Abstract: In the discussion of teaching literature, one controversial issue has been whether professors should remain dispassionately objective to various political and philosophical ideologies in the classroom; or if they should influence their students with their political and philosophical views. On the one hand, some scholars argue that professors of literature cannot remain objective in their classroom because their choices of content, teaching methods, and ways of conducting classes not only reflect their ideologies but also influence their students. On the other hand, some others argue that professors should not influence their students with their political and philosophical views because the literature classroom is not a place for imposing professors' political agendas. Within this context, this paper examines the theories of teaching literature and seeks to answer this issue. Drawing on the works of Himmelfarb, Showalter, and McKeachie, this paper argues that although professors should not impose their political and philosophical views on their students targeting them as their potential followers, they must influence them to uphold the value of liberal democracy, the value of liberty, and also the value of social justice because these are the fundamental values of our society and civilization.

Keywords: Critical Pedagogy; Teaching; Literature; Professors; Classroom; Ideology; Influence; Objectivity; Engagement.
Hence, because of scholars' opposing perspectives about teaching literature, some questions emerge that need to be answered to determine the role of the professors as the leaders of the classes. These questions are

(1) Can professors of literature avoid influencing their students with their political and philosophical ideologies?
(2) Should professors should act as activists of social change disseminating political and philosophical ideologies among their students?

My feelings on the issue are mixed. Although I agree with the point that the political and philosophical views of the professors are reflected through their curriculum designs, teaching methods, and class lectures, I do not think that it is a right approach from the part of the professors to impose their views on their students. While professors should not work as political activists and propaganda machines to spread a specific ideology, they have a moral responsibility to spread and uphold the universal values of humanity. In short, professors should not impose their political and philosophical views on their students targeting them as their potential followers; however, they must teach them the value of liberal democracy, the value of liberty, and also the value of social justice because these are the fundamental values of our society and civilization.

Great professors never impose anything on their students; instead, they work as facilitators and create an environment of learning, objectively opening the world to the students. In the literature classroom, many professors impose and spread their beliefs and ideologies on their students almost in an attempt to create their empire. Although their motives are not necessarily evil, this is (1) very unprofessional and a barrier to high-quality teaching, and (2) similar to the colonizing process wherein professors act like the old colonial masters and treat their students as colonized subjects.

In short, in the classroom, professors hold their students hostage with their ideological obsessions and often seek to convert young minds into their ideologies. Professor Gertrude Himmelfarb criticizes this approach of professors and argues that the literature classroom should not be a place of imposing the "professor's agenda upon the student" in a form of identity politics, holding students "hostage by the professor's preoccupation" (Richter 88).
For Himmelfarb, this predisposition needs to be questioned because dominating the minds of students and systematically taking advantage of the classroom settings is not a healthy practice. Professors should not impose their ideologies upon their students because this not only shuts the door on debate and discussion, but also makes students feel intimidated about bringing alternative interpretations of the issues being discussed.

This imposition not only discourages students from thinking outside of the box but also hinders their intellectual development. Moreover, this imposition from the part of the professors stops the free flow of ideas, which is vital for a progressive community. Great professors do not impose their ideologies on their students using their leadership positions in the classrooms; instead, they dispassionately open the world to their students so that they can see, think and learn freely based on their observation and understanding. Students must have absolute autonomy to interpret a literary text without feeling intimidated by the professors' preferred theories. For a vibrant classroom, professors should encourage students to come up with innovative ideas and be equally respectful to various interpretations, although they might have particular preferences for specific ideas.

Great professors not only teach subjects but also teach values. Professors of literature should influence their students in upholding the values of liberal democracy, liberty, and social justice because these are the fundamental values of the humanities, and without these values, our civilization will collapse. Professors should influence students to stand against totalitarianism, dictatorship, and social and political tyranny to uphold freedom of speech, rule of law, and civil liberty "consistent with the values of civility and democratic culture" (Richter 93).

Literature professors must uphold these values in the classroom because these are our collective values and the very foundation of our society. For example, I love Sophocles' *Antigone*, and sometimes assign the text. In teaching *Antigone*, I never impose my ideology upon them. Instead, I give them full autonomy to read the text in their own way. However, I point out whether the protagonist Antigone in *Antigone* has agency. Although Antigone's uncle Creon argues that he wants to uphold the dignity of his State and save Antigone from punishment, the real question is whether Creon's ideology makes sense to Antigone or not. However, upholding the idea of liberty, democratic values, and social justice is not in any way
to be considered as an imposition of personal ideology on students. Instead, it is an essential step to make students aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Although many theorists of teaching literature denounce the idea of influencing students through professors' political and philosophical views, the majority of theorists agree with the notion that professors should not avoid spreading humanistic values among their students. These theorists argue that literature is not a detached discipline from the world; instead, it reflects the world artistically. Therefore, literature professors cannot avoid discussing the real-life issues which are taking place every day in the community. Moreover, as the torchbearers of humanity, they are morally responsible for spreading the values of humanity among their students.

For instance, in her *Teaching Literature*, Elaine Showalter asserts "our role and our subject are not cleanly detached from the world, but messily entangled with it" (140). Literature and the contemporary world are intertwined where literature produces humanistic values and professors of literature disseminate these values among students to make the world a better, safer, and kinder place for all to live in peace. Along the same line, in discussing teachers' roles in teaching literature, Wilbert McKeachie argues, "We can't avoid teaching values… our choices of content, our choices of teaching methods, our very ways of conducting classes reveal our values and influence our students' reactions" (qtd. in Showalter 132). What McKeachie argues here is that the professors of literature should not avoid teaching values; instead, they should engage their students not only in teaching and learning but also in upholding humanistic values.

Similarly, Terry Eagleton argues that literature serves the purpose of religion as it "works primarily by emotion and experience, and so was admirably well-fitted to carry through the ideological task which religion left off" (Richter 51). Therefore, professors of literature have another responsibility to carry out, which is to spread humanistic values among their students. Although I do not believe that professors should impose any political and philosophical ideas on their students, I agree with Showalter and McKeachie that we cannot avoid teaching values because these are essential for establishing a humane, harmonious, and compassionate community. Furthermore, to a great extent, I also agree with Terry Eagleton that because of the failure of religion, literature has duties to fulfill the vacuum because it has
to replace the position of religion. Therefore, professors of literature cannot avoid their responsibility to provide the moral leadership to the community.

Some scholars might object that this paper contradicts itself on the grounds that it argues professors should not influence students with their political and philosophical views at the same time that it advocates upholding liberty, democracy, and justice, which are also political and philosophical ideology.

Essentially, even though I am arguing against the wholesale imposition of personal and political ideology, this does not mean that they should avoid encouraging them to uphold the values of democracy. There is a difference between imposing personal and political ideology and upholding human dignity. I strongly hold the idea that professors of literature must uphold the spirit of humanity. A professor might believe in atheism, Marxism, feminism, and/or nihilism because, in a democratic society, everyone has the liberty to believe in whatever she wants. But it becomes a problem when a professor tries to impose her political ideology on her students and objectifies others who do not agree with her views. Professors, therefore, should remain objective and ensure inclusivity, neutrality, and fairness.

Great professors do not act as a propaganda machine to spread a particular ideology; instead, they remain objective to various ideologies and maintain professionalism. They strive to open the world to the students and facilitate them in navigating the world according to their own choices and beliefs. For example, in her personal life, a professor may be a feminist, and she might believe that feminist interpretation is the best perspective through which to read literature. However, she should not impose her idea on her students intending to make them feminists because there are many schools of thought that students need to know thoroughly. Students should have the autonomy to choose what they want to follow.

Professors’ responsibilities are to introduce students to the various schools of thought so that they can find what school(s) make sense to them. This paper does not validate or invalidate any school of thought, instead it recommends that professors should introduce all of them to students objectively. While a professor presents a particular ideology to her students, she should present its counter-arguments as well so that her students may know all the viewpoints and can make their own decisions based on their understanding. Now some might argue that since there are many valid interpretations of a literary text, students might
struggle to know which interpretation they should follow. My reply to them is please let the students decide what makes sense to them instead of acting like Creon in *Antigone*.
Works Cited


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