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**A Learner-centred Communicative  
Approach to Teaching a Literary Text  
Based on an excerpt from D.H.  
Lawrence's  
*Sons and Lovers***

هذا المقال عبارة عن اقتراحات منهجية تتعلق بتدريس نص أدبي لطلبة جامعيين مبتدئين في درس أدب اللغة الإنجليزية.

الطريقة المقترحة هنا لتدريس نص أدبي طريقة اتصالية ومركزة على الطالب وليس على الأستاذ (Learner-centred and communicative approach) تعتمد على نص مستخرج من كتاب Sons and Lovers للكاتب الإنجليزي D.H Lawrence.

المغزى من هذه الطريقة هو جعل الطلبة ينتقلون من مجرد فهم بسيط للنص (Comprehension) إلى تحليل اللغة والأسلوب المستعملين في النص (Stylistic analysis).

بهذه الكيفية سيدرك الطلبة أن النص الأدبي عبارة عن "بنية" تتضمن تقنيات سرد واستراتيجيات معينة وأن دوره يتمثل في تفكيك هذه البنية وتحليلها، وأخيرا جعله يفهم النص الأدبي كعمل فني محض.

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Prior to this I have published an article entitled *Teaching English in an E.F.L Situation: A sample Lesson for First Year University Students*, which enunciated a number of methodological principles and recommendations the purpose of which was to provide guide lines, if not a rationale, or a philosophy for the teaching of a literary text at a beginners level\*.

The present propositions are meant to be a follow up to that article offering , through the study of a given text, an illustration, a **concrete example**, not to say a **model** , of the suggested methodology.

What is therefore sought here is to offer:

- teachers of literature guide lines on how to use a literary text,
- and on the other hand, to develop in the student greater awareness to a text's "literariness" and sharpen his/ her overall linguistic and literary competence.

The reflections gathered here are based on the study of an excerpt from D.H .Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. This methodology has been tried out satisfactorily in class with this and other texts; the only factor likely perhaps to cause some discomfort is the time allotted to the different "activities". Needless to say that should this occur, the teacher is invited to modulate the activities and/ or the time "framework" proposed here, and adopt one more suitable to his or her own class's rhythm and needs.

This is a learner-centred, communicative approach. The teacher's role here is essentially to propose and guide the students into graded and specific activities structured within two major stages which are:

A- Comprehension.

B- Stylistic analysis and interpretation.

The point through these two stages is to move from a mere understanding of the text to an appreciation of it as an art form involving strategies and techniques demanding from the author craftsmanship in the handling of his material, and the student is called upon to perceive and appreciate this artistry.

This text study may be divided into two sessions of 90 minutes each.

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\*c.f. Annales de l'Université d'Alger n° 5 O.P.U Alger 1990-91.

c.f. also analogous reflections in *Bridging the Gap*, University of Algiers, 1993

## FIRST SESSION: 90 MINUTES.

For this first session students are expected to have already read the text at home and attempted some preliminary succinct, and preferably guided research, involving background or peripheral information (on the author's life and background and the circumstances surrounding the writing of this work) meant to inform their study of the passage and subsequently enhance their understanding and their aesthetic appreciation of it.

The text's COMPREHENSION stage is divided into three phases:

- 1- A warming up activity
- 2- Comprehension
- 3- Activities including oral and written tasks and exercises.

### 1-WARMING UP OR "BRAIN STORMING" ACTIVITY: 10 MINUTES

This preliminary activity is meant to pave the way for the students into their text; its general idea or theme and the general features of its style (descriptive, narrative, lyrical, etc...).

With regard to this particular excerpt from Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* such questions or comments could be considered for the warming up activity

-Ask students to comment on such phrases and expressions as 'love at first sight', 'attraction of opposites', etc.....

-The teacher would help students answer the following questions:  
Why are people attracted to one another? (out of friendship?, love, interest... other?) Provide examples and/or illustrations.

-Students can also be guided into describing or characterizing:

- a physical attraction.
- a moral or intellectual attraction

The comments will provide students with reflections, and a vocabulary fund to be used in their subsequent study of the text. This "warming up" activity is but a stepping board into the next, perhaps more sustained, activity of the session.

## 2- COMPREHENSION 40 MINUTES

As it is assumed that a *Silent Reading* of the passage has been done at home, i.e. prior to coming to class, the teacher could begin with a *Reading Aloud* exercise performed by the teacher and by a few students in alternating turns, time permitting.

The immediate and evident purpose of this exercise is to help students:

- 1- correct their pronunciation
- 2- it also encourages good "chunking" of the text and by the same token offers the teacher a good opportunity to check the students' reading speed, pitch and emotion which convey the reader's interpretation of the text.
- 3- it involves everyone in the story.
- 4- it helps capture the atmosphere and possibly the tone of the passage.

The essential objectives of the "COMPREHENSION" part is to focus the students' attention on the content of the passage through its main ideas. The teacher may ask general questions about the two main protagonists of the story, Walter Morel and Gertrude Coppard.

Questions about :

Walter's and Gertrude's physical and moral traits

The contrast between his "physicality", his "instinct"; and her "intellectuality", her "rationality". Students could pinpoint in the text the words and phrases which convey this opposition between the two protagonists.

- On the other hand, the teacher can get the students to note, by reference to specific passages from the text, their mutual attraction. The teacher can also sensitize students to the verbal exchanges between Walter and Gertrude; their first verbal contact: his broad English accent, and her much more refined speech.

The teacher may also get the students to answer some such general questions as:

- a) Do you like this story? Why?
- b) What type of portrait is drawn of Walter?
- c) What is striking about him?
- d) What type of portrait is drawn of Gertrude?
- e) What is remarkable about her?

- f) Are they attracted to each other?
- g) Do they complement each other? How?
- h) Are they radically opposed? In what way?

The other main objectives of COMPREHENSION are:

**1** To number and identify the principal parts of the text , and focus the students' attention on the formal structure of the passage. Such simple questions may be answered:

- a) How many parts can be distinguished in this passage?
- b) Indicate them clearly, explain your reasons for structuring the text the way you have.
- c )Are there other ways of structuring the text ?

The teacher can for instance get the students to observe the juxtaposition of the "portraits" or "close ups" of Walter and Gertrude; and eventually their coming together through a dialogue.

Students may also be encouraged to suggest other possible structuring of the text, and note for instance the alternative use of narration and description , or else observe the presentation of the two characters through **narrative** and **descriptive** passages and their coming together , their meeting through a **dialogue**.

**2** To sense the atmosphere of the passage : students may be made to note its warmth and its gaiety; such questions may be asked for this purpose :

Which particular words and phrases does the writer use to convey this atmosphere of happiness and joviality?

### **3 - ACTIVITIES: Oral and Written Exercises 40 MINUTES**

The following are proposed:

- a) Vocabulary extension exercise (for skimming purposes). Students may be required to draw a chart emphasizing the physical and moral portraits of Walter and Gertrude using adjectives and phrases, synonyms and antonyms.

For example: Walter may be said to be tall and well built , smart and full of colours; and also, humourous , extrovert , non intellectual etc ..., while Gertrude is frail and small, delicate and subdued , but thoughtful ,sharp and inquisitive etc .....

Students may be asked to draw a similar chart ( for scanning purposes ) using words , derived from the text , to describe Walter and Gertrude , and leading to a stylistic analysis of their use.

- b) Prediction exercise. Having observed the attraction and the opposition of the couple, what is going to happen next ? (Give a follow up to the story) Are they going to marry? Yes / no?
- c) Draw conclusions.
- d) Write a short summary of the passage.
- e) Imagine at this stage an ending to the story.

*Between the two sessions students may be invited to do some pair or group work such as discussing briefly the characters of Walter and Gertrude in relation to their social background, to their class and outlook on life etc.....*

## **SECOND SESSION: 90 MINUTES**

This session also comprises three phases:

- 1- Warming up activity.
- 2- Stylistic analysis and interpretation.
- 3- Activities (productive tasks).

### **1-WARMING UP: 10 MINUTES**

Will be made to bear on the question of individual character and social class which students have worked on as a group or individually .

## 2 - STYLISTIC ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION: 40 INUTES

Rationale: This important part of the session is crucial in this proposed methodology and has to be conducted carefully with students being solicited and given free way to speak. It is meant to elicit from students questions on the «**Hows**» and "**Whys**" that govern the text. The activities chosen should essentially emphasise:

- a) The passage from *language usage* to *language use*, from *text* to *discourse* , from the *functional* to the *aesthetic* aspect of language .
- b) Dwells more on the *connotative* dimension of the words used, for example "ruddy", "gambolling", "honest", "searching" eyes, etc
- c) Students are meant to *infer* from the passage (i.e. read between the lines)
- d) To draw conclusions
- e) To *sense* or recognize the writer's purpose and attitude. Get the students to observe that Walter and Gertrude are different, radically opposed, and how nevertheless, they are made **by Lawrence** to exert a powerful attraction on each other .
- f) To appreciate the rhetorical, technical and stylistic effects (i.e. the text's "literariness") and appreciate their use and purpose.
- g) Ask students to comment on the "mechanics" of the text. Why is the text structured the way it is? How and why does Lawrence manage as an artist to arouse from the outset interest for the two characters by **opposing** them and at the same time showing their **mutual attraction** . Show the dialectical balance between the two , for example : "she thought him rather wonderful" Vs "she was to the miner that thing of mystery".

The presentation of Walter and Gertrude in successive "vignettes" is remarkably comparable to the cinematic technique where we are offered a juxtaposition of "close ups" meant to focus on character, to capture the fine traits ,the emotions of each .

-Note down briefly the characteristics of Walter's and Gertrude's speech;  
His: (broad, colloquial) hers: (sustained, refined, correct etc...)



-Give some illustrations from the text.

-Launch students into a discussion about character and class , class and language . Select information , if any , from the text to sustain the argument .

### 3- **ACTIVITIES** :( productive tasks) 40 MINUTES

The following are suggested:

- Give a title (or a different title) to this passage.

Using all clues contained in the text( rhetorical , technical and stylistic) write a continuation of the dialogue between the couple .

-Rewrite the passage from a different point of view:

- a) from Walter's point of view
- b) from Gertrude's point of view.

This should help students recognize and diagnose Lawrence's purpose and possibly his attitude.

-Comment on the nature and type of analogies, metaphors and similes used and what effect(s) they are meant to produce. For example : " his face the flower of his body", "golden softness" "she was to the miner that thing of mystery".

-Creative writing session: Rewrite the passage or significant parts of it.

-Using all clues (use of parallel structures , use of contrasts for instance) draw the students' attention to the adjectival nature of the text .

-Note the repetitive pattern in which adjectives and images occur.

-Note at last the cumulative effect of this repetitive pattern .

-Get students to make comments , with illustrations from text , on Lawrence's style: its general features, its simplicity, its directness, its effectiveness

-Using previous material ask students to write a short essay on Lawrence's skill as an artist .

As we can see, the overall design of this approach and guided methodology is hopefully to make students see by themselves that a literary text is always a “fabrication” of its author, or preferably, a “construction” and the students’ objective, is precisely to “deconstruct” it. The point here is to make the students see the text as having an “architecture”, so to speak, with materials of its own, specific, functional, purposeful. In the end it should be clear in the eyes of the students that this, or any other literary text, is an *artful creation* involving narrative strategies and techniques, astute artistic selection and a careful organization which should all be recognized and appreciated by the student.

## Extract from *Sons and Lovers*

When she was twenty three years old , she met at a Christmas party, a young man from the Erewash Valley. Morel was then twenty seven years old. He was well set- up, erect, and very smart. He had wavy black hair that shone again, and a vigorous black beard that had never been shaved. His cheeks were ruddy , and his red , moist mouth was noticeable because he laughed so often and so heartily. He had that rare thing, a rich, ringing laugh. Gertrude Coppard had watched him, fascinated. He was so full of colour and animation, his voice ran so easily into comic grotesque , he was so ready and so pleasant with everybody. Her own father had a rich fund of humour, but it was satiric. This man's was different : soft , non-intellectual, warm , a kind of gambolling.

She herself was opposite. She had a curious , receptive mind which found much pleasure and amusement in listening to other folk. She was clever in leading folk on to talk. She loved ideas and was considered very intellectual. What she liked most of all was an argument on religion or philosophy or politics with some educated man. This she did not often enjoy. So she always had people tell her about themselves , finding her pleasure so.

In her person she was rather small and delicate , with a large brow , and dropping bunches of brown silk curls . Her blue eyes were very straight, honest, and searching. She had the beautiful hands of the Coppards. Her dress was always subdued. She wore dark silk ,with a peculiar silver chain of silver scallops. This , and a heavy brooch of twisted gold , was her only ornament. She was still perfectly intact, deeply religious , and full of beautiful candour.

Walter Morel seemed melted away before her. She was to the miner that thing of mystery and fascination , a lady . When she spoke to him , it was with a southern pronunciation and purity of English which thrilled him to hear. She watched him. He danced well , as if it were natural and joyous in him to dance. His grandfather was a French refugee who had married an English barmaid if it had been a marriage. Gertrude Coppard watched the young miner as he danced, a certain subtle exultation like glamour in his movement , and his face the flower of his body , ruddy , with tumbled black hair , and laughing

alike whatever partner he bowed above. She thought him rather wonderful , never having met anyone like him. Her father was to her the type of all men. And George Coppard ,proud in his bearing , handsome , and rather bitter ; who preferred theology in reading , and who drew near in sympathy only to one man , the Apostle Paul; who was harsh in government , and in familiarity ironic; who ignored all sensuous pleasure; -he was very different from the miner. Gertrude herself was rather contemptuous of dancing; she had not the slightest inclination towards that accomplishment, and had never learned even a Roger de Coverley. She was puritan, like her father, high- minded, and really stern. Therefore the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed of his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful ,beyond her.

He came and bowed above her. A warmth radiated through her as if she had drunk wine

"Now do come and have this one wi'me", he said caressively. "It's easy, you know. I'm pining to see you dance."

She had told him before she could not dance. She glanced at his humility and smiled. Her smile was very beautiful. It moved the man so that he forgot everything.

**D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (1913). (Ch. 1 )**

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