanje kot njen sestavni del) razumemo kot rezultat sistematičnega konstruiranja sistema (konteksta), ki ga učenec gradi relativno samostojno preko lastnega raziskovalnega in/ali ustvarjalnega stika s fikcijo (literarnim tekstom).*

*Pri pouku književnosti v najvišjem deležu ocenjujemo zlasti tiste določilnice, ki so rezultat (meta)kognitivnega-kritičnega branja, tj. književnega znanja oz. spoznavne ravni literarne zmožnosti. Sodobna slovenska kratka proza je vključena na primarno in sekundarno stopnjo književnega pouka pri slovenščini, zato je primerna za preučevanje branja tako z vidika recepcije teksta in konteksta kakor kognitivne teorije literarne*

osebe, pa tudi aplikacijo teoretičnih izsledkov na ocenjevanje literarne zmožnosti pri pouku književnosti. Temeljni značilnosti sodobnih slovenskih kratkih zgodb sta redukcija in kompresija. Redukcija se pojavlja na ravni zgodb, dogodkov, prostora, časa dogajanja, strukture, jezika in sloga, subjektov ter motivno-tematskega ustroja. Kompresija se kaže kot zgoščevanje, izpuščanje in abstrahiranje, kar vodi do izjemnega zmanjševanja pripovednega polja, zreduciranega na subjektivnost, intimnost, atmosfero in razpoloženje (prim. Žbogar 2020: 287). V sodobnih slovenskih kratkih zgodbah pogosto nastopajo urbani povprečneži, ki živijo v disfunkcionalnih družinah, izpraznjenih, površnih medosebnih odnosih ter neizživetih partnerskih razmerjih. Lažna prijateljstva, neuspešne poslovne odločitve in votli družinski stiki jih pehajo v najrazličnejše kompenzacije od zasvojenosti z mediji in medmrežnimi tehnologijami, prepovedanimi substancami do telesnih in psihičnih zlorab. Subjekti v sodobnih slovenskih kratkih zgodbah so osamljeni, pogosto razmišljajo o samomoru, utesnjuje jih misel, da nimajo nadzora niti nad sabo niti nad okolico. Nemočni so obsojeni na bivanje. Postmodernistična resničnost izčrpane eksistence in sveta, v katerem ni več ene same resnice in avtoritete, terja od desubjektivizirane in individualizirane literarne osebe, da zaupa le svojim sposobnostim ter se po svojih najboljših močeh bori z vsakdanjimi težavami, kot so brezposelnost, inflacija, izčrpavanje na delovnem mestu, neharmonični in izpraznjeni medosebni odnosi. Tako so npr. literarne osebe v Blatnikovi zbirki *Zakon želje* (2000) ujete v mrežnico časa, iz katere ne morejo pobegniti: zavedajo se hitrega življenjskega tempa in lastne nezmožnosti, da bi v tem hitrem življenjskem tempu razumele in osmislile realnost, ki jih obdaja. Prikazane so v navidezno nepomembnih, skorajda banalnih trenutkih, v katerih jih negotova, neobvladljiva in nestabilna usoda peha v občutke ogroženosti. Absolutne resnice ni. Čeprav jo iščejo, je ne najdejo, saj ne obstaja: utrujene so, razočarane, izčrpane. Ugotavljajo, da niti z besedo niti z molkom ni mogoče ničesar izraziti, prav tako ni mogoče nič zamolčati. Kljub temu da veliko govorijo, je bolj od njihovih besed povedna glasba (npr. v zgodbah *Billie Holliday*, *Električna kitara*, *Pankrti igrajo ljubezenske pesmi*). Gre za t. i. subjekte pogovarjanja: razvijejo se v trenutku spoznanja (epifanije), ko jim nepomembni trenutki preobrnjejo življenje. Spremembe jih notranje ne preobrazijo: ne skušajo reševati sveta, ker vejo, da to ni mogoče, rešiti skušajo sebe, svoj življenjski vsakdan. (Samo)govor je njihova edina akcija.

Branje fikcije je zapleten in kompleksen proces mentalnega modeliranja, tj. interakcije bralčevih izkušenj s podatki iz literarnega besedila ter estetsko, etično in spoznavno osmišljanje prebranega. Bralno procesiranje ima svojevrstno dinamiko, zakonitosti in omejitve, kar je potrebno upoštevati tudi pri ocenjevanju. Miselne predstave o prebranem nastanejo na podlagi bralčevih življenjskih izkušenj – te naj bi pomembno vplivale na mentalno konstruiranje in “prevajanje” fikcijske sheme v bralčev domišljjski in miselni svet. Leposlovno branje aktivira implicitni in

*eksplicitni miselni fokus, kar pomeni, da bralec svoje predznanje in pretekle življenjske izkušnje neposredno povezuje z informacijami iz literarnega besedila, hkrati pa se informacije iz literarnega besedila shranjujejo v njegov spomin, pri čemer slednjega bralec ne osmisli takoj. Proces sta v nenehni interakciji na vseh ravneh branja: od dekodiranja grafičnih znakov do razumevanja besed, stavčnih struktur in ostalih interpretativnih postopkov. Hkrati se ob branju sproža t. i. literarna empatija, tj. sposobnost bralca, da sočustvuje z literarno osebo, predvideva, kako bodo razplet in posledice dogajanja vplivale nanjo, ter se do fikcijskih situacij opredeljuje. Literarna empatija – v nasprotju z identifikacijo – od bralca ne terja selekcioniranje značilnosti posamezne literarne osebe niti vživljanja v vlogo opazovalca (Schneider 2001: 613).*

*Bralec kognitivne predstave o literarnih osebah nenehno posodablja. V kompleksnih procesih zbiranja informacij o literarnih osebah, preurejanja teh informacij, spreminjanja in korigiranja predstav o literarnih osebah, se po Schneiderju (2001) sprožajo posebne kognitivne strategije, ki jih imenuje kategorizacija, dekategorizacija, personalizacija in individualizacija. Bralec na osnovi iztočnic iz literarnega besedila, literarnovednega znanja ter čustvenega odzivanja na literarno osebo, nenehno reinterpreтира prebrano. Rekonstrukcija predstav o literarnih osebah mdr. poteka tako, da bralec določene informacije shranjuje ločeno, v predstave o literarnih osebah pa jih vključi bodisi kasneje bodisi jih z novimi informacijami nenehno nadgrajuje.*

*Opisana teoretična spoznanja recepcije in kognitivne teorije literarne osebe bi veljalo upoštevati pri ocenjevanju literarne zmožnosti pri književnem pouku v gimnaziji. Literarno zmožnost sestavljajo čustveno-motivacijska, spoznavna in vedenjska raven. Ocenjevanje branja literarne fikcije naj poleg prvotnih čustveno-doživljajskih odzivov in motivno-tematske analize (obnove in povzemanja zgodbe) vključuje zlasti (meta)kognitivno-kritično branje. To pomeni, da v procese razumevanja, analiziranja in vrednotenja prebranega sistematično vključujemo literarnovedno znanje (literarnozgodovinske in -teoretične pojme za interpretacijo), saj šele bralčev sistematično izgrajen literarnovedni kontekst lahko pripomore h korektnemu zapolnjevanju odprtih mest, horizonta pričakovanja in nadgradnji prvotnega bralčevega odziva na prebrano. Pri pouku književnosti, npr. v šolskem eseju, torej lahko objektivno ocenjujemo zlasti tiste določilnice literarne zmožnosti, ki so vezane na spoznavno raven, tj. na književno znanje, zato naj ta predstavlja večinski delež končne ocene. Le razvito literarnovedno znanje dejansko omogoča reševanje književnih problemov in literarno raziskovanje. Kognitivno-kritično branje namreč omogoča, da učenci svoj prvotni doživljajski bralni odziv osmišljajo in nadgrajujejo z objektivnimi, kritičnimi, razumskimi (logično-analitičnimi) vpogledi v literarno besedilo. Kognitivno-kritično branje nadgrajujemo tudi z različnimi (po)ustvarjalnimi postopki, ki učence spodbujajo, da so miselno dejavni, znanje gradijo oz. konstruirajo z*

*lastnim naporom, npr. s samostojnim (po)ustvarjanjem prebranega, aktualizacijo ter kritičnim vrednotenjem prebranega. Elementi čustveno-motivacijske ravni literarne zmožnosti, kamor sodijo stališča, vrednote, pripravljenost učenca na dejavno delo pri književnem pouku, ter vedenjske ravni literarne zmožnosti, to so sposobnosti učenca, da v kompleksnih situacijah, npr. pri branju neznanega besedila, aktivira svoje potenciale, naj potemtakem predstavljata le po dvajset (do največ trideset) odstotkov končne ocene, spoznavna raven, kamor sodi književno znanje, pa od petdeset do šestdeset odstotkov končne ocene.*