A Course in English Language and Literature

Bernard Lott

Tutor's Book

World Publishing Corp
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First published in Great Britain 1986 by
Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd, 41 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DQ

Edward Arnold (Australia) Pty Ltd, 80 Waverley Road, Caulfield East, Victoria 3145, Australia

Edward Arnold, 3 East Read Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, USA

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Lott, Bernard
A course in English language and literature.
Tutor's book
1. English literature—History and criticism
I. Title
428 PR83

ISBN 0-7131-8428-0
ISBN 7-5062-0386-3

The edition of A Course in English Language & Literature
is published by arrangement with Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd.
reprinted by World Publishing Corporation, Beijing, 1989
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To the tutor

General

The aim of this course is to give your students useful, practical and interesting instruction in the combined study of the English language and literature in English. In preparing it, I have been guided by two principles which I take as essential to this sort of work. First, language is to be studied *in context*; the language practice presented in *A Course in English Language and Literature* is never isolated from real or imagined situations. Second, literature is to be studied through the evidence of texts, through 'close reading'; I have set store by comprehension as a starting-off point for work on most extracts. Students will need to apply their minds to the various sorts of evidence (content, diction, grammar, style) in the texts if they are to meet the demands made on them. A vague impression of what the extracts are about is not enough.

Since the aim of this course is to teach something in general about literature in English and at the same time develop skills in the use of the language, you will, I hope, find it broad enough in scope to be teachable regardless of your particular speciality within the field of English studies. With your help, and especially with plenty of discussion and group work on the lines suggested in the introductory note to each unit in this Tutor's Book, your students should by the end have acquired the necessary skills and experience to move ahead to more specialized projects, such as the intensive study of individual literary works in entirety, or of the literature of a particular period or country.

The course has been made possible by recent advances in our understanding of how texts communicate their meaning, how stylistic features can be identified, how cohesion works in linguistic units larger than the sentence, and so on. For the language teacher, these insights represent a turning away from the so-called 'structural approach', i.e. teaching by means of isolated realizations of grammatical structures. In putting such advances to the service of English studies, I have selected passages from literature in English which are valuable on at least two counts: they are interesting in themselves, and offer the tutor as well as the student a ready-made source of constructive work in both language and literature; also, every text has at least one language feature occurring a sufficient number of times for it to be the starting-point for specific language practice. At the same time I have guarded against any tendency to exploit the texts to the limit, any attempt to say all there is to say about them stylistically. You will therefore find plenty to add to the commentaries for yourself, according to the needs of your classes. However, if interest and enjoyment are to be maintained, there is a good case for leaving some things unsaid. The texts should not be worked to death.

Literary aspects

I believe the extracts will all be accepted generally as pieces of fine writing. I have put into the commentaries here and there some appreciation of the outstanding qualities of the texts, and have encountered very few instances where any adverse criticism is called for. At this stage, however, enjoyment of the various types of writing presented here (prose narrative, poetry, memoirs, character delineation, drama, parody, etc.), and a heightened awareness of what the texts in these various genres communicate, make up a sufficient goal. Any call for genuine critical writing from your students needs careful consideration on your part because it requires maturity in reading on *their* part which may be beyond their ability at this stage. For this reason I have avoided setting questions which ask for literary judgment or critical appraisal.

The extracts are taken directly from the work of some of the best creative writers in English. They are printed here just as they appear in the original books, without any simplification except that the spelling and punctuation are regularized as in modern English. In this regard they inevitably compare favourably with passages specially contrived for language-learning purposes, such as often appear in other courses but seldom have much intrinsic appeal, and are sadly limited in their range of reference. The texts in *A Course in English Language and Literature* all have something worth saying, and they say it very well.

In most cases I have given my own title to each of the units: for instance, unit 1 is headed 'Kurtz's last disciple', a title not sanctioned by Conrad. I have done this for fear that readers might be misled if each unit just bore the title of the work its extracts are taken from. Unit 1 is not 'about' *Heart of Darkness*, and any reader going to it to read about Conrad's book, or about the author himself, would feel let down; it is about a single character in that book, an unnamed Russian-born helper at the trading station, and about the relations of this man with the dominating, mysterious presence in the jungle.

Linguistic aspects

The language features chosen for special study in *A Course in English Language and Literature* are naturally those which are 'foregrounded' in the texts. As I have selected the texts from a wide range of different literary genres, subject-matters, styles and ages, the coverage of these various language features is extensive, as you will see from the **Contents** and from the **Index of language features dealt with in the exercises** at the end of the student's book. But, although extensive, it is not of course comprehensive, i.e. it does not add up to even a summary grammar of the language. You should nevertheless find that all the features treated in the course will work well and usefully as focuses for language study.

For grammatical descriptions, I have used a surface structure grammar, and, for the most part, a traditional terminology which will be generally familiar to you. My main source has been: Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum: *A University Grammar of English*, Longman, London, 1973. A new book: Randolph Quirk et al.: *A Comprehensive Grammar of*

the English Language, Longman, London, 1985, became available a I was finishing work on this course. It is by far the most complete and authoritative grammar on the market, and is at the same time extremely readable and enlightening.

Order of difficulty among the units

I have not discovered any systematic and universally valid set of criteria for arranging the units in order of increasing difficulty: the choice of any one aspect of the texts to be used as a parameter for this purpose turned out to produce an order which had no close correspondence with another order produced in accordance with some other parameter. For instance, an order based on the relative frequency, in the language as a whole, of vocabulary items in the extracts – i.e. 'the less common the item, the more difficult the text' – turned out not to correspond with the relative maturity of the concepts in the extracts themselves. Again, word frequency in the common language does not correspond to syntactical complexity – i.e. the hypothesis, 'the rarer the word, the longer the sentences' was found to have no validity.

Also, as I say in the student's book, readers' sense of difficulty depends in large measure on their own linguistic and cultural background. The best I could do was to gauge the general feel of the unit and grade it accordingly.

The keys

The rest of this Tutor's Book is given over to some informal notes on the teaching of each unit, and to 'key' answers to the questions in the exercises. These answers are mostly suggestions as to how the questions might be answered, but the surface transformations in accordance with grammatical rules allow, of course, less free variation than the more literary material I have touched on. The key to the exercises in unit 1 is included in the unit itself in the student's book, so as to give students an indication of the sort of work expected of them. Further, you will gather from the keys, taken together, some indications of how you can build up your own study materials on literary texts, both arising from the literature used as a resource in this course, and also from other texts and other writers. Similarly, the exercises may well suggest to you ways in which set books and more discursive reading could be tested and examined.

In some places the keys extend a little way beyond the coverage given in the units; you will be able to decide how much extended information like this you think it right to bring into your discussions in class.

Stylistics

Although this course is not a primer in stylistics, its attention to the language of literary texts makes it something of a prelude to the study of this linguistic science. The foregrounded features of a text are important evidence for use in the preparation of any stylistic description of it, and

studying such features therefore provides some access to the discipline required.

For further investigation of approaches to the teaching of stylistics, I recommend: Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short: *Style in Fiction*, Longman, London, 1981; and: Ronald Carter (ed.): *Language and Literature, an Introductory Reader in Stylistics*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1982.

When Carter (p. 12) writes: 'the integration of language and literature teaching in English classrooms is long overdue', he puts in a nutshell the need which *A Course in English Language and Literature* is designed to meet.

University College London
February 1986

By degrees I made a discovery of still greater moment. I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experiences and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. . . . This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it.

from *Frankenstein* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

UNIT 1

Kurtz's last disciple

from *Heart of Darkness* (1902)
by Joseph Conrad

Introduction

Kurtz's companion, the Russian, does not play a large part in the novel *Heart of Darkness* – he is not even given a name – but his place in the plot is an important one. If the manager of this remote trading station had been an ordinary person, he would have been at the waterside himself, to meet anyone coming off the riverboat as it tied up. But Kurtz is no ordinary manager, and the mysteries surrounding him are deepened as Marlow meets Kurtz's companion at the landing-stage. Marlow hears from the Russian more than he knew before about Kurtz, and in this way the suspense we share with the narrator is increased in intensity.

The Russian is delighted to meet some ordinary white men again – ordinary, that is, by comparison with Kurtz – and his words come tumbling out excitedly as he talks to Marlow. He is in this way an ideal subject on which to base an exercise in guided composition. Give your students some latitude in what they write in order to fill out the Russian's words, but at the same time ensure that they are given credit for writing sentences which do not conflict with what can be learned or easily deduced from the extracts. Your group as a whole should be interested to hear some of the results of these exercises read out aloud.

A key to the exercises in this unit is printed in the student's book within the unit itself. Do what you can, however, to ensure that your students write their own answers to the exercises before they read my suggestions in the key.

UNIT 2

Raju and his father's shop

from *The Guide* (1958)
by R.K. Narayan

Introduction

I have chosen the extract here for two main reasons. First, it is simply and attractively written and, however unfamiliar its setting may be to your students, it effectively conjures up in the mind a place and a time, without being overburdened by detail and lengthy description. Second, the 'habitual' mode of almost all of the verbs makes it suitable for language practice: it converts readily into the simple present tense.

Although such language practice may seem simple, students can sometimes make mistakes in the forms of the verbs and in the consistency of the tenses they use in a continuous passage. Exercise 2 asks them to identify the forms correctly. Exercise 3 gives them practice in converting just the finite verbs (not the non-finite ones, of course) in some of the paragraphs in the extract.

Reading the original paragraphs aloud, and then the converted paragraphs, will help to give students a feel for the function of the two tenses, past present and simple present, in a fully contextualized piece of writing.

The point about the irony (ex. 1, qu. 9) is difficult and open to discussion. Encourage your students to think first about the very brief description in the glossary of what the term 'irony' means, and then to decide whether there is anything ironic in the extracts. In other words: Are there any passages in the extract which are in any way at variance with a child's account of the events? My own suggestion in answer to this question is in the key below.

Key

Exercise 1 Comprehension

1 Before midnight Raju's mother told him a story. At midnight, his father shut up the shop. His father came home and ate the night-time meal with him and his mother. Raju then lay down to sleep in the front room.

2 Before midnight, Raju's mother told him a story. Around midnight, his mother sent Raju several times to the shop to show his father that they were expecting him home. When he did not come, Raju and his mother had their meal without him. She rolled out Raju's sleeping mat and he lay down. She ran her fingers through his hair, and scratched his neck. She began to tell him another story. He fell asleep. His father came in

from the shop and ate what had been set aside for him. His father then went to sleep for a short while.

3 For at least five days a week it must have been open for very long hours. Raju's father was up very early in the morning, at cock-crow, and did not close up the shop until midnight.

4 They were carters who came in from the surrounding villages, bringing goods to sell in the market on the following day. They came to the shop for food or tobacco, or just for a talk.

5 A frequent topic of conversation was the state of the irrigation channels: these provided water for the crops, perhaps from a dammed-up river. The frequent talk about the channels suggests that the rains in the district were not good enough to keep the earth in a suitable condition for growing crops.

6 These were disputes which people had taken to law, no doubt over matters to do with land and produce. The men found these cases amusing because they often remembered times when the courts came to foolish decisions, or when one side or the other tricked the law, probably by finding faults in the legal code which were favourable to themselves.

7 It happens when he has to run across the dark place between the bright light of the shop and the dim light over the doorstep of his home. He imagines there are wild animals in this dark space waiting to catch him.

8 He always fell asleep, even before his mother had finished the first sentence of her story about this person.

9 First, in paragraph 4, he says that the extent of the 'dark patch' was 'a matter of about ten yards, I suppose'. He does not say 'as much as ten yards', or 'only ten yards' or 'all of ten yards'. The ironic effect comes from this very small distance being mentioned for just what it was, leaving the reader to imagine how big it seemed to the little boy, and how small it seems to Raju as an adult.

Second, in paragraph 5, he tells how, when his mother sat down at his side, he felt he ought to 'put her proximity to good use'. In saying this he is, in the way of an adult, giving a reason for doing what comes naturally to a child: moving close to its mother.

Exercise 2 Language study: verb forms

told - *tells*
waited - *wait*
remained - *remains*
arrived - *arrive*
were unyoked - *are unyoked*
drifted - *drift*
loved - *loves*
talked - *talk*
heard - *hears*
tickled - *tickles*

Exercise 3 Language study: verb forms and functions

Para. 2 My father ignores food and sleep when he has company. My mother sends me out several times to see if he can be made to turn in. He is a man of uncertain temper and one cannot really guess how he will react to interruptions, and so my mother has coached me to go up, watch his

mood, and gently remind him of food and home. I stand under the shop-awning, coughing and clearing my throat, hoping to catch his eye. But the talk is all-absorbing and he will not glance in my direction, and I get absorbed in their talk, although I do not understand a word of it.

Para. 3 After a while my mother's voice comes gently on the night air, calling, 'Raju, Raju,' and my father interrupts his activities to look at me and say, 'Tell your mother not to wait for me. Tell her to place a handful of rice and buttermilk in a bowl, with just one piece of lime pickle, and keep it in the oven for me. I'll come in later.' It is almost a formula with him five days in a week. He always adds, 'Not that I'm really hungry tonight.' And then I believe he goes on to discuss health problems with his cronies.

Para. 5 I follow her into the kitchen. She places my plate and hers side by side on the floor, draws the rice-pot within reach, and serves me and herself simultaneously, and we finish our dinner by the sooty tin lamp, stuck on a nail in the wall. She unrolls a mat for me in the front room, and I lie down to sleep. She sits at my side, awaiting Father's return. Her presence gives me a feeling of inexplicable cosiness. I feel I ought to put her proximity to good use, and complain, 'Something is bothering my hair,' and she runs her fingers through my hair, and scratches the nape of my neck. And then I command, 'A story.'

Para. 6 Immediately she begins, 'Once upon a time there was a man called Devaka . . .' I hear his name mentioned almost every night. He is a hero, saint, or something of the kind. I never learn fully what he does, or why, sleep overcoming me before my mother is through even the preamble.

UNIT 3

Father William

from *Poems* by Robert Southey
and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)
by Lewis Carroll

Introduction

Do not be put off by the two verses from Southey's poem in this unit. They are not great poetry, not even great *didactic* poetry, partly because the lesson they teach comes in flat, generalized terms, unrelieved by any flashes of insight into real-life situations and challenges. I have brought them in to introduce the parody of them in *Alice*, and by this means to give your students some experience in analysing the rhythmic and rhyme schemes used in two poems similar in some ways but with very different intentions. The rhythmic scheme I use here is based on stresses; I suggest you do not bring in the concept of the 'foot' in English poetry, not at least at this stage. See that the students place the stresses on the right syllables in each line and appreciate how these stresses form a pattern within each verse of Southey's, and how this pattern is transferred to Alice's poem. The rhyme schemes, very straightforward ones of end-rhymes in single, stressed syllables (masculine rhymes) can also be seen at work in both the poems; but note that Southey's lines rhyme ABCB, whereas Alice's rhyme ABAB.

Careful thought needs to be given to how you present the concept of parody. In some cultures, readers may be uncomfortable when they see a moral lesson turned into a joke. In other cultures, the didactic verses will leave readers unmoved; they will be read as the lame forerunner of a famous parody. In any case, I hope everyone will enjoy Alice's engaging nonsense verse.

On the language side, I have used these poems as a basis for practice in two ways of expressing concessive relationships between clauses in English: that with the conjunct '(and) yet', and that with the subordinator '(al)though'. The purpose of this part of the unit, finishing in exercise 4, is to give practice in just these two ways of expressing concessive relationships between clauses in English, though there are of courses others.

Key

Exercise 1 Language study: verse structure

1 'You are óld, Father Wílliam,' the yóung man críed,
'And pléasures with yóuth fade awáy;
And yét you lamént not the dáys that are góne,
Now téll me the réason, I práy.'

'In the dáys of my yóuth,' Father William replíed,
'I remémbered that yóuth could not last;
I thóught of the fúture, whatéver I díd,
That I néver might grieve for the past.'

2 away/pray; last/past.

3—'Now tell me the reason, I pray' (verses 1 and 3, the last line of each verse);
—'In the days of my youth,' Father William replied (verses 2 and 4, the first line of each verse);
—'I remembered that youth . . .' (verses 2 and 4, the second line of each verse);
—'That I never might . . .' (verses 2 and 4, the fourth line of each verse).

Exercise 2 Language study: the original and the parody compared

The first lines of the first verses in each poem are nearly the same; only one word is changed: 'said' is substituted for 'cried'. The second lines have some aspects of meaning in common, but in the Southey poem the language is heavy and unattractive (there are two 'are's , for instance), whereas in Alice's the flow of language is easy and natural:

. . . your hair has become very white.

The first lines of the second verses in each poem also have something in common; a similar thought in each is expressed very stiffly and formally in the Southey poem and easily and colloquially in Alice's.

Above all, the rhythm of the lines in each stanza, four heavy stresses in the first and third lines, and three heavy stresses in the second and fourth, is exactly reproduced in each of Alice's verses. The rhyme schemes are not quite the same: Southey's is ABCB, Alice's is ABAB.

The content, however, is very different. Southey's verses are essentially grave and moral. Alice's are pleasing nonsense; in the story, she is carried along unwillingly into a different version of the piece which does nothing at all to teach any moral lesson. Yet what she says has its own sort of logic, with the exchange of words between father and son fully maintained. And what she is doing turns Southey's serious verses into a joke.

In line 3 of Southey's first verse, the linker between the clauses is implied, not stated: the meaning is, 'You are old, your hair is thin and grey . . . (*and yet*) you are hale and hearty.' Alice's way, on the other hand, is to state the conjunct 'and yet', and in this way give expression to the precise relationship between the clauses: 'You are old and white-haired . . . *and yet* you stand on your head.'

Exercise 3 Language study: conjuncts

Here are possible completions for each of the three sentences:

1 You are old . . . and have grown most uncommonly fat; yet you force yourself into trousers which would be right for someone a quarter of your own age.