INTERFACE

LITERARY STUDIES IN ACTION

ALAN DURANT & NIGEL FABB

ROUTLEDGE
世界图书出版公司

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ROUTLEDGE
London and New York
世界图书出版公司
北京・广州・上海・西安

First published 1990
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
a division of Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Durant, Alan
Literary studies in action. – (Interface).
1. English literature. Criticism – Manuals
I. Title. II. Fabb, Nigel. III. Series
820.9

ISBN 0–415–03931–2
ISBN 0–415–02945–7 pbk

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Durant, Alan.
Literary studies in action.
(The Interface series)
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. English literature – Study and teaching.
I. Fabb, Nigel. II. Title. III. Series: Interface (London, England)
PR33.D87 1989 820'.7 89–10465
ISBN 0–415–03931–2
ISBN 0–415–02945–7 (pbk.)

Reprint authorized by Routledge
Reprinted by World Publishing Corporation, Beijing, 1992
Licensed for sale in China only
ISBN 7 – 5062 – 1450 – 4

LITERARY STUDIES IN ACTION

Literary Studies in Action

The aim of the INTERFACE series is to build bridges between the traditionally divided disciplines of language studies and literary studies. A major task in bridge-building is surveying and preparing the land on either side. In *Literary Studies in Action* Durant and Fabb are doing exactly this.

Literary Studies in Action is a new kind of textbook: a combination of workbook and handbook. Instead of just telling you about the discipline of literary studies, *Literary Studies in Action* helps you to answer questions about its history and current practice: about what to do and how to do it, and why literature has been and can be studied. In doing so, it attempts to develop an informed view of where the object of our study in 'literary studies' fits into larger patterns of knowledge and thought.

The numerous examples chosen for analysis range over the last thousand years of writing in English throughout the world, and include a variety of different kinds of texts. *Literary Studies in Action* also contains over a hundred activities for you to carry out yourself, to develop practical analytical skills and to structure your theoretical work.

> This is a textbook for the times, which addresses itself brilliantly to the twin phenomena of expanding horizons and diminishing resources of English studies.
>
> – *David Lodge*

The Authors

Alan Durant and Nigel Fabb were involved in setting up Strathclyde University's Programme in Literary Linguistics, where Alan Durant is director and Nigel Fabb is lecturer. In 1986 they co-organised the international conference 'The Linguistics of Writing' and co-edited the proceedings as *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature* (Manchester University Press/Methuen, Inc, 1987). Alan Durant is also the author of *Ezra Pound: Identity in Crisis* (Harvester/Barnes & Noble, 1981), and *Conditions of Music* (Macmillan/SUNY, 1984).

The INTERFACE Series

> A linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unconversant with linguistic methods, are equally flagrant anachronisms. – Roman Jakobson

This statement, made over twenty-five years ago, is no less relevant today, and 'flagrant anachronisms' still abound. The aim of the INTERFACE series is to examine topics at the 'interface' of language studies and literary criticism and in so doing to build bridges between these traditionally divided disciplines.

Already published in the series

NARRATIVE A Critical Linguistic Introduction
Michael J. Toolan
LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND CRITICAL PRACTICE Ways of Analysing Text
David Birch

The Series Editor

Ronald Carter is Senior Lecturer in English Studies and Director of the Centre for English Language Education at the University of Nottingham. He is chair of the Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA), and has recently been seconded part-time to the post of National Co-ordinator of the 'Language in the National Curriculum' project.

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Series editor's introduction to the Interface series

There have been many books published this century which have been devoted to the interface of language and literary studies. This is the first series of books devoted to this area commissioned by a major international publisher; it is the first time a group of writers have addressed themselves to issues at the interface of language and literature; and it is the first time an international professional association has worked closely with a publisher to establish such a venture. It is the purpose of this general introduction to the series to outline some of the main guiding principles underlying the books in the series.

The first principle adopted is one of not foreclosing on the many possibilities for the integration of language and literature studies. There are many ways in which the study of language and literature can be combined and many different theoretical, practical and curricular objectives to be realized. Obviously, a close relationship with the aims and methods of descriptive linguistics will play a prominent part, so readers will encounter some detailed analysis of language in places. In keeping with a goal of much work in this field, writers will try to make their analysis sufficiently replicable for other analysts to see how they have arrived at the interpretive decisions they have reached and to allow others to reproduce their methods on the same or on other texts. But linguistic science does not have a monopoly in methodology and description any more than linguists can have sole possession of insights into language and its workings. Some contributors to the series adopt quite rigorous linguistic procedures; others proceed less rigorously but no less revealingly. All are, however, united by a belief that detailed scrutiny of the role of language in literary texts can be mutually enriching to language and literary studies.

Series of books are usually written to an overall formula or design. In the case of the Interface series this was considered to be not entirely appropriate. This is for the reasons given above, but also because, as the first series of its kind, it would be wrong to suggest that there are formulaic modes by which integration can be achieved. The fact that all the books address themselves to the integration of language and literature in any case imparts a natural and organic unity to the series. Thus, some of the books in this series will provide descriptive overviews, others will offer detailed case studies of a particular topic, others will involve single author studies, and some will be more pedagogically oriented.

This variety of design and procedure means that a wide variety of audiences is envisaged for the series as a whole, though, of course, individual books are necessarily quite specifically targeted. The general level of exposition presumes quite advanced students of language and literature. Approximately, this level covers students of English language and literature (though not exclusively English) at senior high-school/upper sixth form level to university students in their first or second year of study. Many of the books in the series are designed to be used by students. Some may serve as course books – these will normally contain exercises and suggestions for further work as well as glossaries and graded bibliographies which point the student towards further reading. Some books are also designed to be used by teachers for their own reading and updating, and to supplement courses; in some cases, specific questions of pedagogic theory, teaching procedure and methodology at the interface of language and literature are addressed.

From a pedagogic point of view it is the case in many parts of the world that students focus on literary texts, especially in the mother tongue, before undertaking any formal study of the language. With this fact in mind, contributors to the series have attempted to gloss all new technical terms and to assume on the part of their readers little or no previous knowledge of linguistics or formal language studies. They see no merit in not being detailed and explicit about what they describe in the linguistic properties of texts; but they recognize that formal language study can seem forbidding if it is not properly introduced.

A further characteristic of the series is that the authors engage in a direct relationship with their readers. The overall style of writing is informal and there is above all an attempt to lighten the usual style of academic discourse. In some cases this extends to the way in which notes and guidance for further work are presented. In all cases, the style adopted by authors is judged to be that most appropriate to the mediation of their chosen subject matter.

We now come to two major points of principle which underlie the conceptual scheme for the series. One is that

the term 'literature' cannot be defined in isolation from an expression of ideology. In fact, no academic study, and certainly no description of the language of texts, can be neutral and objective, for the sociocultural positioning of the analyst will mean that the description is unavoidably political. Contributors to the series recognize and, in so far as this accords with the aims of each book, attempt to explore the role of ideology at the interface of language and literature. Secondly, most writers also prefer the term 'literatures' to a singular notion of literature. Some replace 'literature' altogether with the neutral term 'text'. It is for this reason that readers will not find exclusive discussions of the literary language of canonical literary texts; instead the linguistic heterogeneity of literature and the permeation of many discourses with what is conventionally thought of as poetic or literary language will be a focus. This means that in places as much space can be devoted to examples of word play in jokes, newspaper editorials, advertisements, historical writing or a popular thriller as to a sonnet by Shakespeare or a passage from Jane Austen. It is also important to stress how the term 'literature' itself is historically variable and how different social and cultural assumptions can condition what is regarded as literature. In this respect the role of linguistic and literary theory is vital. It is an aim of the series to be constantly alert to new developments in the description and theory of texts.

Finally, as series editor, I have to underline the partnership and cooperation of the whole enterprise of the Interface series and acknowledge the advice and assistance received at many stages from the PALA Committee and from Wendy Morris at Routledge. In turn, we are all fortunate to have the benefit of three associate editors with considerable collective depth of experience in this field in diffferent parts of the world: Professor Roger Fowler, Professor Mary Louise Pratt, Professor Michael Halliday. In spite of their own individual orientations, I am sure that all concerned with the series would want to endorse the statement by Roman Jakobson made over twenty-five years ago but which is no less relevant today:

> A linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unconversant with linguistic methods, are equally flagrant anachronisms.

Literary Studies in Action by Alan Durant and Nigel Fabb offers a unique contribution to the Interface series in that the authors have combined a wide-ranging introduction to many recent developments and analytical techniques in literary studies with approaches to the classroom study of such texts which, collectively, offer a radically different pedagogic design. The book shows above all, however, how the different perspectives from which texts are read or the subject of literary studies conceived are rooted in different literary and cultural theories. As the authors themselves put it on p. 2, in this way they 'follow theory' throughout providing as they do a guide to exciting and newly developing theories of literature which are beginning to have a profound impact on departments of English throughout the world. But the book is also radical in the way it challenges 'armchair' approaches to text study; instead Durant and Fabb provide a prodigious range of activity-based, student-centred projects which at all times foster both active involvement with the texts studied as well as productive interaction with fellow students and with tutors. The pedagogic strategy of the whole book offers something excitingly new and different in the study of literature. David Lodge puts it aptly in his endorsement of the book when he says this is a textbook for the times.

Ronald Carter

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Suggestions for using this book

This book consists of three main types of material:

(a) descriptions and explanations (exposition);
(b) questions (in some cases with answers provided);
(c) activities.

Literary Studies in Action is intended as a book to be worked with as well as read. For this reason its interactive parts – particularly the activities – are probably its most important element. Much of the benefit to be gained from the book is to be had from working through the activities it contains, rather than just by reading the connecting text. To make this easier, we have left space in the text for you to write into it; in this way the final contents of the book will be provided as much by you as by us. We think that working through problems and issues is the only way of bringing into the book the elements of individual intervention and active learning which are the traditional foundation of literary studies.

Some activities are presented simply as a way for you to check that you have understood items of terminology or how to do specific operations with a piece of text. Others ask questions which have specific correct answers. Where we think this is the case, we list those answers at the back of the book (we have added a note in the activities indicating that answers are provided). In most cases, however, we do not provide correct answers or recommended solutions to the problems outlined in the activities. Generally this is because there is no single right answer to the questions. In some cases, there may be an answer but we do not know it, and in other cases, we may (think we) know the answer but nevertheless feel that you need to work it out for yourself (if the activity is to be of any use to you). In some cases, the instructions in the activity do not enable you to reach a final conclusion. Here it is up to you (if you wish) to pursue the implications further; we hope you will have gained enough 'momentum' while doing the activity to enable you to extend its investigations into new areas. In general, what you gain from the activities will come from your experience of *doing* them and reflecting on your results, not from sitting back and guessing a 'hidden answer we are really looking for'.

Each activity is annotated with a suggested time, to give you some sense of the scale of commitment we feel it is likely to require. Estimated times are given on the assumption of an individual working alone. There are, however, advantages in working with other people; and in this case activities may take slightly longer, because of the time it will take you to get organised (though a group is less likely than an individual to get stuck and so lose time). If you are likely to be working in self-run groups you may find it helpful to look at the section entitled 'Suggestions for teaching a course with this book'.

What to do if you get stuck

Stop and do something else.

Go back and read the passage in question again, or read more slowly.

Use the index and table of contents to remind you of the context of what you are reading.

Stop reading this book and follow up suggested and further reading.

Look in a guide to literary terms, or a companion to literature, or a dictionary, or Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, etc. Ask a librarian for suggestions if necessary.

Skip to the next section or chapter.

Remember that some of the questions asked in the activities are difficult for anyone to find clear answers to; difficulty in deciding on answers may point to unresolvable problems raised by the questions, rather than to any deficiency in your knowledge or ability.

'Do' an activity by deciding (and writing next to the activity) exactly why you think it cannot be carried out as asked.

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Suggestions for teaching a course with this book

The activities in this book have been written in such a way that they can be done by an individual working alone. But if *Literary Studies in Action* is being used as part of a course, they can profitably be done by student groups in a 'workshop' class. Our own experience of using these and similar activities with a class of second-year undergraduates at the University of Strathclyde and elsewhere suggests that the following general procedure works effectively.

A class time of 50 minutes is set aside. Each room has thirty students and one or two co-ordinators, and each student has a copy of the activity. We begin with the general instruction: 'Form groups of four to five; each group should choose a "secretary" to take notes and be responsible for reporting back to the class.' Students spend 30 minutes in the groups working through the activity. The co-ordinator circulates from group to group, provides input as appropriate and helps people get 'unstuck' where necessary. We attempt to be minimally directive in providing answers, on the basis that the process of working through the problem is the main educational goal (the questions which make up the activities, on the other hand, are very directive). After 30 minutes the groups come together as a class. Using some sort of rotation pattern, the co-ordinator collects from each of the group 'secretaries' a response to each question, and lists them on a blackboard. The collected answers are then compared and discussed by everyone. This final stage of the session lasts about 20 minutes.

Many of the activities in this book can be used in this way, although long activities may need to be edited (or used over a longer period of class time, or possibly partly done by you with the whole class). Estimated times given for the activities may be reducible in groupwork situations, because there are more people trying to solve the problems; on the other hand, the more contentious and individual issues may take longer to deal with in a group, because of disagreements.

Workshops of this kind have several things to recommend them. They provide the high student involvement of a seminar while requiring the low teacher-time input of the lecture. Workshops are as open to individual creativity as a written project or homework, but at the same time encourage people to work together, and provide direct experience of collaborative work. They also have at least partly definable end points, so that students know when the activity is finished in a way which is free from the arbitrariness of time simply running out. In our experience, workshops of this kind provide one of the most efficient, challenging and enjoyable ways for students to engage in literary studies.

Alongside this use of the activities as workshop sessions, the descriptive material is also likely to lend itself to use as course material. Some chapters (e.g. Chapter 1) may be more suitable for self-instruction than for class use. Although there may be some benefits in using the chapters in the order in which they appear in the book (our cross-references assume this), other sequences are possible.

Acknowledgements

This book was completed in July 1988. It grows out of our experience of teaching and discussing issues about literary study, especially in the Programme in Literary Linguistics at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. Parts of the book develop directly from our work in the Programme in Literary Linguistics; other parts have their origins in courses and seminars given for the British Council and other organisations, not only in Scotland but also in Algeria, Austria, Brazil, Finland. India, Malaysia, Morocco, the Philippines, Spain, Thailand and the United States. We are grateful to everyone who made a contribution during those sessions, and apologise for any unacknowledged ideas we may have borrowed.

The following people commented on the manuscript, in part or whole, and the book has benefited by their comments and criticisms: Sylvia Adamson, Derek Attridge, Jennifer Bradley, Adam England, Janet Fabb, Margaret Fabb, Shridhar Gokhale, Debbie Hodder, Leonard Koussouhon, Vicky Ley, Colin MacCabe, Sara Mills, Martin Montgomery, Mary Louise Pratt, Rebecca Thomas, Shan Wareing, Deirdre Wilson.

Sakina Mrani Alaoui did the drawings on p. 144.

Thanks to Wendy Morris and Alison Barr at Routledge, and to our series editor Ron Carter.

The production of this book was supported by the Programme in Literary Linguistics. We thank Margaret Philips, Administrator of the Programme, for her help in its preparation.

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Introduction

Aims

Literary Studies in Action is a new kind of study guide to literature. It investigates, and helps you to answer, three questions which confront you when you are working in literary studies (and to some extent in the related fields of communication studies, cultural studies and media studies).

What should you do?
How should you do it?
Why should you do it?

Succeeding in a course means being able to do whatever is asked of you. This is where the 'what' and 'how' questions are relevant. A coursebook or workbook should help you acquire the skills you need to achieve established goals in literary studies. *Literary Studies in Action* does this. But coursebooks and textbooks often stop here, handing down a tradition of knowledge and skills from their own secure position on the ladder of history. *Literary Studies in Action* tries not to do this. Instead it seeks to go beyond other textbooks by rejecting the idea that success in an existing course means not asking *why* the course is the way it is. You study literature in a particular place at a particular time, and this book should help you explore how you got there, where you go next, and how the intellectual and social landscapes of the discipline came to surround you in the ways they do. The book works through these problems by asking historical and critical questions about the development of existing frameworks for studying literature (and other related subjects). It also investigates what alternatives exist.

In *Literary Studies in Action* we take a confident, rather than defensive, view of literary studies and their importance: we bring 'what' and 'how' together with 'why'.

We suggest that developing the skills you need to study literature can be combined with reflecting on what that study is for, how it was established, and what sorts of thing it is possible to learn through it.

Many established courses proclaim 'English literature', 'literature in English' or 'English studies' as the exemplary discipline for expressing your own critical opinions and judgements. This book should help you meet the external demands set by such a course, but it should also help you develop an intelligent independence from the views expressed and handed down by others, whether in a course or a work of criticism or theory.

Context

There is a specific context for introducing a new kind of study guide such as *Literary Studies in Action*. We are now surrounded by a vast range of representations of social experience. Yet although new academic disciplines have emerged to focus on the production of this array of representations and information (media studies, communication studies, information science), studying literature is still the most widely engaged-in of these disciplines. Nevertheless, the consensus which this reflects – that there is still some special purpose in studying literature – is not founded on a consensus about what that special purpose is.

History plays an important role in *Literary Studies in Action*. This is because the past imposes shapes and limits on our thoughts about the present. In thinking, we use categories and procedures that we acquire from our social surroundings, and in this sense the past is a valuable resource of knowledge and judgement. But conflicts and contradictions surrounding those categories and procedures also persist into present forms of things, where they can confuse our images of how things are now. Since our activities and beliefs are conditioned by the past in this way, views of the past – no matter how distorted or partisan – retain an active force in the present. This force is very often beneficial. But sometimes it is this same force of history which surfaces to prevent us analysing, altering, or rejecting given states in favour of new or different perceptions and interpretations.

The present is directly connected to the past, as its 'unfinished business'.

Many traditional ways of studying literature have been questioned and undermined, to an extent that it is hard to press on with the old methods and orthodoxies. But critiques of those methods have rarely been accompanied by specific proposals about what to do instead. In many cases, the critiques simply explore, in spiralling depth and detail, the arguments why things

shouldn't be done in the old ways – while frequently going on doing in general terms what they did before: business as usual. Where new methodological proposals (such as stylistics) *do* exist, they have tended to develop as specialised minority options within the subject, rather than as revisions to its primary direction or purpose. In the case of literature in English in particular, there have also been *social* changes which significantly alter the context in which people study. The rapid rise of English as an international language – now used in a wide range of different contexts of multilingualism and for a very wide range of different purposes – outpaces concern with its literature as the expression of a narrow Anglo-American high culture. As a result, many people who set out now to study 'literature' in English may see no obvious purpose in doing so. When faced with the spectrum of academic subjects dealing with questions of history, society and communication, they are likely to see studying literature as a remote and apparently confused activity – possibly even as a set of parochial squabbles taking place in a back alley of modern intellectual enquiry. To someone thinking about beginning literary study in this context, our suggestion is this.

> **To study literature seriously, you need to acquire specialized skills required for the tasks the discipline demands. But to make sense of your study, you also need to develop an informed view on how your study fits into larger patterns of knowledge and thought.**

Following theory

In the last thirty years a large body of work has developed which is concerned with analysing the basic principles and procedures of studying literature and other cultural forms. This work has come to be known as 'literary theory' or simply as 'theory'. *Literary Studies in Action* could only have been written in the light of this work, and we refer to it often in the book. Nevertheless we have focused on individual questions and issues, rather than on particular theoretical works and authors, because we hope that *Literary Studies in Action* will 'follow theory' in two particular senses.

First, we hope *Literary Studies in Action* will take up the valuable challenge which 'theory' has signalled, by encouraging you as a reader to analyse the underlying principles and assumptions of your views. We hope our readers will seek to formulate – and constantly re-evaluate and question – systems of analysis and interpretation without becoming mystified by or subservient to systems which have already been developed.

Second, we hope this book will 'follow' theory in another sense. With the expansion of work in literary theory has come a sudden explosion of courses on literary theory *itself*. Sometimes these courses focus on the publications of theoreticians as a new catalogue or 'canon' for study. They take 'theory' as a course *content*, rather than as part of a course *process*. In contrast with these courses, *Literary Studies in Action* hopes to establish that the major way forward from valuable insights of the last thirty years is towards new courses informed by theory – which use theoretical awareness to explore issues and practical concerns in new ways – rather than new courses in theory itself.

This, we suggest, is the real challenge of 'theoretical' work: the lesson of 'theory' is *analytic work* of theory formulation and theory assessment, not learning theories – *any* theories – as dogma.

Using *Literary Studies in Action*

While *Literary Studies in Action* as a book should be self-contained, providing problems to solve *and* space to solve them in, we do not mean this to suggest that it is the only book you will need. Apart from following up problems and lines of argument wherever possible in the various works we refer to in the notes and bibliography, you need to be constantly looking at and thinking about the wide range of texts around you – novels, adverts, songs, television and radio programmes, newspapers, signs, graffiti, dramas, etc.

Only by connecting your thoughts in working through *Literary Studies in Action* with your own changing experience as a reader, listener and viewer will you be making the use of this book that we intend. *Literary Studies in Action* does not aim to be an exhaustive or definitive survey of studying literature in English. We hope simply to provide materials and procedures for working through problems that should lead into other readings and investigations beyond the horizon of *Literary Studies in Action* itself.

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