

Language of one flew over the cuckoos nest essay



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The Language and Structure of 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' Some

Ideas of how to address the following criteria * Well-developed discussion and sound analysis of the structures, features and conventions used by the author to construct meaning * Considered selection and use of significant textual evidence and highly appropriate use of relevant metalanguage to support analysis Things to think about Structure * 1st person narration - allows the reader to see and explore the ward/institution from the Chief's point of view.

Chief's language and descriptions are ambiguous; this creates confusion in the reader and emphasises the confusion, paranoia, fear and uncertainty experienced by the characters in the hospital. Chief's schizophrenic state of mind and medicated condition is demonstrated through the repeated motif in his narrative of the fog. Chief tells the reader '..

.. the fog clears to where I can see... ' Trusting the narrator - Kesey makes it difficult to trust the narrative provided by Chief; he informs the reader that, '..

.. it's the truth even if it didn't happen'. How can the reader put faith in a text that implies the narrator may have got it wrong? It is difficult to suspend belief and trust someone who is reflecting on their time in a psychiatric hospital. * The novel is divided into four large parts. Each part is divided into further smaller pieces.

This represents the fractured mind-set of the characters in the ward. The reader receives glimpses of what occurs on the ward. Robbing the novel of chapters ensures that each part doesn't have a clear identity; it also

represents the lives of the patients - moments that bleed into each other without clear definition/boundaries. Their life feels splintered. * The line, They're out there. Black boys in white suits.

.. is repeated in the text. It is the opening line of the novel and occurs again towards the end. Does this suggest hopelessness? Is there any escape? Is the Chief going around in circles (like *McMurphy*, as implied by his initial R. P.

M) * The clarity of the narration - As *McMurphy* helps to heal and cure the Chief the narrative becomes easier to read. As Chief's clarity of thought returns so too does the ease at which the text can be read * Cartoon structure - The Chief describes the ward as looking 'like a cartoon world where the figures are flat and outlined in black, jerking through some kind of goofy story that might be real funny if it weren't for the cartoon figures being real guys.' The text possesses many similarities to comic strips; the book's characters are larger than life, boldly rather than subtly drawn. Like a comic strip, the novel is fast paced with moments of humour.

Language * use of present and past tense - mixing the tenses in his text allowed Kesey to create a sense of unbalance; it also adds to the confusion suffered by its narrator and creates a sense of urgency and foreboding in the text. An example of this is when the Chief is describing the entrance of the Nurse Ratched for the first time. He describes it in the present tense as being, '... soft and swift (sliding) through the door with a gust of cold and locks the door behind her.'

.. ' * Metaphoric language - Many of the descriptions given by the Chief are metaphoric. The Combine' is metaphoric of society and its control over the
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individual and minority groups. The Chief sees the hospital as part of the larger Combine machine. He writes, ‘

.. wheels and gears, cogs polished to a hard glitter, tiny pills that gleam like porcelain, needles, forceps, watchmakers’ pliers, rolls of copper wire... ‘ On one level the metaphoric language elates to Chiefs schizophrenia, but on a deeper and more sinister level it comments on the conditioning of society (where ‘ individuality and ‘ difference’ is eradicated or at least controlled).

Similes and adjectives used to describe the Nurse – Chief uses many descriptive techniques to show the Nurse Ratched in a dominant and cruel light. He writes, ‘...

I see her fingers trail across the polished steel – tip of each finger the same colour as her lips. Funny orange. Like the tip of a soldering iron’. Right from the start of the text the character of the Nurse is associated with pain and is also juxtaposed with ‘ The Combine’ as she is one of its darker agents of fear and terror. * Dialogue – The conversations in the text reveal a lot about the characters. It is through dialogue that we see McMurphy as a manipulator, and perhaps someone to rival Nurse Ratched for authority.

It is the Nurse’s cool, calculated and literal tone that emphasises her power. Billy’s submissive personality is represented in his stutter when he says things like, ‘ Duh-duh-don’t-tell, M-M-M-Miss Ratched’. It is through the use of dialogue that the reader hears characters like Cheswick and Chief find a voice. Irony – There is dramatic irony running throughout the text, from the very start. The reader understands that the fate of McMurphy may not be a pleasant one. It is ironic that Chief becomes our saviour.

It is through his text that we have become enlightened. He even deals with the suffering of McMurphy. Foreshadowing - The novel is full of moments that imply how the text will end. Some of the key moments are paralleling McMurphy to a Christ figure, the symbol of the dog, the nursery rhyme that the title takes its name from etc...

* Pathos - The novel manipulates the audience's emotions. The boat trip is a humorous scene. McMurphy taking some of the patients to see his childhood home is also very emotional. This scene also foreshadows future events. Chief explains that, ' - a set of tail-lights lit up McMurphy's face, and the windshield reflected an expression that was allowed only because he figured it'd be too dark for anybody in the car to see, dreadfully tired and strained and frantic, like there wasn't enough time left for something he had to do.

.. ' Another emotionally tense scene is McMurphy's final confrontation with Nurse Ratched. The reader is told, ' He gave a cry.

At the last, alling backwards, his face appearing to us for a second upside down before he smothered on the floor by a pile of white uniforms, he let himself cry out: A sound of cornered-animal fear and hate and surrender and defiance... ' The repetition here helps to emphasise the loss felt by McMurphy. * Animal imagery - is used to describe the Nurse at times; she is dehumanised. The Chief describes her when ' She goes into a crouch and advances on where they're trapped in a huddle at the end of the corridor'.

Think about how symbolism is used in the novel * The description of the ward - the ward is a blank canvas, devoid of all emotion. The ward also

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contains '... the glass Nurses' station where she'll spend the day sitting at her desk and looking out her window and making notes on what goes on..

. ' Spivey states that the ward, '... is a little world. Inside that is a made-to-scale prototype of the big world outside.

' The ward is a microcosm (small universe). This little ward, located in Oregon, is designed to represent the much larger world outside. Pathetic fallacy - the sterile, bleak environment described in the text represents the mental condition of the patients. When the ward is destroyed it shows the liberation of the patients; they are escaping from their metaphoric prison and rebelling against the system. * Biblical allusions - McMurphey represents a Christ-like figure.

In the end he is the sacrifice the men make in order to regain their humanity to and bring to the light the tyranny of the Nurse's reign.