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TITLE	Literary Theory and Literature Education in Finnish Upper Secondary School: A Historical Survey
YEAR	2023
DOI	https://doi.org/10.14712/23366680.2023.2.4
VERSION	Publisher's PDF
LICENCE	CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
CITATION	Mäkikalli, A. (2023). Literary Theory and Literature Education in Finnish Upper Secondary School: A Historical Survey. *Slovo a smysl, 43(20),* 79-94. https://doi.org/10.14712/23366680.2023.2.4

Literary Theory and Literature Education in Finnish Upper Secondary School: A Historical Survey

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SYNOPSIS
This article examines how literature education has changed in Finnish upper secondary school and what kind of theoretical background assumptions are made in the processing of literature. Early on, the aim of teaching literature in Finnish upper secondary schools was to emphasize national identity. Literary works about Finnish people were considered the strength of the young nation. The teaching of literature focused on learning national literature, and on knowing the authors and their works. From the 1950s onwards, new criticism influenced the teaching of literature, and close reading became the key tool for approaching literature. Gradually, the teaching of literature expanded from national literature to young adults' literature, popular literature, and contemporary literature. In the 1980s, various literary approaches and background theories were emphasized in the learning materials. However, current literary teaching is still tied to new critical and formalistic theory. At the end of the article, the question is asked whether it would be necessary to change this approach so that literature would continue to attract young readers.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA / KEYWORDS
Literární vzdělávání; literární teorie; dějiny literatury; nová kritika; close reading; střední škola; finská škola; Finsko / literature education; literary theory; history of literature; New criticism; close reading; upper secondary school; Finnish school; Finland.

DOI
https://doi.org/10.14712/23366680.2023.2.4

We act in the midst of language, searching for the right words to make ourselves understood, composing sentences and clauses into paragraphs and chapters when the need arises to write something as a meaningful whole. Spoken and written (and also sung) language consisting of letters and words — this is the basis of our existence. This remains the case even as our culture has changed visibly and noticeably over the past few decades from printed text and image to digital and online culture. Indeed, we are spending more and more time online and on screen, engaging with an audio-visual medium that is inundated with language, in both our leisure time and professional lives. Despite this, written and spoken language remain crucial media of communication — media which lead students to engage in further study and with

the challenges of their working lives. The 'mother tongue and literature' (the school subject in which literature is taught in Finland, or 'L1' as it is referred to in the international context), is the place in the school systems where language and literature make up the principal subject of study.[1] L1, consisting of the study of language and literature, is the starting point for all learning, and represents a priority for education. The overall position of literature as a subject in the Finnish secondary and upper secondary school system should therefore be central.

Even at the upper secondary school level, students are engaged in the process of learning to read. Literary works (including literary fiction and poetry) present the reader with a mix of conventional and novel elements, and it is often difficult to approach, let alone understand them without the necessary knowledge and skills to meaningfully engage with them. The academic study of literature and literary theory is an important companion to the teaching of literature, one that is supported by research but also by the ideas this research generates regarding various ways of approaching literary works. What kinds of tools or skills do we need to understand or make sense of a literary work? What makes it possible for an upper secondary school student to experience fiction as a rewarding form of culture and art? Such questions are not only current but extensive, and to properly address them would exceed the scope and framework of this article. I will try, however, to approach these issues by outlining the current interrelationships between literary education and literary research at the level of upper secondary school.

This article studies the perspectives with which literature is approached in upper secondary school education in Finland. I examine the historical starting points of literature education in Finnish upper secondary schools, especially from the point of view of literary theory, with an aim to identify the specific kinds of literary theory that underlie it, and better understand how literature is approached in the classroom. I will also examine some of the ideological underpinnings of literature education. My primary sources in this survey are the national core curriculum texts and textbooks, but I also draw on final exam and interview material.[2] I will begin by studying the first phases of literature teaching in Finland, and then move on to more current practices.

What role does literary theory play in literature education? First, it affects *how* we read; second, it influences *what* we read; third, it discourages simplistic thinking

1 In Finnish secondary school students study a subject called '*Äidinkieli ja kirjallisuus*', in English literally 'mother tongue and literature'. In praxis, the subject of study depends on a student's L1, which means that most students study Finnish language and literature. But there are also groups of students who study Swedish language and literature, for example, North Saami and literature, or sign language and literature. All in all, there are 12 possible subjects that a student can study depending on his or her L1. 'Literature' does not refer here exclusively to literary works (fiction and non-fiction) originally written in a student's L1 or national context, but also to foreign works and works in translation.

2 I have interviewed 11 teachers from seven schools who taught both Finnish language and literature in the upper secondary school and Finnish A literature in the International Baccalaureate program during the autumn of 2022. The interviews were held by Zoom and were recorded.

(cf. Willinsky 1998). From time to time, discussion of the relationship between literature education and theory has surfaced in Finland, and a number of publications have presented views on how theories concerning literature could be used in school education (cf. e.g., Hägg 2006; Kouki 2009; Koivisto — Kiiskinen 2011; Rikama 2013). However, they often fail to consider the question from a historical or holistic perspective. In this article, I will take a somewhat broader approach by considering the historical perspective on the relationship between literary theory and literature education, examining as well what this relationship looks like in the current situation.

The significance of history lies in the present, and I believe that the relationship between theory and teaching literature must be seen from the perspective of the current cultural transformation. We live in a time when the avalanche of technology, especially telecommunications, internet, AI, and electronic media, has engendered new forms of communication, learning, and the consumption of art and culture so extensively that the digital transformation of culture can be compared to the Gutenbergian revolution. While the era of the book, particularly the printed book, is shifting to digital media, this does not mean the death of books or reading but their diversification.

LITERARY HISTORY AND LITERARY KNOWLEDGE AS THE BASIS FOR LITERATURE EDUCATION

Teaching literature in Finnish upper secondary schools is a tradition that began about 140 years ago in the 1880s with the teaching of the Finnish national epic the *Kalevala* and Greco-Roman literature (Fasoulas 1990, pp. 153–155). The first textbook was a book of literary history written for schools by B. F. Godenhjelm and published in 1884, after which it was met with immediate interest abroad. This led to its publication in an 1896 English translation by E. D. Butler with the title *Handbook of the History of Finnish Literature*. Considering the history of the Finnish nation, it is evident that also the history of Finnish literature was not too long at this stage. In his preface to the book, Godenhjelm argues that the history of Finnish literature is also the history of national development, the history of Finnishness, but that the other languages used in Finland — Swedish and Latin — must also be considered (Godenhjelm 1884, preface). This suggests that literature education in Finland was multilingual from the very beginning. Godenhjelm's history is about *national* literature, which he defines as literature depicting the spirit of a people (ibid.). Periodization is based on political history, and the author covers the literary history of Finland from the times of the *Kalevala* and other oral folk poetry to writers active during the first half of the 19th century. Strikingly, Godenhjelm draws attention to the essential connection between language and literature by beginning with the history of Finnish language, and by mentioning a number of peasant or rural writers alongside highly acclaimed writers, such as Elias Lönnrot. At this stage of Finnish literary history and Finnish nation building, J. L. Runeberg — later the national poet — is mentioned only as one of the poets writing in Swedish, albeit as the most talented one (ibid., p. 69). Aleksis Kivi is presented as a playwright, although *Seitsemän veljestä* (1870) — the first novel written in Finnish — is also mentioned as a great novel which realistically depicts

daily folk life and ultimately emphasizes the innate human drive to learn and civilize oneself (ibid., p. 86).

The history of literature was taught as part of the general curriculum and in support of cultural learning, which was considered essential for fostering students' human capital (Fasoulas 1990, pp. 153–155). In 1916, literary history was designated a compulsory field of instruction in Finnish upper secondary schools, and it ultimately became a means for strengthening Finnish nationality and nationalism in the context of Finland's political subjugation to the Russian state (ibid., p. 158).

Literary history has thus been an integral part of Finnish language and literature education in upper secondary schools since the early 1900s. Up until the 1960s, strong emphasis was placed on the history of Finnish literature and a specific textbook was used for teaching literary history. Godenhjelm's textbook had already been in use for several decades when the revised 9th (last) edition was published in 1916. In 1914 a new textbook on the history of Finnish literature was published, just three years before the Finnish state became independent from Russian rule. The book had the title *Suomen kansalliskirjallisuuden vaiheet: kouluja varten* ('Phases of Finnish national literature: for schools'), written by J. W. Juvelius. The title of the book directly expresses its main focus: Finnish *national* literature. In his introduction, Juvelius (1946, p. 5) defines national literature as those literary products which, above all, reflect the national spirit and bring out the ideals of the people, and the book continues basically with the same attitude and contents as Godenhjelm's. Juvelius focuses exclusively on the history of Finnish literature, and there are no chapters on the history of the Finnish language, as in Godenhjelm's textbook. More attention is paid to J. L. Runeberg, and he is now described in more elevated terms as the 'poet prince' of Finnish literature (ibid., p. 63). With its title, the textbook clearly emphasizes the need for Finland to establish its own identity through literature, in this way serving what are essentially patriotic aims (cf. Sevänen 1995). The book was used for several decades, with the last edition published in 1946.

The national core curriculum in 1941 advised teaching literary history to deepen the *understanding* of literature. This was implemented by a psychological-biographical method combined with knowledge of the historical context (VOO 1941; Rikama 2004, pp. 18–19). According to the curriculum, students should read literature which represents the 'national spirit' and helps to cultivate a 'patriotic mind' (VOO 1941, pp. 13, 20). V. A. Haila and Kauko Heikkilä's (in later editions also Eino Kauppinen's) *Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden historia* (1947, 'History of Finnish literature') was a popular textbook from the 1940s to 1970s, published in 20 revised editions. Its preface does not mention *national* literature or any specific quality of literature, but instead simply comments on periodization and the most recent works of literature. Compared to the textbooks by Godenhjelm and Juvelius, *Suomalaisen* is lengthier, with more thorough treatment of the various periods and literary phenomena, as well as illustrations. As Finland had already established its identity as an independent country, there was no particular need to emphasize Finnish national spirit or nationalism with the aim of establishing the nation (cf. Tilly 1994, pp. 133–134). It does, however, describe Finnish folk poetry as 'one of the greatest and most noteworthy in the world' (Haila — Heikkilä — Kauppinen 1964, p. 10). It also points out that, besides recognizing its own tradition, Finnish literature has always observed and been open to foreign literary trends (ibid., p. 170).

We are compelled to agree with Erkki Sevänen's (1995) argument that literature education in Finland has played an important role in the formation, maintenance, and dissemination of the nationalist-patriotist value system. With its own contribution, it has participated in the process in which the Finnish state institution was first built, then developed, and in the years following 1917 and 1918, strengthened (Sevänen 1995). The textbook by Haila, Heikkilä, and Kauppinen is written in a manner that serves to strengthen the institution of the Finnish state.

A great deal of emphasis was placed on teaching literary history and on the psychological-biographical method of approaching literature during the first half of twentieth century. In general terms, it could be said that until the middle of the 20th century, *literary knowledge* — the study of authors, their works, and the contents of these works — seems to have been at the centre of teaching literature and the strengthening of national identity mediated by it (cf. Rikama 1990, p. 170). In the classroom, students studied the classics of literature in such a way that their contents and the events they described were retained in memory. The work of synthesizing meaning or reflecting on various possible interpretations was rarely included in literature education (Fasoulas 1990, p. 156). Assessment tasks in matriculation examinations — as with such essay topics as 'The position of daughter-in-law in *Kalevala'*, for example, or 'Creation myth in *Kalevala'* — also tended to deal with the knowledge of literature (see Heikkonen 2019).

In responding to these types of tasks, students must have been expected to be quite familiar with events in the *Kalevala*. In addition to a thorough knowledge of individual classic works, students were educated in literary history using a textbook on literary history together with a supporting reading book (Salminen 1971, p. 103). O. J. Brummer writes in 1913 that 'after all, the history of literature is the outcome to which the teaching of the mother tongue [L1] is to lead, [...] the literary-historical presentation becomes, as it were, the apex of a building which needs, as its foundation, other fields of teaching of the mother tongue' (Brummer 1913, p. 6). Brummer's idea must be interpreted in a contemporary context: he speaks mainly of the history of Finnish literature, and in the early 20th century when Brummer was writing, that history was still relatively short.

Brummer (ibid., p. 11) also speaks of presentations on authors and their works given by the teacher. Students learned literature through independent reading in conjunction with the teacher's lectures on literary periods, styles, names of authors and works, and years. Students were assigned classic works of literature and reviewed the events they described. In literary theory, the 19th century is indeed a period of literary-historical, biographical, and comparative theory, associated with a mode of literary Romanticism in which the author is connected directly to his work. Well into the second half of the 20th century, both research and pedagogy were heavily influenced by positivist doctrine, i.e. that knowledge is attained through observable phenomena, and works were generally approached in relation to national identity and a background knowledge of their authors.

The strengthening of national identity as part of the study of literary history was persistently visible in the 1980s as well, as evident, for example, in a textbook from 1984 that cites the *History of Finnish Literature* (1910) written by the poet Eino Leino (1878–1926):

> *Literature is an interpreter of a country. Literature is a mirror of the nation. Through its literature, a people speaks out what it has felt and imagined as the most beautiful, what it has desired, hoped, and sought after, what is the most sacred in the world. Without literature a nation is like a blind man or deaf-mute. It is only through a literature in its own language that a people learns to know itself and make itself understood by others.*
>
> *Through its literature, a people joins a greater unity: humanity.* (ÄSIII, p. 119)

The quotation is presented as an epigraph for the literary history section of the textbook, serving as a statement of purpose for the study of literary history. Literature is seen as a means to understand the nation and the people who live in it, because it reflects what the people have 'desired', 'hoped', 'felt', and 'imagined'. Conversely, without a literature of its own a nation would be 'blind' and 'deaf-mute'. Writing on this perspective, Eino Leino, who was himself a Finnish neo-Romantic writer and one of the most celebrated authors to draw on Finnish folklore and national history in his poetry, emphasizes the nationalistic tendency. The main text in the book further underlines its mission, beginning with the very first lines: 'Few peoples can proudly present such an ancient spiritual treasure as the Finns. The folk poetry of our distant ancestors passed down from generation to generation gives an impressive display of creative talent' (ibid., p. 120).

During the 1960s and 1970s, however, literature education became the target of critical discussion in Finland (see e.g., Sevänen 1995, p. 36). The study of literary history and works of authors belonging to the Finnish national canon were partly replaced by readings in contemporary literature. In this way, after World War II, the range of reading in schools was somewhat diversified. Working-class literature and popular literature entered the school curriculum. Emphasis shifted from literary history to fiction and poetry (cf. Rikama 1984, pp. 38, 66, 132; Sevänen 1995, p. 36).

One of the textbooks that represents this new phase in teaching literary history in Finland is *Suomen kirjallisuushistoria* ('Literary history of Finland') by Esko Ervasti and Pertti Karkama, first published in 1973. Underlying their view of literary history, the writers take the perspective that literature is an essential part of social structure and critical thinking. Literary history should not only be based on biographical information of the authors and the history of ideas, they argue, but on that which depicts the overall structures of society (Ervasti — Karkama 1973, p. 5). It follows that greater emphasis should be placed, for example, on popular literature, children's literature, and literature for young adults. The writers also contextualize Finnish literary movements in relation to their international counterparts. Finland's economic history is considered as a background for literary developments, and the textbook raises awareness of the distinctions between different classes of society. Even the classification of periods defines Finnish society after the independence as a 'bourgeois society'. When speaking, for example, of the historical context of Romanticism, Ervasti and Karkama (ibid., pp. 35–36) write: 'Relations between the classes were governed by patriarchal conceptions. Only in exceptional cases were the poor aware of their status and able to improve it. The position of the church was still strong, and the church emphasized humbleness and submission. […] The cultural bourgeoisie adopted the idea of nationality. Classicism had been a movement supporting the nobility. National

Romanticism became the movement of the bourgeoisie.' The textbook can be considered as exceptionally political, in the sense that it politicizes literary movements as well as the history of the Finnish state.

Gradually, the nationalistic framework for textbooks was superseded, and in the early 2000s a new textbook — *Äidinkielen ja kirjallisuuden lähde* ('Origins of native language and literature') — took an overtly critical view on the question of national identity as a function of literature. The section on Finnish literary history begins with the claim that Finnish literature is connected to national history, and the students are asked to seek information and reflect on the concept of the nation (ÄKL, p. 392). In particular, the textbook identifies the 19th century as a period of nationalistic literature. Furthermore, the book addresses the heterogeneity and distinctness of nationhood and national identity: 'Simultaneously to creating an image of a united people and the typical Finn, literature commented on the heterogeneity of the nation. For example, in the nineteenth century, the Romantic image of a unanimous nation was created. Already in the early 20th century, this image had broken down' (ÄKL, p. 393). The textbook thus argues for the disruption of the nation-building project carried out in literature. It also criticizes Eino Leino's use of the term 'national neo-Romanticism' to describe the period at the turn of the 20th century: 'As a matter of fact, it was only Leino who called the era "national neo-Romanticism" — it's just that when a sufficiently great genius launches a new concept, it is taken up, even if the genius got it a bit wrong' (ÄKL, p. 430).

Although literary history, both Finnish and that of the Western canon, was widely studied in previous years, the scope was even further widened in the 2000s. Textbooks were published that dealt not only with the phases of Western literature but also with world literature. In one textbook, for example, there is a separate chapter dealing with Japanese, Latin American, and African literature (cf. ÄKL 2005). The chapter is short, but it brings to light the simple fact that such literatures exist beyond Western culture.

FROM LITERARY KNOWLEDGE TO LITERARY ANALYSIS

The first decades of the 20th century brought a new perspective to literary theory. Interest shifted from particular authors, the conditions in which they lived, and the cultural and historical backgrounds of their works to the texts themselves. Theories advanced by Russian formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism emphasized discrete aspects of the literary text, breaking it down into its parts, with the aim of showing how a work of art functions as an autonomous whole and why this is relevant.

New Criticism in particular has influenced literature education, and the trend continues today to play a significant role in upper secondary school, if not other areas of education. In the earlier positivist tradition, *interpretation* was not so much at the centre of reading, because meaning was referred back to the author himself, his life stages, and other verifiable aspects outside the work. The new reading methods compelled readers to determine the meaning of literary texts based on the texts themselves. For the poet T. S. Eliot, this effort was connected to the notion that the

meaning of a poem does not emanate from its author, but lies instead between author and reader. The poet formulates an expression for a particular feeling, and it falls to the reader's competences to recognize this expression and thus awaken a similar feeling (Eliot 1921; see also Viksten 1971, p. 82). This process may be described as 'objective correlative' insofar as the reader recognizes in the text, as it were, the 'right' feeling and meaning. This idea implies that there is a 'right' reading mode for a particular text, in which the 'right' meaning of both the details and the whole is also apparent to the reader. In modern schools, this search for the correct interpretation may have already passed, with the consequence that while readers find themselves in a very unequal position, they are not encouraged to see literature as an object that may be approached through various different ways of interpretation. While many conflicting views were taken on New Criticism, the overall approach was to oppose the earlier biographical, historical, social, and psychological approach. An individual work was no longer to be considered the expression of its author, let alone the soul of the people (cf. Viksten 1971, p. 83; Koskela — Rojola 1997, p. 22), but as a text, typically a poem, detached from all context.

The contents of the upper secondary school's L1 curriculum have also changed in many ways. Elias Heikkonen has studied how literary conceptions have changed in Finnish upper secondary school national core curriculum since the early 20th century. Heikkonen (2024, forthcoming) presents how, following the tradition that emphasized literary knowledge, psychological-biographical and historical-social approaches to literature, and nationalistic identity politics, the curriculum of the 1980s began to place a strong emphasis on the internal structures and reading patterns of the text indicative of formalist and close reading methodologies. This phenomenon was primarily based on New Criticism, which was brought to Finland from Anglo-American literary studies by the central book that influenced the theory of pedagogy: René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1942), translated into Finnish in 1969. The book deals not only with 'external' approaches to literature — i.e. with the background of the work — but first and foremost with text-based literary analysis. The main structure of the work has almost directly shifted to the 1985 curriculum, as the curriculum names intrinsic, extrinsic, and reader-oriented literary approaches as learning goals (LOPS 1985, pp. 54, 57, 58).

New Criticism came to Finnish universities and thus to Finnish school education in the 1950s (Kirstinä 1988, p. 107; Koskela — Rojola 1997, p. 29; see also Vähäpassi 1979, p. 29). In 1971, Aarne Salminen looked at what the advent of New Criticism meant for literary teaching already in the early 1970s. He notes that it is the teaching of close reading, i.e. 'accurate and careful reading', that makes the approach so effective. He also expresses his hope that the focus of teaching will shift away from the 'ballast of literary history' (Salminen 1971, pp. 103–104). Literature education, he argues, has focused too much on learning the contents of classic works, and even an entire academic year may be spent processing individual works, such as *Seven Brothers* by Aleksis Kivi. 'This kind of thoroughness is deadly', summarizes Salminen (ibid., p. 104). New Criticism therefore seems to have brought a new way of dealing with literature to schools, replacing the learning of content with analysis of works or texts. Salminen (ibid., p. 105) describes his own way of dealing with literature in classes by first outlining the first impression received from the text, followed by a close reading and text analysis,

including the observation of motives, outlining of theme or themes, and finally, the attempt to formulate a general interpretation.

With the new theory, and decline of the study of literary history, students were given new kinds of assignments. Alongside informed learning came an applied and analytical approach, emphasizing the reader's own interpretation. The approach required text-specific, analytical literacy aimed at interpretation. We may assume that as the focus of teaching shifted to the texts themselves, greater emphasis was placed on discussions, interpretative negotiations, and the formulation of alternative views. This would have given more room for the reader's own views and interpretations, notwithstanding the fact that, as a rule, representatives of New Criticism paid more attention to the 'right' meaning hidden in the work and thus manner of interpretation than before.

In a book covering various literary theories, Finnish literary scholars Lasse Koskela and Lea Rojola (1997, p. 30) also deal with New Criticism, noting that: '[t]he assignments of analyzing and interpreting that are taught in [Finnish] schools today are largely based on New Critical views of literature.' This type of 'analyze and interpret' assignment has been part of the upper secondary school curriculum since the 1985 core curriculum (Kirstinä 2011, p. 49). Leena Kirstinä (ibid., p. 50) has examined the assignment type and suggests that 'analyze and interpret' is 'to be understood mainly as a text-based close-reading assignment, in which the writer is most successful if, in addition to the content, he notices motives, metaphors, contrasts and knows how to reflect on the actions of the narrator'. In addition, Kirstinä (ibid., p. 54) mentions the New Critical starting point of the assignment. Broadly speaking, this type of assignment is prevalent in Finnish schools even today. An assignment format following the principles of New Criticism was last used in the autumn 2018 matriculation examination, the purpose of which was to read and interpret the short story 'Sticks' by George Saunders. The examiners' marking notes of the assignment stated:

> *The assignment requires both an analysis and an interpretation of the short story. A good answer specifies the key narrative and language features of the short story. The assignment requires a multifaceted examination of features. A good answer provides a reasoned view of what the short story is all about. The interpretive approach stands out clearly and presents an answer accordingly. The given interpretation is well supported. A good answer can also consider different possibilities for interpretation. For example, an insightful treatment of narration gap, symbolism, or the title of a short story is a plus.* (LKS 2018, marking criteria for exam)

More specifically, one should analyze the narrative and characters, time, setting, structure of the story, language, and style. In addition, it is stated that 'interpretation is based on an analysis of narrative and language' (LKS 2018). Therefore, students are required to use close reading and provide an interpretation based on it.

In the 1980s, there is an interesting development in the curriculum. The 1985 curriculum lists different ways of looking at literature as an object of instruction. The goal is for the student to become aware that a particular work of art or text can be viewed in a radically different way, and thus the results of the examination can also

be very different. By teaching this difference, the diverse nature of literature is accounted for, and the student understands that there is more than one possible mode of interpretation.

The notion that there are different ways to approach literature is also evident in the textbooks of the 1980s, which deal with methods for reading fiction as well as the approaches and perspectives that may be taken to analyze it. In these books, emphasis is placed on how different approaches produce a wide range of knowledge and different interpretations of the literary work. Textbooks highlight three approaches to literary research that the reader can use to reflect on and interpret what he or she is reading — background-oriented, text-oriented, and reader-oriented —, all of which are in line with the contemporary curriculum (ULÄIII 1983, pp. 78–81). Various theoretical approaches are also suggested for interpreting fiction. The novel, *Elämänmeno* ('Daily life') by Pirkko Saisio, for example, is examined from six different perspectives, ranging from text-oriented analysis to literary-historical examination and the reader-oriented perspective (ibid., pp. 85–91), generating insight on the novel from numerous points of view, and concretely highlighting what aspects of the work may be considered, how the work speaks to different historical-social and literary contexts, and what kind of reading experiences it may produce.

PROBLEMS OF CLOSE READING AND THE CURRENT SITUATION OF L1

The second half of the 20th century was, from the point of view of literary theory, a kind of concept avalanche. The 1971 *Yearbook of the Finnish Association of L1 Teachers* discusses such approaches as impressionist theory, moral criticism, New Criticism, psycho- and mythical criticism (Rainio 1971) in connection with the teaching of literature in upper secondary education. In the late 1980s, experts suggested a deconstructive, narratological, and feminist approach to literature education (see Kirstinä 1988; Kettunen 1988; Ahokas 1988), which meant in practice the introduction of ever new pedagogical concepts (cf. Kouki 2011, p. 25). Leena Kirstinä noted already in 1988 that 'the textual analysis of both secondary and upper secondary school books is too rich in concepts, syncretistic in nature, quite heterogeneous in starting points and heavy to adopt' (Kirstinä 1988, p. 108). Originating from Structuralism, Narratology (alongside a number of other trends) looked at literature largely in terms of structure and from the perspective of narrative, resulting in increasingly precise definitions of narrators and motives, for example. In practice, this meant an increase in the use of textual analysis and close reading.

Various different theories in literature teaching and related approaches to textual analysis have been adopted by different Finnish universities. In some subjects, the use of detailed concepts has tended to produce more precise definitions, while others have relied less on such concepts. Every teacher of literature who trains future teachers of L1 at the university should consider which kind of approaches and concepts he or she will use among the many alternatives to teach the study of literature. No approach to literature is written in stone, and new variations are commonly generated, especially at the point when material related to core curricula is given formal treatment in textbooks.

In the 2003 core curriculum, we find a wealth of concepts related to literature, as well as a vocabulary that guides textual analysis in reading. Echoing the method of close reading, the curriculum states that 'teaching of literature in upper secondary school is aimed at understanding fiction, analyzing, and interpreting texts from different perspectives' (LOPS 2003, p. 32). It also notes concepts related to literary analysis: 'the analysis and interpretation of literature using concepts and approaches justified from the point of view of interpretation', 'prose as a genre of literature: narrative technical means, for example, narrator, perspective, subject, person, time, setting, theme, motive'. Concepts applied to poetry include 'speaker, verse, rhythm, metre, repetition, the figurative quality of language' (ibid., p. 25). The hope is expressed that the student will develop as an 'analyzer of fictional texts using different reader and interpretational starting points and drawing on the necessary concepts of literary science' (ibid., p. 24). Such an approach is certainly enriching to the reading experience, but it is also demanding. Each concept is open to interpretation, and ultimately to be defined in context. Different types of narrators, for example, resist any comprehensive compartmentalization or definition, because literature is simply too diverse and variable.

Instead of naming precise analytic concepts, the newer curriculum (LOPS 2015) speaks at a general level of text analysis and interpretation, as well as analysis of novels and short stories (ibid., pp. 41, 42). One of the goals is to teach students how to 'diversely analyze and interpret fiction using appropriate concepts and approaches, and learn to justify their interpretation' (ibid., p. 43). In addition to fiction, nonfiction and multiliteracy are emphasized as required for a broad understanding of the text. The tradition of close reading, however, is also present.

After 1981, the national curriculum for Finnish upper secondary schools was revised four times: in 1994, 2003, 2015, and 2019. In the 1980s, studies were reorganized in course-based form. Whereas a subject had been taught through the whole school year, the school year would now be divided into five or six terms, with Finnish language and literature typically taught during three of them, five or six hours per week. Students studied eight courses (38 hours in each course) of Finnish language and literature during their three-year upper secondary school education. In terms of teaching literature, the changes of the last four decades have brought significant changes to literature education, in terms of both quantity and quality. In the 1980s, when the structure of the upper secondary school was changed from class to course format, the role of L1 subject was strong. At least 75 courses had to be studied during upper secondary school, which meant that L1 accounted for 10.7% of the total number of courses in upper secondary school. Currently, 12 credits of the compulsory 150 credits are studied in Finnish language and literature (L1), meaning that the share of L1 in upper secondary school studies has fallen to 8%.

These figures show that the number of hours spent in L1 has decreased by a quarter since the 1980s. This is likely because of changes in the 1994 curriculum that reduced the number of compulsory L1 courses from eight to six. This has significantly reduced the time available for the different subject areas. From our present-day perspective, where the common goal of the entire media field and society would seem to be the improvement of reading and writing skills in core areas of language and literature, this reduction seems problematic. According to PISA tests, which began

in 2000, the literacy among Finnish schoolchildren has dropped, and this at a time when literacy in other countries, such as Estonia, has improved (cf. Leino et al. 2019).

When we look at the long-term history of language and literature, L1, and education in Finland, you can see how diverse the subject has become. There has been no reason to abandon the study of the *Kalevala* or teaching of literary history that began in the 19th century, but there has been a strong involvement in audiovisual and media culture. Students now study a multitude of text types, literature being only one of them. The kinds of texts in which students should develop reading aptitude are listed in order by the Finnish Matriculation Examination Board:

> *The materials used in the examination* [L1] *are diverse, authentic materials. In addition to written, visual, and graphic textual materials, various audiovisual texts, such as advertisements, videos, animations, and fragments of television programs, films, and plays, can also be used, in accordance with the text broadly conceived. Material may consist in a mere audio file, such as the snippet of a radio interview, news broadcast, or radio drama. The material may also consist in online texts or a website.* (YTL 2022, p. 1)

Requirements have changed across the board, with knowledge of literature in decline today not only among school students (early childhood through secondary education) but university students as well. Our culture has changed, and with it L1 pedagogy. Interestingly, the influence of new media and visual culture already arises in the early 1970s, with one teacher stating that 'audiovisual teaching is coming. Radio, television, magnetophone and record player are not strangers to language and literature teaching, and even the video recorder is not completely unknown' (Salminen 1971, p. 115). According to Salminen, the subject is so riddled with topics that 'today the situation seems at least confusing, if not downright chaotic' (ibid.). These sentiments have been expressed today by many teachers, noting that the teaching of L1 along with all upper secondary education has become far too fragmented, leaving little time to delve into anything, and marginalizing the subject of literature. Teaching has moved away from the canon and literary history, towards the study of contemporary literature. Teachers emphasize literature as a form of — and way of developing — (critical) thinking. Literary history and other forms of contextualization are likewise seen as tools for developing and improving thinking. Teachers are increasingly forced to allow students to use audio books instead of printed texts, as a way to avoid assigning the task — for some overwhelming — of reading an entire printed book (Mäkikalli 2022).

CONCLUSION

The field of reading literature, in general, and literature education today is fragmented, and it is difficult to predict where it will go moving forward. Given the situation today, it is likely that all working approaches are welcome so long as they serve to keep young people in the field of literature at all. Is close reading, with all its related concepts, still the most effective way to activate young people in literary fic-

tion? The accurate analysis and interpretation of texts may help to grasp structures and the whole as sum of its parts, but will it help a young person to be a more active literary enthusiast and reader in general? Twenty-five years ago, Meredith Cherland and James Greenlaw already raised doubts about the usefulness of New Criticism in school education:

> *The 'new criticism,' the 70-year-old school of literary theory that sees meaning as fixed in the words on the page* […]*, no longer seems a credible theoretical basis for instruction in our postmodern world. High school English teachers are under pressure to teach their students to read literature in ways that lead to more flexible formulations of meaning, in ways that are more relevant to their contemporary lives.* (Cherland — Greenlaw 1998, p. 174)

The potential of literature as art is often demonstrated in the overall interpretations produced by New Critical close reading. However, if we want to help every young person with reading, would it be necessary to emphasize other literary approaches? The problem with the text-based approach to literature education is that it is restricted to analysis of the text regarded as a whole, and further constrained by the aim (to the exclusion of others) of generating an overall interpretation of that text. When we engage in reading, we do not always read to form an overall interpretation. Rather, when we read a short story, novel, or poem, we may pay attention only to a single feature, fact, or part that acquires meanings in relation to our own lives, the world around us, the past, or the world of the future (cf. Mäkikalli 2019).

In reading and teaching fiction, it is important to highlight the reader's observations vis-à-vis the work. What did I pay attention to while reading? What did it call to mind? How does what I read resonate with my own life or the world I know? What thoughts and feelings were provoked by what I read? What does the text say about this? Such observations can be made for all levels of the text. Such observations can be very detailed or, on the contrary, appear insignificant. By working together, however, one can find connections to the very world in which we live. Attention may be drawn to the dialogue between the world of the work and our own. Perhaps, like Cherland and Greenlaw, it would be desirable to include more of the reader's own way of reading, with the possible result that more and more young people would be motivated to read fiction.

While earlier textbooks, even in the 1980s, taught students to understand that fiction can be read and interpreted in different ways, that there is more than one approach or theory for grasping a literary work, this attitude seems to have disappeared from textbooks today, along with sections on theoretical methods of reading or analyzing literature. Although the term 'literature' still appears in the name of the subject, it has remained only one of many forms of text in the everyday reality of L1 teaching, a fact that underscores the multiliteracy and multimodality of upper secondary school language and literature education in the current environment.

In the diverse flow of written and spoken texts, fiction and poetry have long held an important place, as genres that enrich our language, streamline our writing skills, and increase our understanding. Furthermore, literature education in the Finnish school system relied for a long time on supporting and bolstering national identity.

Even in the 1980s, the treatment of upper secondary school textbooks was based on emphasizing Finnish identity and highlighting that it was literature that served as a tool for creating our identity (cf. Mäkikalli 2023). In recent decades, the world and borders have opened in such a way that teaching national literature now seems old-fashioned, and an ideological relic of the past. As a state, Finland is a global actor and bears global responsibility for life on Earth. People move across borders and cultures, so that the important issues in our lives move not so much on a national level as on a transnational and cross-border level. International and diverse literature published in Finland provides a tool for in-depth reflection on the problems we face in Finland and beyond. However, to have a proper foundation for expression, thinking, and learning foreign languages, it remains especially important to read literature written in our own L1 language. Perhaps it could help students to approach these skills if we focused on the experience rather than mere aesthetics of literature.

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