

Before W. Bradford's manuscript "Of Plimmouth Plantation" was printed in 1856, it circulated as a unique document outside the network of publication for well over two centuries. It crossed the Atlantic twice and was deposited for a time in a London Bishop's library. It is an English antiquarian who re-discovered it in 1856 and put it into print. It was finally deposited twenty years later in the basement archives of the State House in Boston. Douglas Anderson who had studied the book described it as "a much more beautiful volume than photographs are able to convey." As a member of the puritans in exile (Leyden, Holland) and then as a historian and governor of Plimmouth Colony, W. Bradford recaptured the events immediately following their arrival in America with some immediacy and emotion. The text is in the appendix.

My approach to the literary text will be inspired from Walter Nash's stylistic analysis where he emphasizes the following steps:

A sample text

Setting: Symmetry and perspective

The development of the scene: Phases and Modes of Narrative

The Actors

The Environment

A Conclusion.

We shall add an analysis of sentence structure according to N.F. Blake, taking an extract from the passage as an aid to reinforcing students' weaknesses in this aspect of syntax.

Besides, this approach starts by stressing the structure of the passage and therefore the students are forced to look at the main theme and at the key ideas being developed. Once they have done this, they are better equipped to look at how the author develops them through a linguistic study, gaining a personal and deeper insight into the text. Our comments of the texts were always first a debate with the students of how we could divide the text into main and sub parts (if any) and then go into more details by looking at the grammar and vocabulary when discussing the actors and the environment.

### **6.1.1 A Sample text**

Book I is about the puritans' first, immediate contact with the American environment. The main theme is that of exile in an unknown continent and of a different settlement. The real strength of these Pilgrim fathers was their strong faith in God which enabled them to survive the first hideous winter. The text is a narration and follows the events of the Plymouth colony: History is presented as being under God's providential guidance and this represents for me the main cohesion and symmetry of this text as it starts and finishes with the pilgrims thanking God for their safe landing after a tumultuous journey over the ocean and their gratefulness for having delivered them from the hand of the oppressor (persecution in Europe).

The lines of the text are numbered for easy reference. It is extracted from *American Trails* volume 1. My metalanguage is that of N.F. Blake in *The Language of Literature* (except where otherwise indicated).

### **6.1.2 Symmetry and Perspective**

A remarkable feature of this passage is that it starts and finishes with a thankfulness and gratefulness to God: "after arriving, they fell upon their knees and blessed ye God of heaven, who had brought them over ye vast and furious ocean" and it ends with "let them therefore praise the lord because he is good and his mercies endure forever". It

was thanks to god that they could set their feet on the firm and stable earth. It was also only thanks to God that they could keep hope for wherever they could turn their eyes in this deserted and desolate landscape, they could have little solace or comfort save towards the heaven, namely God (35-38). The author makes us realize by making the children of these fathers say that their fathers were Englishmen who crossed this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto God and he hearkened to them and helped them in their adversities. The story of the settlement ends like a sermon in a church since the last quotation is from psalm CVIII in which the redeemed are exhorted to praise God for his manifold providence.

### 6.1.3 The Development of the Scene: Phases and Modes of Narrative

The scene develops according to passages of narration where the author intrudes in the text but once to make us contemplate these poor people's conditions otherwise the passage is told according to a third person narrator who tries to be objective and sympathetic towards the plight of the Pilgrims. He presents the scene as if with a camera. The text appears to be constructed on the following frame:

#### Phase

- I from "Being thus arrived in a good harbor  
to is tedious and dreadful was ye same into him"(1-11)
- II from "But hear I cannot but stay and make a pause..."  
to "much more to search an unknown coast"(12-30)
- III from "Besides, what could they see but a hidious and desolate wilderness"  
to "how the case stode between them and ye marchants at their coming  
away, hath already been declared"(30-63)
- IV from "What could now sustain them but..."  
to "his wonderful works before the sense of men"(63-77)

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Lines</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Content</u>
I	1-11	Narration	God has delivered them from all the perils of the ocean and so they landed safely.
II	12-30	Narration with intrusion of the writer	Sympathy of W. Bradford towards the plight of these pilgrims.
III	30-63	Narration	Pilgrims are caught in a hostile world not able to come back to any civilized nations.
IV	63-77	Quotation	Quote from the children of these Pilgrims. Remarks made for posterity.

This text is mainly narrative evincing the ordeals of traveling by sea, the first contact with the new world with the physical and moral strain imposed on them. Then, the

environment, including the Indians, shown as hostile. It finishes by revealing that the only moral sustenance came from God.

#### **6.1.4 The Puritans versus the Environment**

The first ordeal the puritans had to face was to overcome a tumultuous ocean; notice how W. Bradford makes the clause “they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of heaven” central not only in terms of position but also in terms of importance. The ordeal of travelling by sea is also emphasized through a reference to Seneca who believed that he had rather travel by land for twenty years rather than by sea in a short time.

In his use of language, we may draw attention to his often starting a sentence with a participial clause that makes the central part of the sentence prominent: *Being thus passed ye vast ocean, and..., they had now no friends... to welcome them, nor inns to entertaine or refresh their weatherbeaten bodys, no houses or much less towns to repair too, to seeke for succoure.* A prominent feature of this sentence is the use of structural parallelism which underscores the feeling of pity any reader might feel for them. This entails that the environment they faced could bring no comfort whatsoever.

Not only did they face a desolate and harsh environment but also the encounter with the Indians was to meet their arrows. All this taking place in winter which meant that it was hard to settle in an unknown place subject to fierce storms. Notice the repetition of *winter* to reinforce a dreadful season in the lines 26-27. We may remark that W. Bradford is a skilled writer of both the “texter’s art” and the “historian’s craft: his use of a rhetorical question which in itself contains the answer in an evidence of this: *Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men?* and object placed in an unusual place for emphasis: *what multitudes they might be of them they knew not.* Look at the object of this last sentence which is a whole clause followed by the verb in the negative form placed at the end for end-focus. The inversion of subject and verb in the next sentence to stress that unlike the Jews led by Moses, the Puritans could not glimpse their promised land. W. Bradford well emphasizes that the environment provided no comfort whatsoever through his intrusion to describe their conditions (beginning of paragraph two), the use of repeated parallel structures to inspire sympathy and pity, use of contrast in the behaviour of Indians (instead of refreshing them, they were ready to attack them with their arrows, the repetition of words (*winter*), the use of rhetorical questions, the reference to Moses and the Jews, the repeated reference to the whole country full of woods and thickets, the irrevocable barrier that the ocean represented that cut them from all civilization.

W. Bradford adds to this the feeling of nostalgia when they thought of the help given to them at Leyden, Holland by their brethren who were no longer here to help them.

W. Bradford is skilful at imparting a truth that will remain for posterity : after listing all the unbearable ordeals the Puritans had to face, he leaves the children of these pilgrims have a last word as a final climax : *Our fathers were Englishmen which come over... before ye sons of men.*(p.65-77)

#### **6.1.5 Definition of Foregrounding and illustration with a passage from the same book 1**

With this text, the teacher has to explain archaic forms, old spelling, old structures but it also is appropriate for a stylistic analysis especially Book 1 as it is fraught of foregroundings. We did not introduce this concept of foregrounding with my first generation of students (2006-2007) but we did with this experimental group (2008-2009) as we came across the concept after reading Mick Short’s *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*. It is a key concept in stylistics as it is a special arrangement of words, often deviant, sometimes using repetition or parallelism for special prominence. Katie Wales (2001) well

defines this concept in her *Dictionary of Stylistics*:

*Foregrounding is the throwing into relief of the linguistic sign against the background of the norms of ordinary language.....But within the literary text itself linguistic features can themselves be foregrounded, or 'highlighted', 'made prominent', for specific effects, against the (subordinated) background of the rest of the text, the new 'norm' in competition with the non-literary norm. It is on this 'internal' foregrounding that critical attention is largely focussed.*

*Foregrounding is achieved by a variety of means, which have been largely grouped under two main types: DEVIATION and REPETITION (Leech 1965). Deviations are violations of linguistic norms: grammatical or semantic, for example (p.126).*

If we look at William Bradford's Book 1 and look at the notion of foregrounding, this is what the students found:

They noticed the recurrence of the passive voice because the puritans' destiny was not in their own hands but in the hands of God who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean (active voice) in contrast to the Puritans who were brought safe to land (passive voice) by God almighty. Again they mentioned the use of the passive later in the lines: *Being thus passed over the vast ocean, and..., they had now no friends to welcome them, nor inns to entertain'or refresh their weatherbeaten bodys, no houses or much less townes to repair too, to seeke for succour.*

Within this same sentence, they noticed the use of structural parallelism which is also a salient and foregrounded feature. It underscores the feeling of pity any reader might feel for them. It also suggests that the Puritans could find no comfort in the environment they faced. The students also found a deviation which is also a feature of foregrounding: they said that the direct object is placed first in: *what multitudes ther might be of them they knew not* speaking of the Indians and the wild beast the Puritans came across. They also mentioned the negation placed at the end as end-focus. It was important for us that the students could find by themselves some features of foregrounding because it serves no good that the teacher gives the students all the answers. It is well known in SLA research that it is more beneficial to elicit the responses from the students to have a better uptake. Only then can we agree, disagree or complete their answers. They also take a greater interest in the workshop when they are full participants in it. Although Book 1 is written in old English, it is a good example of stylistic analysis illustrating Katie Wales' definition that foregrounding is achieved through two main means: deviation and repetition.

They also saw how the author inverses the subject and verb in the next sentence to stress that unlike the Jews led by Moses, the Puritans could not glimpse their promised land: *neither could they as it were go to the tope of Pisgah, to vew from this wilderness a more goodly cuntrie to feed their hopes.* We noticed that there were a lot of stative verbs and subject complements since the text is a description as in *The whole cuntrie ...represented a wild and savage heiw.*

After that, we asked them if there were other instances of repetition in the text and *they* answered affirmatively giving the example of *winter* or giving the hyponym of season to enhance the dreadful season in which they landed. The author places the word *season* at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis: *And the season, it was winter and they that know ye winters of ye cuntrie know them to be sharp and violent ...* He also repeats *barbarians* and later *savage barbarians* to qualify the hostile Indians.

The students also found a deviation in the use of questions that of a rhetorical question asking for no answer but a confirming remark on the desolate state of the land:

*What could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness full of wild beast and willd men?*

The students remarked that the repetition and parallelism could occur at the level of

syntax, vocabulary and phonology as in the repetition of the sound

which contributes to expressing that the journey over the ocean was extremely trying and that the landing on a stable earth was welcome *again to set their feete on y firme and stable earth, their proper elemente*. They also noticed the repetition of plosives and sibilants which are used to express uneasiness, difficulties, and harsh experiences therefore reinforcing the theme of the passage.

After this, we asked the students the following question: what was the purpose for a writer to use foregrounded elements?

They replied that it was a very personal way of reinforcing his message drawing the readers' attention by using *unusual forms against the background of ordinary language* (Katie Wales' definition). We also came closer to the way an author sees and conveys a reality and so it was also a mirror of the author's soul. The students added that the author well conveyed the Puritans' ordeals and living conditions when they settled on the American continent.

#### 6.2.4 Conclusion

As a conclusion, our study of W. Bradford's text (Book I) has been analyzed according to its symmetry, its structure and narrative development, the Puritans versus the environment and for book II, its structure, a study of W. Bradford himself, the settlers and the Indians. We have added a study of the structure of sentences for book I and an extract of book II inspired from N.F Blake in his *Introduction to the language of Literature*. This has been added to the students as reinforcement to their mastery of structure at the level of the sentence.

Besides, the way W. Bradford writes the history of *Of Plimmoth Plantation* reveals a deeply religious man who writes with honesty, simplicity, dignity and directness. He developed a skill for the written text: he plays with the position of words in the sentence; he uses a lot of adverbials to explain and comment on their conditions, he also uses a lot of participial phrases but that must perhaps belong to old English, he also resorts either to historical or religious figures such as Senecca, to Moses and the Jews, to the language of the Bible which pervades his text from the opening lines to the end. It is an outstanding book of reference for all students of American history that is why, although the students find it hard to study, it remains a must for students of American literature.

A last comment on William Bradford's *Of Plimmoth Plantation* and the author's rendering of reality through his style:

William Bradford is a writer immersed in Puritan ideology who saw the fate of his compatriots in Biblical analogies. The writer's rendering of reality is clearly seen through his style. At the beginning of his narrative, Bradford announces that he is going to write in the Puritan's 'plain style' sticking to the simple truth in all things. His style is directly indebted to his Puritan ethics: in his writings he always tried to decipher *God's* plans behind mere events. Puritans always sought to see God's plans or providential guidance behind history. The hardships and the hideous winter they went through on arriving to America were part of God's plan; Bradford makes several allusions to the Bible: he makes an analogy between the Pilgrims and the Jews in search of the Promised land: 'neither could they, as it were, goe up to ye tope of Pisgah, to view from this wilderness a more goodly cuntrie to feed their hops'. Here, the writer refers to Moses who was allowed to see the Promised Land before dying; the Jews had hopes of seeing the promised land unlike the Puritans, the author suggests. He even takes verses from the Bible word for word as at the end of Book 1: 'but they cried unto y the lord, and he heard their voice, and looked on their adversitie, etc...'...Here, as for the Jews, the quotation applies perfectly to both the Puritans and the Israelites. Their strong faith helped them overcome the hard living conditions of settlement. Bradford also mentioned Psalm CVIII in which the redeemed were exhorted to thank God for his many providence. Consequently, the author sees the Puritans 'plight in

Biblical terms.

Bradford also evinces a distinctive style fraught with foregroundings which he uses to enhance that the Pilgrims 'destiny was in the hands of an omnipotent God (use of the Passive Voice), parallel structures to arouse pity for them, repetition of words such as winter, barbarians, rhetorical questions to stress that the environment was hostile and that they were trapped in this new environment. Behind Bradford's text is a search for meaning that is highly conveyed through a religious vocabulary and which was to have a tremendous impact on American writing. Besides, other writers of that period such as Ann Bradstreet and Edward Taylor both accepted God's will even if it caused them personal despair: ' I blessed His name that gave and took'(Northern Anthology, 212). At last, Puritans integrated religion so much in their lifestyle and government that the society they created was a blend of secular and religious life. As Sacvan Bercovitch ( 1978) in *The American Jeremiad* quoting Danforth (1670)in *Errands in the Wilderness* states:

*The errand was a corporate venture, leading from society to self. What conscience meant for the preparationist was in the conscience of the tribe- the great migration, the founders' city on a hill, the sacred communal past. But in both cases the object of the ritual was to link saint and society in the framework of New England's destiny (p.49).*