

A 'Marriage' between Language and Literature: Writing an Argumentative Literary Essay in EFL Contexts

Nahla Nola Bacha

Abstract

'A work of literature is an organization of language to which linguistic awareness must be applied if it is to be understood and appreciated' (Thejirik, 2014, p.87).

Research has indicated that non-native speakers of English have language difficulties in writing essays on literature due to different rhetorical systems between the native and the foreign language as well as different cultural contexts which may hinder the student from performing successfully in English medium institutions of higher learning. This paper reports on one method in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to write a literature essay according to an adaptation of Toulmin's argumentative organization approach which develops their critical thinking skills in evaluating and interpreting their own and others' ideas while taking a stand on a topic. There has been a great deal of research on how literature can further students' language development in EFL classrooms, but there is a need to bring 'language into literature classrooms'. Recommendations for teaching/learning and future research are made.

Key words: literature, language, EFL, academic writing, argumentation, scaffolding, Lebanon

Introduction

Most researchers and practitioners agree that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students find difficulty in understanding literature in the target language and also find it a challenge to write essays on literature especially arguing their opinions on what they read as most of their writing has been expository (Hussein & Al Emami, 2016). Along with this, teaching literature in EFL language classrooms has long been an issue of controversy. Also, there is debate as to whether or not literature and language are two separate subjects and should be taught as such. More recently, however, research has indicated that these students can develop both their language as well as their critical and analytic thinking skills, crucial skills nowadays in academic and professional fields, when literature and language are taught together in EFL classrooms and explicitly instructed as how to (Francis et al., 2006 in Colon, 2018 in progress).

However, little or no research has been carried out, to the researcher's knowledge, on L1 Arabic speakers of English who find it difficult to express their opinions concerning what they read. The focus has been on the expository genre (e.g. Bacha, 2017) but when requested to write an argumentative one, often the students revert to narratives and/or descriptions which do not support their opinion or stand on a given argumentative prompt. This has recently prompted researchers to increasingly think of the relationship between language and literature and study how each can equally work together and more specifically in the literature classroom. In other words, much has been proven that literature can help the EFL students develop their proficiency in the target language, but there is a surging need to help students with their language in the literature classrooms. Thejirika's (2014) study shows the importance of a symbiotic relationship between language and literature in the English literature classroom and although there is a number of helpful guides available, rigorous research is needed to study their effectiveness.

Review of Literature

Argumentative writing has been found important in academic settings as it develops the students' critical thinking, analysis and synthesis skills important for course work (Bacha, 2010; Birhan, 2018; Tiruneh et al, 2014). Furthermore, foreign literature in the classroom is a challenge for these EFL students who come from a different culture and may not understand many of the lexical items, the humor or the culture. Contrastive analysis studies in the past showed that it is the negative rhetorical transfer from L1 (Kaplan, 1966; Purves, 1988) that causes L2 writing to be awkward;

However, recently, this has been challenged and practitioners and researchers advocate explicit instruction (Feez, 1998; Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Bacha, 2010, 2017; Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Mukattash, 2003; Swales, 1990).

Hussein & Al Emami (2016) noted that "Teaching and learning foreign literature could be a daunting task for both the instructors and learners," and emphasized this is particularly the case for undergraduates in Arab countries. Various reasons for this are mainly from differences in culture, teaching methods, linguistic deficiency, and low motivation. Students in Lebanon are no exception.

Furthermore, most research focuses on how the teaching of literature benefits EFL students in developing their language (see Shamsur, Khan, & Alasmari, 2018), but few studies show how the instruction of language in literature courses can further students' language skills especially in writing on literature. Widdowson (1971) claimed that "...the study of **literature** is fundamentally a study of **language** in operation" and "is based on the realisation that **literature** is an example of **language** in use, and is a context for **language** use". Specifically, analysis and interpretation of a literary text needs instruction as to how best to go about this task. More often than not, students are thought competent in this endeavor, but studies have indicated that EFL students find this task difficult (Feez, 1998). They describe and narrate rather than approach the text from a critical viewpoint and find it a huge challenge to support their views and refute those of others. This is to say we, as teachers of literature, cannot take it for granted that our students can read and understand a novel or any literary text for that matter, without guidance in the cultural nuances and the language. It is argued that we need to take them through the literary text and give them explicit instructions in writing their views on literature in an organized manner. Argumentation is one important genre in the academy as it allows the writers to express their opinions while at the same time logically refute those of others. In the literature classes, learning the argumentative structure is one very appropriate genre for students to learn. Francis et al. (2006 in Colon, 2018 in progress) state that

'Despite the fact that the whole skillset has a function in a pedagogical context, the relevant skill which is critical to the literacy and engagement of students is "explanation" and its subskills as their general tenet is "to present one's reasoning in the form of cogent arguments" (10). The reason being that in order for learners to be able to form the kind of arguments which justify their "reasoning in terms of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological and contextual considerations" that are expected out of them; development of academic communication becomes a vital component in students' literacy and engagement in their education. Some studies even agree that development of academic communication is among the factors that influence success in learners' education' (pp.5-6).

Although there has been some guidance as to how integrate the argumentative structure with writing on literature, there has been little research, to the author's knowledge, on analyzing the results of any improvement in the use of this structure over a period of time. The aim of this paper is to bring 'more' language into the literature classroom and to study its effectiveness. That is, language that helps the EFL student with the needed 'language, organization and content' (LOC) that is often lacking and taken for granted. More importantly, it is the aim of education to develop a skillset for students which enable them to argue on a subject. Colon (2018) shows us the skillsets (core and subskills) below and argues that one way to best develop them is through literature discussions. He mentions Facione, (1990 in Colon, 2018 in progress) stating that '...literature discussions entail that students form interpretations and/or judgments through their interactions with the text and their peers' as shown below (pp4-5).

What is most important is that language and literature and literature and language go hand in hand. Ihejirika, (2014) states that there is no literature teaching without language and thus the symbiotic relationship between them. However, there are challenges, and it is up to the English teachers to 'marry' them in the classroom and go beyond the expository organization to the argumentative (Bacha, 2017). Teachers should be competent in both language and literature. To sum up, 'A work of literature is an organization of language to which linguistic awareness must be applied if it is to be understood and appreciated' (Ihejirika, 2014, p.87).

Aim: This paper reports on one exploratory method in a liberal arts literature introductory course in an English medium university in Lebanon to write argumentative literary essays.

Method

Context: The study was carried out in an introduction to literature intact class as part of the liberal arts core curriculum in an English medium university.

Participants The twenty five participants enrolled in the course are L1 speakers of Arabic and attending various majors at the university. Their ages ranged from nineteen to twenty two. Since gender was not a variable being studied, the number of males and females are not reported.

Procedure: Toulmin’s argumentative organization structure (see below and the adaptation) and the relevant language meta discourse were discussed with previous samples of students’ work. The method follows a scaffold step approach in which students write three essays based on the three assigned literary texts over a fifteen-week semester each time focusing on (language specifically the metadiscourse markers (e.g. This study shows; The results confirm/reject...and so forth), organization of the argumentative structure, and content, stating the proposition, providing evidence from the literary text, and interpreting the evidence. based mainly on literary theories. In this way, language is brought into the literature classroom to help these students not only understand what they have read but to logically argue their points of view. Holistic scores of the essay are assigned according to: Language: metadiscourse; Organization - organizational structural moves; Content – evidence, interpretation). Models of the argumentative essays were discussed with the students after the literary text in question had been read.

The argumentative structure selected was based on the Toulmin model detailed below in the web link in Figure 1, adapted as in Figure 2 and outlined similar to the sample in Figure 3. Practice with giving evidence and interpreting the evidence was done in class on various argumentative prompts on the literary text being read (refer to Tyson, (2001) upon which interpretation can be based e.g. psychological, feminist, marxist literary theories). In other words, what the evidence means, why the particular evidence was given, and how logical the evidence is in relation to the argument being discussed. Sample propositions (theses) were given and students would take a side and practice refutation techniques. Two counterarguments (CA) and two arguments (A) in this specific exercise were required (see Figure 3). This proved to be a very interesting active learning exercise. Two choices of topics were given in order to allow the students to write on a topic on which they could do best. Other ways of organizing the CAs and As were also experimented with, but the below organization proved to be most effective and ‘easiest’.

Figure 1 – Toulmin Argumentative Model (1958)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-YPPQztuOY&feature=youtu.be>

Figure 2 Sample Adapted Argumentative Outline (Based on *A Passage to India* by E.M. Forster)

Proposition: X is mentally ill.

For the proposition (Affirmative side) (2 reasons) Against the proposition (Negative Side) (2 reasons)

- | Reasons | Reasons |
|---|---|
| 1. Hallucinates
In the caves
In court | 1. Attempting to find truth
Confused for a while in the caves
Echo leaves her |
| 2. Unstable
Changes her mind often
Has dizzy spells
The heat | 2. A bad experience
Difficult decisions |

Argument (A) plus evidence (AE) plus interpretation (AI)

Counterargument (CA) plus evidence (CE) plus interpretation (CI)

Refutation (weakening the opponent’s argument by one or a combination of the following)

- a. True, but (conceding the truth of the Counter-argument and/or counter evidence)
- b. Incorrect CA and/or CE
- c. Irrelevant CA and/or CE
- d. Logical fallacies in CE; for example: False cause, False analogy, Generalization
Oversimplification, Other

The triangles below represent the four paragraphs of the essay. The smaller ones are the introduction and conclusion and show their length in comparison to the body paragraphs which develop the proposition. The broad part of the triangle in the introduction shows how the content of this paragraph begins with gaining attention and general broad statements narrowing down to a specific proposition; the tip part of the triangle in the conclusion shows how the content of this paragraph begins with a specific restatement of the proposition and broadens out to general final remarks. The tips of the triangles in the two body paragraphs show the topic sentence of the first argument and then broadens out to include the evidence and interpretation. Four paragraphs and two ideas each for the argument and counterargument are required in this method, but instructors may choose to require more. Instructors may choose to give either the proposition or the prompt based on the novel; for example, *A Passage to India* by E.M. Forster.

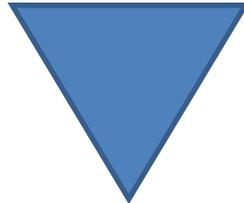
To illustrate, a prompts for the below outline may be 1) *X has a lot of bad experiences when going to India*, 2) *She (Stella) tries her best to cope with them but fails due to her mental confusion* or 3) the proposition itself: *X is mentally ill. Argue for or against.*

Figure3 Sample Essay outline: 2counter argumentsin italics and 2 arguments in bold type (Bacha, 2019).

Thesis statement (proposition) Although X *hallucinates* and is *unstable*, she is attempting **to find the truth** about herself and is just **having a bad experience**.

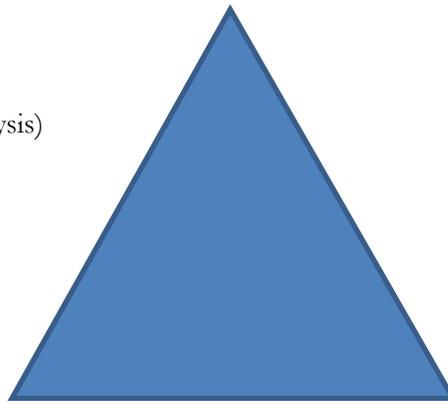
Introduction

- Gain attention
- Define key terms
- Background information
- Thesis statement



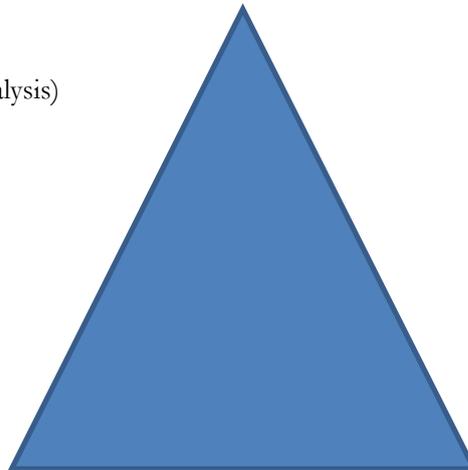
First Body Paragraph

- Counterargument 1
 - Counter evidence(synthesis-analysis)
 - Interpretation (evaluation)
 - Refutation
- Argument 1
 - Evidence (synthesis-analysis)
 - Interpretation (evaluation)



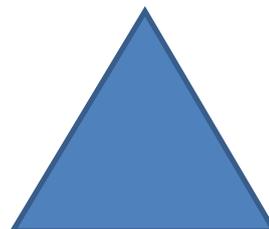
Second Body Paragraph

- Counterargument 2
 - Counter evidence(Synthesis-Analysis)
 - Interpretation (evaluation)
- Refutation
- Argument 2
 - Evidence (Synthesis-Analysis)
 - Interpretation (evaluation)



Conclusion

- Restate thesis statement
- General comments
- Final word



Data Collection and Analysis

Three essays were written at three different times in a fifteen week semester, one at the beginning, the second in the eighth week and the third at the end. Each essay was on a different topic related to one of the literary texts that had been read. Some research indicates that the topic and literary genre (e.g. novels, poems, plays etc.) may affect the vocabulary, structure and the evaluation of the essay (Kroll,1990). However, the common variable under study was the macro-argumentative structure and the associated metadiscourse which would be evaluated under the criteria content, organization, vocabulary, language and mechanics of Jacobs' et al. (1981) composition profile criteria which has been tested for reliability and validity on second and foreign language learners (including L1 Arabic students) in the States. The essays were written in sixty minutes on a prompt in which refutation of counter-arguments and interpretation of the evidence would reveal the writers' agreement and/or disagreement.

Sample Analysis of Student's Essays

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were done on each essay. Essays were scored out of 100% and then examined for the language, organization and content. Scores and description of analyses were recorded. Three sample essays in the appendix were written by the same student and are evaluated in the results section.

Results and Discussion

The results focused on the language, organization and content of Jacobs (1981) Composition Profile. Main results show that there is improvement in language, organization and content from the first to the third essay. Additionally, a focus group of five students reported they became aware that there are different opinions on the same topic and learned to 'defend' their stand, while at the same time give credit to others' ideas.

The twenty five essays were holistically graded with a mean average of 74%, the second, 77% and the third 83%. However, there were a few essays that regressed which sometimes does occur, but overall, the explicit instruction did show that the students gained an understanding of one way to argue their views. This explicit instruction confirms Feeze' (1998) point that scaffolding of instruction from guidance to independence is a method from which students do benefit.

The results cannot be generalized to the population as the sample was limited, but it did give positive feedback as to how the students learned to write better organized argumentative essays on a literary work. Hatch, & Lazaraton, (1991) and Hatch, (1992) remark that this type of research design attempts to describe textual features and not causal claims as the latter would require an experimental design with a control group. This ex post facto and pre-test post test design, they argue describe what is going on texts and not the effects of any treatment which is a valid method in linguistics. Below, a brief analysis of the three essays are given. The essays in the appendices can be used for class discussion and further analysis before students write their own essays.

Essay 1 – beginning of semester (see Appendix) Score: 17/25

- Language – lacks meta discourse markers and sentence structure needs editing
- Organization – clear but lacks use of transitions and meta discourse markers to refute counterarguments.
- Content - Lacks specific evidence and interpretation. There are irrelevant ideas in parts. Reads more like a narrative.

Essay 2 – mid semester Score 19/25

- Language – an improvement in use of vocabulary and meta-discourse
- Organization – more explicit arguments and refutation
- Content – more interpretation of evidence

Essay 3 – end of semester Score 25/30 (some meta-discourse and proposition is highlighted)

- Language – use of 'sophisticated' vocabulary, meta discourse
- Organization – well organized as an argumentative essay as outlined in this study
- Content - well supported and interpreted

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to recommend one method in teaching the literary argumentative essay in an EFL context. Findings show that holistic scores improved on average with inclusion of the relevant meta discourse markers being used more on the third essay with a coherent argumentative structure more clearly expressing the students' voice and opinion. Although the study sample was limited and an experimental research design would have given more valid results, the present study does indicate that with explicit teaching of organization of the argumentative structure and orientation into the foreign culture through literature, positive development can occur. It is recommended that future research focus on writing essays in different disciplines and comparing the EFL students' writing with those of native speakers' essays.

Acknowledgements: The article is an adaptation of the author's presentation at the International Conference on Education December 28-January 2 in Orlando, U.S.A. Travel grant sponsored by the university where the study took place.

Appendix: Student Essay Samples

Test 1 (novel)

Prompt: Write a well developed essay taking a stand on the proposition below based on the novel *Silas Marner* by George Eliot supporting your ideas from the text and interpreting the support selected. The support should be two examples for the argument and two examples against the argument from the relevant text. The essay will be evaluated according to language, organization and content. Give a title to the essay and underline the thesis (proposition) statement.

Given by teacher: Proposition: Silas is a hero
Title: A Travel for a Forest

Silas manner is a man who lived in the forest and travelled from time to time from place to another. Silas was carrying the bag of material and walking in the forest. The people at that time used to call him strange and a witch. George Eliot, the writer of Silas novel, was atheist and lost her faith because she sees injustice in the world that leads her to be an atheist. She also writes a novel to show all types of conflict. George Eliot writes about the conflicts that Silas faced in his life. Such as, the conflict with the society that forced him to escape far away from his land. I believe that he is not a hero because he did not face his fears and lost his faith.

Some people claim that Silas was a hero, but I believe he was not a hero. On other hand, Silas was strange and shows mental symptoms. For example, the conversation between him and William that tell he was saving his money under the ground for fear of theft. May be this evidence is true because he was insane and this action is expected to happen. Silas become atheist when he said God is liar because there is no justice in the world. Moreover, Silas was not patient at all. This evidence is accurate.

The second argument tells Silas is a hero. I do not believe that Silas is a champion because he went far away to another land. In another meaning, he escaped after the government and court did not believe him that he did not kill the dean. Silas has to wait for justice and patient for that. But he did the opposite and lost his faith in God. Yes there is a justice and yes it took time to show; it took 16 years. Moreover, when he escaped from injustice and went to another world, he faced many conflicts. Among these the conflict with society and conflict person with himself but there is no conflict with nature because Silas loved nature and decided to stay in the forest for a long time.

To conclude, the person must have patience and strength to face all the fears that are exposed to it. The reason that makes you patient is the justice that appears at the end of every story. Moreover, his daughter Eppie changes his life and gives him a positive life that make Silas thinks differently than before. From this story we learn that there is light at the end of every darkness.

Test 2 Poem

Prompt: Write a well developed essay on one of the topics below supporting your ideas from the text and interpreting the support selected. The support should be two examples for the argument and two examples against the argument from the relevant text. The essay will be evaluated according to Language, organization and content. Give a title to the essay and underline the thesis (proposition) statement.

TOPIC 1: *The Wasteland, Burial of the Dead* by T.S. Eliot is a true reflection of our society today. Argue for or against. Use examples from the text and from our society today. Be specific in providing examples.

Or

TOPIC 2 The Modern Period brought with it the death of the natural environment. Using *The Wasteland, The Burial of the Dead* by T.S. Eliot and argue for or against.

Topic 2: The Burial of death
TEST 2 (Poem)

The Waste Land is the most celebrated poem by T.S Eliot. He wrote this poem after World War 1. T.S Eliot spoke to a group of people who suffered from lose of identity, lose of purpose and absence of religious purpose or meaning. Eliot showed in the little of waste land the multiplicity of voices and meanings. This era after the World War 1 was called the Lost of Generation because people lost their values, and they were confused as to what is right and what is wrong. Thus, people questioned God; they said God is unjust because many people died for no reason. There is no hope in waste land, there are a lot of fears in their lives and there is no solution. The waste land has two themes, **disillusionment** and **resurrection** .

Some people claim that there is no hope or life in waste land. This claim is true but in the waste land there is a kind of hope. For example, when summer came and surprised us with plenty of rain in hot reason. After that the sunlight showed in hat place and people walked to the garden to drink coffeand to communicate with each other. There is image between life and dead when T.S Eliot talked about the hyacinths girl that gave him positive life to keep going just similar to our lives. For example,in real life people describe a flower in the garden as a kind of optimistic to search for beautiful image. Eliot showed also the image of mountain where the person feel free. The mountain provides solution to search for some meaning in life. This claim shows the steam on consciousness, the social and historical change. Religion for many people it is a source of strength and moral guidance to keep the hope in people lives.

There is no life after death, there is no rebirth in the waste land. The Burial of Death also describes the Internal dead body in the soil, the concept of dust to dust. For instance, Eliot said April is the cruelestmonth. April or spring itself is a reawaken, it is a beautiful month but for Eliot there is a sense of irony. April mixing memory and desire. Thus, in April there is rain but the waste land has only dull roots. No flowers or anything can grow from this land, no conception of rebirth any more. Here there is absence of God and absence of religious meanings. Eliot also describes London, the unreal city, as a sort of hell. Moreover, in London bridge many crowded people walked around the London bridge and they fixed their eyes on their feet like people in real life do. For example, the people nowadays, played with their phone without realize, they walked lonely and they fundamentally disconnected with one another. Eliot showed that people can die and buried also when alive not only under the ground. This evidence describe the disillusionment, the main theme in waste land. Furthermore, the people describe a life as a wheel, a kind of routine. The circle of life from winter to spring and back to winter. People also going to sleep because there is no choice with their exist in life.

To conclude, in the waste land there is no real truth, no real purpose and no real meanings. Perhaps death is desirable because it is the only way to go out of these pain. The waste land presents death that is the only hope for silence and for comfort. Moreover, a lot of people in the waste land remember the past, the great time that spent in the past and cannot reaped any more.

But there is a lot of positive sense in the waste land search for hope and real life to live with.

Like to search for the flowers in the garden. The people should see the light at the end of the road. People always should be optimistic in their lives.

Test 3 (Novel)

Prompt: Write a well developed essay on one of the topics below supporting specifically and interpreting your ideas by using one example for each argument and counterargument from *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom and one example from any of the texts read this semester or life today. The essay will be evaluated according to Language, organization and content. Give a title to the essay and underline the thesis (proposition) statement.

TOPIC 1: ‘When we are in bed we are dead’. Argue for or against.

Or

TOPIC 2: Morrie’s attitude towards life is positive. Argue for or against.

Topic 2: Title: Dying yet optimistic man

Mitch Albom is an American author, musician, television broadcaster, journalist and a dramatist with a bachelor in sociology. He published one of his famous works entitled “Tuesdays with Morrie” in 1997. This real story is about a dying man giving life advices to a living one. This book spent four years on the New York Times best seller list and was recognised as the most successful memoir ever to be published. Mitch wrote it to aid his professor Morrie suffering from ALS pay his medical bills. This memoir is also a theory built by Mitch visiting Morrie every Tuesday in his home and discussing topics that every person needs clarification on such as life, death, marriage...

Furthermore, this book is published in the post-modernistic period that departed from modernism at the end of the twentieth century. It includes notion of truth, social progress and human nature. Moreover, this book reflects the modernism of the society who are always busy and in a rush. Also, the main subject revolved around the meaning of life based on Morrie's past experiences, on another note, a person with a positive attitude towards life reflects a positive person, happy for his success and others, not hold grudges; basically feel like he is living in a utopic world in which all people represent one big family. Although Morrie is a dying man illustrating his negative attitude towards life by **not accepting his own death and acting in a pessimistic manner**, in my opinion, he still finds a way to look up to life in a positive way since he starts **rationalizing his death and acts optimistic about it as well as giving life advices**.

Some critics argue that Morrie is not accepting his death. The thought of him not being in the world is a strange scary idea for him. It is liked he wants to disrupt the cycle of life by not accepting his death. For instance, he is holding on life so tight that he starts hoping that a miracle would come and cure him from his slow killer disease. Also, he shows his emotions of sadness by not being able to hold his tears in when Mitch's fiancée sings and he starts remembering the good old time when he used to dance and feel alive. Moreover, this old man who is supposed to act wise at this stage of life looks like a self-centered man who only cares about himself and envies the healthy living people. He makes everyone come to his funeral. He is trying to change Mitch to become like him. Usually, a person that acts and think in this way is someone who has lack in his personality and is scared of death. Today, everyone fears death. It is an unavoidable feeling that pops during harsh time in the course of your life. Hence, Morrie's acts can be explained by fear; he wants people to stay as close to him as possible and take care of him.

Even though it is not in his intentions but Morrie is acting as a rugged individual caring about his self-interest, asking people not to leave him before he passes away. This is true, but during his life, he illustrates a bit of optimism. Morrie starts his day by crying in the morning for a short time but doesn't allow himself to cry more than that. He wants every minute of his last days on earth to count and be as memorable as possible. He shuts his sadness by reminding himself that he is surrounded by people who loves him and the reunions on Tuesday. Moreover, Morrie feels a bit lucky that he got the chance to know that he was dying in order to start indulging in his life and fix things : "when you know how to die, you know how to live". Also, he feels lucky because he is leaving this cruel destructive world that we are living in today; hence he is no longer obliged to hear and feel sorry about anyone. Today, the world is changing in a destructive manner: people are killing each other for trivial things and out of fear. For example, a mother shooting her husband and two daughters claiming to protect them. Nowadays, people when they die feel relieved that their life is no longer at stake. They are leaving this world peacefully and not in a painful death.

Some critics argue that Morrie is pessimistic. He is acting optimistic to hide the pessimism and the scary thing that he is trying to avoid. Morrie regrets a lot of decisions and situations that he took in his life. For example, he regrets not reaching out and forgiving his friends when he found out that he died out of cancer. He also regrets not forgiving his father. Every person before knowing that he is going to die starts thinking about their life: if they lived it well, if they were good, if they regret some situations. However, before knowing that we are dying we do not think about the latter things, we only focus on jobs, salaries, properties, friends and families. Death brings up negative thoughts in all people's lives no matter how nice they are. Furthermore, Morrie feels sorry for himself. He complains that he can't eat his favourite or any other food anymore, he can't practice his hobbies like dancing. Thus, he can't feel alive. He also feels that his sickness is taking over him by making him lose his dignity in which he can't walk nor use the bathroom alone anymore. Moreover, Morrie is overwhelmed with sadness because he doesn't have time to fix things with the last few days he still got. Every person while dying regrets mostly not being able to forgive others and thus they can't forgive themselves. Death is a sad wave that makes the dying man go over his life and blaming himself for certain acts and then washes us away. Regardless, this is the cycle of life. Death is part of life. Everything that gets born, dies eventually. In this cycle of life, every death brings a life and every life engenders a death. We can't escape from death, we have to face reality. This is true but Morrie is using his past experiences to give life advices for the living people. He starts by saying that he regrets vanity and there is no point in vengeance and stubbornness. We should learn to forgive others by starting to forgive ourselves before it's too late. He adds by stating that " Love is the only rational act". We humans shouldn't focus on materialistic things that doesn't brings us satisfaction, we should focus on spiritual acts and appreciate life before it's too late. He advices his friends not to take life and relationships for granted, they should help others and give them time to feel that you are needed and respected in this world. For instance, Morrie loves helping other people even though he has plenty of problems of his own. He gives every person his time and makes them feel important because through him helping others, he feels alive even though he is actually dying. He emphasizes on the idea that when you are dying, material things doesn't matter anymore.

He adds that social status won't get us anywhere, neither money and power can replace tenderness. Love always wins no matter what. Our popular culture today is taken by money and materialistic things. They don't know what they need in life anymore. They don't differentiate between what they want and what they need; they should be honest with themselves and starts understanding the true meaning of life. People are always running to find meaning in money, cars, properties, material things but they can't find it and keep on running and rushing. Our world today is a sad materialistic self-centered one with no hope of changing until they realize they are dying.

In a nutshell Morrie is a dying man who can't help to look at the world negatively and feel pessimistic vibes from times to others. This is proven by Morrie not accepting his death, acting self-centered as well as being pessimistic. However, he profits of his death by giving advices to people to live their life correctly and avoid committing his mistakes. Also, he pulls himself together for his loved ones by trying to find optimism in his death. Hence, Morrie changes and makes his attitude towards life positive and starts giving advices that are true because when you die you start interpreting life correctly. How about you reader, would you take Morrie's life advice and start living your life correctly as if is your last day?

The essays above have been kept as written by the student and permission to reproduce the essays in this article was obtained.

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