

Literature as Messages

We have chosen this particular approach because the analysis Walter Nash gives starts with the theme imparted by the passage, and so it begins with its message, and he will underline how this message is underpinned by the codes (the linguistic features of language in grammar and lexis). Consequently, Walter Nash's criticism starts with:

Intuitive response to D.H. Lawrence's classic story 'Odour of Chrisanthemums' suggests that its theme might be defined in the one word *alienation*. A woman is alienated from her husband, and this is the major issue...

And he is going to find other kinds of alienation such as that of man in his industrial environment. Walter Nash is going to emphasize how the text is structured and developed in its phases and modes of narrative and relate his stylistic analysis to the structural intention. He is basing his metalanguage on that of Quirk's *A University Grammar of English* (1972). He gives the references for the passage of the book he is going to look at and numbers the lines for future reference:

- 1 The engine whistled as it came into the wide bay of*
- 2 railway lines beside the colliery, where rows of trucks*
- 3 stood in harbour*
- 4 Miners, single, trailing and in groups, passed like*
- 5 shadows diverging home; at the edge of the ribbed*

6 level of sidings squats a low cottage, three steps down
7 from the cinder track. A large bony vine clutched at
8 the house, as if to claw down the tiled roof. Round
9 the bricked yard grew a few wintry primroses. Beyond
10 the long garden sloped down to a bush-covered brook
11 course. There were some twiggy apple-trees, winter-
12 crack trees, and ragged cabbages. Beside the path
13 hung dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths
14 hung on bushes. A woman came stooping out of the
15 felt-covered fowl-house, then drew herself erect,
16 having brushed some bits from her white apron.
17 She was a tall woman of imperious mien, handsome
18 with definite black eyebrows. Her smooth black hair
19 was parted exactly. For a few moments she stood
20 steadily watching the miners as they passed along the
21 railway; then she turned towards the brook course.
22 Her face was calm and set, her mouth was closed with
23 disillusionment. After a moment she called:
24 'John!' There was no answer. She waited, and
25 then said distinctly:
26 'Where are you?'
27 'Here!' replied a child's sulky voice from among
28 the bushes. The woman looked piercingly through the
29 dusk
30 'Are you at that brook?' she asked sternly.

31 *for answer the child showed himself before the*
32*raspberry-canes that rose like whips. He was a*
33 *small, sturdy boy of five. He stood quite still,*
34 *defiantly.*
35 *'Oh!' said the mother, conciliated, I thought*
36 *you were down at that wet brook- and you remember*
37 *what I told you---*
38 *The boy did not move or answer.*
39 *'Come, come on in,' she said more gently, 'it's*
40 *getting dark. There's your grandfather's engine*
41 *coming down the line !'*
42 *The lad advanced slowly, with resentful, taciturn*
43 *movements. He was dressed in trousers and waistcoat*
44 *of cloth that was too thick and hard for the size of*
45 *the garments. They were evidently out down from a*
46 *man's clothes.*
47 *As they went towards the house he tore at the*
48 *ragged wisps of chrysanthemums and dropped the petals*
49 *in handfuls along the path.*
50 *'Don't do that – it does look nasty.'* said his
51 *mother. He refrained, and she, suddenly pitiful,*
52 *broke off a twig with three or four wan flowers and*
53 *held them against her face. When mother and son*
54 *reached the yard her hand hesitated, and instead of*
55 *laying the flower aside, she pushed it in her apron-*

56 band. The mother and son stood at the foot of the
57 three steps looking across the bay of lines at the
58 passing home of the miners. The trundle of the small
59 train was imminent. Suddenly the engine loomed past
60 the house and came to a stop opposite the gate. (Widdowson, 1973,
p.102).

After giving the sample text, Walter Nash is going to look at its setting. He observes that the text is built according to a symmetry: it starts and finishes with the bustle of the engine and the sad, shadowy walking of the miners (engine line 1– miners 1 4 – miners 1 58 – engine 1 59) so that in this chronology, we notice that the miners are trapped within an industrial grim world symbolized by the engine. We know that D.H Lawrence spent his childhood in the coal mining town of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, and so his birthplace, his working class background as well as his parents' disputes provided raw material and the setting for most of his early work.

Moreover, we shall notice with other passages under study that when we study the structure of a text we realize how much it discloses the content and themes developed in the text.

Walter Nash notices other recurring symmetries occurring successively in the following pattern:

engine (line 1) – miners (1 4-5) – steps (6) – chrysanthemums (13-14) /
chrysanthemums (1 4) – steps (58) – miners (59) – engine (59) so that it
signals to the reader a scheme of movement from the railway to the house and

to the garden and it is here that the two protagonists (mother and son) meet and back again from the garden to the house and finally to the railway. The chrysanthemums which reccur often through the story are flowers with no scent or beauty and they are usually chosen to be the flowers we take for the dead at a cemetery. In fact, the flowers symbolize all that is despairing and gives the short story a tone of despair and sadness evoked in the frustrations of Elizabeth Bates (the mother) who has not fulfilled her life and in the drab life of those bleak miners. The chrysanthemums are also a foreboding sad omen that progressively announces death (the mining father will die crushed under the rubbles under the earth at the end of the story.)

As mentioned above, there is a scheme of movement therefore the place adjuncts are plentiful either to indicate a direction as in *past the house*, *opposite the gate* or a position as in *At the edge of the ribbed level of sidings* (1 5), *Round the bricked yard* (1 8), *Beside the path* (12)...

These place adjuncts are noteworthy since most sentences start with them followed by the verb and putting the subject as end focus as in:

Round the bricked yard grew a few wintry primroses

Beside the path, hung dishevelled pink chrysanthemums

In both instances, the subject is end-focussed and preceded by negatively connotated adjectives such as wintry or dishevelled which suggest

despair, bleakness not only of vegetation but also of the present human figures.

Walter Nash is then going to divide his text into phases and modes of narrative to examine the development of the scene. The first phase is a description and depicts an environment, the second is the description of the woman, the third is the direct speech between mother and son and the fourth is again a description with a direct speech between the two protagonists.

He then depicts the actors, their identity and relationship through the lexis and the syntax. “A woman” becomes *a tall woman of imperious mien*, she is in line 28 *the woman* and then *the mother* and finally *his mother*.

The change from the indefinite article to the definite one and to the adjectival pronoun *his* and from *woman* to *mother* brings them closer together establishing the link of mother to son.

He will carry on describing each actor in turn: the woman is depicted through the modifiers and adjuncts: *tall, imperious, handsome, definite, smooth, calm, set/exactly, steadily, piercingly, sternly*. The adjuncts describe the woman’s appearance in *her smooth black hair was parted exactly*, her manner of speech in *she asked sternly* and her activity in *the woman looked piercingly*. He identifies her as a woman with an activity at first, but then it abates and she regains her activity by the end of the text. She is a woman who appears as authoritative at first in *she drew herself erect, having brushed some*

bits from her apron and then regrets her quarrelling tone she directs toward her son.

As to the son, he is described with the same type of sentence structures as the mother; compare *he was a small, sturdy boy of five* with *she was a woman of imperious mien, and the child showed himself before the raspberry canes that rose like whips, and she showed herself erect, having brushed some bits from her white apron*. Here the authoritative mother is contrasted to the child who is under the threat of punishment symbolized through the vegetation as in, for example, the child showed himself before the raspberry canes that rose like whips. The adjuncts and adjectives qualifying the boy portray him as reluctant and defiant (*defiantly with resentful, taciturn movement, sulky*).

After depicting the actors, Walter Nash is going to look at the environment which is as dispiriting as the human figures. The adjectives convey a skeleton appearance (*a large bony vine, the ribbed level*) neglect (*dishevelled pink chrysanthemums*), poor clothing (*ragged cabbages*). A lot of the verbs are state verbs such as *grew, hung* indicating state rather than event.

Besides, the adjectives denoting the vegetation (*wintry primroses, twiggy apple-trees, wintercrack trees, ragged cabbages, dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, ragged wisps of chrysanthemums*) evolve around winter, the skeleton, and neglect, namely, a depressing and poor environment.

The conclusion Walter Nash draws is important because for him the two levels of articulation (the symmetry, the development of the scene) and information (the actors, the environment) are intertwined. He puts great importance on finding the structure of any text first in order to make remarks on the language and style. He makes a precision that it is rather linguistic promptings which suggest a structure. The latter will provide references for stylistic features which will back up the structure. For W. Nash, we read a text having an intuitive response or a literary sensitivity which is fostered by the observation of linguistic features. The latter are going to make us discern whether a text is developed by foregrounding, contrast, pairing and gradations, for example, and we shall discover in our future analyses of texts how true this interweaving of the plane of articulation and the plane of information is. Of course, a text cannot be reduced to simply a stylistic description; extra (or supra) linguistic references must be taken into account.

To sum up, Walter Nash has been looking at the different points in this approach:

1. A sample Text
2. Setting: Symmetry and Perspective
3. The Development of the Scene: Phases and Modes of Narrative
4. The Actors
5. The Environment