THE PLACING OF NAMES: SEQUENCING IN NARRATIVE OPENINGS

RONALD CARTER

This paper seeks to extend the field of stylistic analysis of literary and non-literary texts into the area of written discourse analysis. Such an extension is consequent upon some recent developments in the field of linguistic enquiry which are still in the process of being systematised to the degrees achieved in work at the levels of syntax and phonology. Stylistics can, and should, hold a mirror to such developments if analysis is not to become bound by formalist, text-intrinsic procedures and is to explore literary text as discourse operating within a communicative context. Inevitably, though, the ideas outlined here have a tentative and preliminary character. In proposing to examine in this paper the significance of the kind of narrative organisation adopted by a writer in order to communicate with readers at the very opening to a text, it must be acknowledged, too, that there is a certain operational convenience in the limited and partial focus provided by openings to texts whose total effects are inevitably richer and more complex.

The main general emphasis of this paper is less on the traditional literary-stylistic concerns of interpretation and rather more on the hypothesis-building concerns of linguistic stylistics.[1] Where interpretations are made, then, the main point is to illustrate how certain interpretative procedures operate relevant to the type of narrative discourse involved. This is in accordance with a main strategy of linguistic stylistics which is not simply to move beyond sentence-internal or word-level analysis into an examination of inter-sentential and discoursal relations but also to attempt to specify what constitutes the character of different genres of literary discourse. Also, throughout the paper a corresponding claim is made for the relevance of this kind of discourse analysis to the integrated teaching and study of language and literature. Finally, in keeping with the orientation of this volume, particular attention will be given to the sequencing of names of people and places in narrative openings. We can now, after a long opening, proceed to the openings.

Structures of Expectation

The use of the word "expectation" in the heading to this section is of considerable significance for narrative analysis. Several recent studies have focused attention on what the speaker or narrator expects the hearer or reader will anticipate in the

developing reception of a narrative or a poetic discourse. This constructive process uses stored information from previously encountered discourses to build knowledge-structures which predispose us to interpret new experiences in relation to past expectations. And the more we have encountered the same experiences previously, the more likely it is that we will expect or predict aspects of discourse in a relatively fixed way. Such expectations or interpretative competences have been variously described as a set of "frames", "scripts", "schema(ta)", "scenarios", and description has derived principally from work in artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology.[2] With regard to narrative, a study of these expectations is therefore one concerned with the kind of "norms" which operate in such discourse and which are therefore important components of the reading competence assumed by an author/narrator. Tannen's account has specific reference to the study of narrative and her term "structures of expectation" seems both a neutral and usefully all-embracing one. As its origins indicate, the study of this kind of competence is by no means unique to analysis of literary discourse and it does accord with the kinds of projects proposed among others by Jonathan Culler and Stanley Fish to describe the discourse-specific conventions which different communities of readers must know in order for them to interpret appropriately both the message they are receiving and the socio-cultural activity in which they are engaged.[3] An example of such an "expectation" is the way in which the conventional structure of the elements in the sentence "All was quiet at the 701 squadron base at Little Baxton" determines that many readers would consider it normal for a narrative of some sort to follow.[4] In studies by literary critics there is a tendency not to pay systematic attention to the varied linguistic forms which encode such norms and to move quickly from intuitive recognition to interpretative account; on the other hand, stylisticians have to recognise the extent to which such "styles", especially in textual openings, are language-internal and to what extent extrinsic non-linguistic factors are involved.

One of the most useful of recently developed linguistic-stylistic models for the analysis of the interactive properties of narrative discourse is that of Labov.[5] Of Labov's six main components of narrative structure, the two most relevant here are those of "abstract" and "orientation". The former is a short summary of the story which narrators generally provide before the narrative commences. It "encapsulates the point of the story". Orientation is an essential constituent in helping the reader or listener (Labov's work was on oral narrative) "to identify in some way the time, place, persons of the story and their activity or situation". It can include "an elaborate portrait of the main character". Linguistically, orientation can be marked by forms such as past progressive verbs and, more obviously, adverbial phrases of time, manner and place. Although sequential ordering is not rigid and although orientation is a feature which recurs and is embedded within other components of narrative structure, the more normal or expected sequence is, according to Labov, that of: abstract, orientation, and then complicating action (the main narrative clauses which advance the action).

Labov's model is an important one which has been tested against a wide range of narrative "data" in different contexts. It is one which corresponds to the linguistic-stylistic aims of this paper. In the next section I propose some extension to Labov's category of "orientation" by examining the nature of the kinds of propositions which can underlie the orientation readers are given in some specific opening passages to literary texts.

Tests for Types of Proposition

According to Leech, a proposition is what is expressed by a declarative sentence when that sentence is uttered to make a true or false statement.[6] There are four main ways of expressing propositions: either propositions can be asserted, or they can be presupposed, entailed and implicated. It must be recognised that there is no necessary one-for-one equivalence between propositions and sentences. Propositions are abstract representations of meaning independent of lexical and grammatical form and are only incidentally and for convenience given sentence form in their description. Propositions described in this paper will be represented by brackets [ ]. Standard tests for the recognition of different propositions are as follows:

1. *Assertion.* In the sentence "The girl rode a horse" we have an asserted proposition. This can be tested by negating the sentence in order to change the truth-value. "The girl didn't ride a horse", for example, denies the truth-value of what is asserted in the proposition [The girl rode a horse]. Similarly, if the sentence is given an interrogative expression, (e.g. "Did the girl ride a horse?") then the possibility of a yes or no answer contravenes the claim to truth made by a proposition.

2. *Presupposition.* Whereas in asserted propositions new information is conveyed directly, a presupposed proposition conveys information which it is assumed that the reader or hearer will already possess. The basic test for presupposition is the negation test. This is a test in which anything which is presupposed will still remain true under negation. That is, if the sentence "The attractive blonde got married" is negated "The attractive blonde didn't get married", the truth of the presupposed propositions [There was a blonde] [The blonde was attractive] remains constant. A further test which converts the sentence into an interrogative should preserve the same truth-values. In the analysis of narrative texts it is argued here that presupposed propositions are of particular relevance for determining the relationship between author/narrator and reader/narratee. The relationship depends on what the author can take for granted as shared knowledge.

3. *Entailment.* Any sentence typically entails propositions. For example, in the sentence "The man went home" there are presupposed propositions [There was a man] [There was a home] and entailed propositions [Somebody went home] [Somebody went somewhere]. Entailment is of only limited relevance for the propositional analysis of narrative. As can be seen, the entailed propositions cannot be said to convey significant additional information.

4. *Implicature.* In contrast with asserted propositions, implicatures convey information indirectly. Recovering implicatures involves the reader or hearer in an active process of inference in which propositions are sought among those possible meanings in the text which have not been either asserted or presupposed or entailed. For example, in the sentence "Few of my friends like living in London" there can be an implicated proposition [Some of my friends like living in London] but the process is invariably a subjective one and implicatures are not normally taken to be open to a truth conditional analysis. This lack of certainty is confirmed by the fact that implicatures can be cancelled: thus, "Few of my friends like living in London, in fact none of them do". It can be considered that drawing inferences, making assumptions, reading between the lines, interpreting both stated and unstated (asserted and unasserted) propositions is a key component of literary competence and thus implicature will receive particular attention in subsequent sections.

In summary, here we might note that texts can be ranged along a cline according to the degree of logical and inferential work undertaken by a reader/listener relative to the indirection of the message and the controvertibility of the truth of the propositions. It is a basic starting-point of this paper that writers of narrative adopt different styles for the expression of propositions. To establish some stylistic norms for the expression of propositions can help to determine the way in which different literary-narrative discourses work.

Before examining some sample openings, two distinctive characteristics of reading literature must be mentioned. The first concerns the "reality" to which literary propositions refer. It is clear that a definition of what is literary about a text cannot be easily related to the truth of its claims about the world. Some narrative texts are transparently "fictional" (e.g. fairy tales); others are based on real events (e.g. Thomas Kenneally's *Schindler's Ark* or Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*). We must recognise, then, that what is "actualizable" in literary propositions is varied from one genre of literary discourse to another and may also depend on the different assumptions about the nature of literary discourses which obtain at particular historical moments. It might be safer to say

that the truth conditions of a literary text are, firstly, those internal to and created by the text itself and, only secondly, those existing outside in a non-literary world. Thus, authors assert claims and propositions about the world they have created and readers are invited to judge them accordingly.[7]

The second distinctive feature of a literary text is that it would appear to be a part of literary competence, as of communicative competence generally, that unusual or unexpected communication of propositions has to be interpreted in relation to "the structures of expectation" which constitute the background knowledge to our competence. Discussion of the passages below also illustrates an important additional point in reading literary texts, namely, that the way in which a proposition is *expressed*, stylistically, is often intended to have *thematic* significance and that it is expected by authors that readers will interpret such features in accordance with this convention.

Sequential Ordering

My basic hypothesis here is that readers' expectations about the narrative component of "orientation" are sequentially ordered and that writers/narrators proceed on the assumption that readers produce such "schemata" as a model of normal coherence. This can be tested in substance by asking "informants" to put the following sentences/propositions in what they consider to be "a normal and appropriate order" and report "in what context they would expect to encounter these propositions":

A. One day she met a prince
B. She was called Bettina
C. Once there was a princess
D. She lived in a castle
E. She was a good and attractive person

Informants I have worked with predict that the appropriate sequence for these propositions is CBDEA (over 90% claim that this is "normal") and that they expect a story/narrative to be initiated by such a sequence.

If these propositions are assigned semantic-functional labels then it would appear, on this evidence at least, that the expected propositional sequence or "order" at the beginning of a narrative is that of:

C. Existential proposition
B. Naming proposition
D. Locational proposition
E. Evaluative or attributive proposition
A. Actional proposition

It is interesting to note the correspondence of these categories with those proposed by Labov (see above) who also proposes a category of evaluation, and with categories and definitions proposed by

Hasan.[8] Before proceeding further, however, some definition which might assist the recognition and categorization of these propositions has to be given. This is necessary if other analysts working on passages to which I attach commentary below are to retrieve and check my decisions and if analytical procedures are to be fully developed in a teaching context. These tests are as follows:

1. *Existential propositions* express the existence of a world, produced by the writer which the reader agrees to accept or reject. Most commonly, they express the existence of (a) person(s) who will figure significantly in that world, e.g. [There was once a man].

2. *Naming propositions* express what people or places are called. Typically, they have the form: [The man was called Jake].

3. *Locational propositions* express where, how, when and under what circumstances the narrative is taking place. They are marked by adjuncts of time, manner and place and typically express propositions such as: [It was in the year 1923 in London on an autumn day].

4. *Evaluative or attributive propositions* serve to attribute to characters, places, temporal locations, etc., an evaluative colouring. They express attitudes towards key components in the created world. These evaluative attitudes can be conveyed in the verbs, adjuncts or modifiers employed. For example, [The place was *dull* and the weather *uninviting* / I met a *most interesting man*].

5. *Actional propositions* serve to advance the narrative by informing the reader what people or things do. If actional propositions are put in a different order, then a completely different meaning emerges. For example, [The girl got married and got pregnant / The girl got pregnant and got married]. They are of very basic significance to the development of a narrative.

In the context of study of literature where sensitization to different styles of opening in different texts can be an important element in the development of literary competence, it is productive to explore opening paragraphs or even sentences in the light of this "model" for propositional analysis. For example, striking contrasts between writers can be examined:

A. Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to

> unite some of the best blessings of existence;
> and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world
> with very little to distress or vex her.
> (Jane Austen: *Emma*)

B. It was now lunchtime and they were all sitting under the double green fly of the dining tent pretending that nothing had happened.
(Ernest Hemingway: *The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber*)

In the case of "B", necessary propositions are either assumed to be known to the reader or are withheld so that the reader will read on into the text as if he had this information, and/or will seek actively to uncover it in the course of the process of reading. In the case of "A", the author/narrator is more overt and active in supplying information, evaluating it and asserting claims about the world she has created. In "A" and in texts like it, the relationship between author and reader is more settled or "traditional" or, to put it another way, more expected; in "B" the reader is forced to play a more active, reconstructive and problem-solving role, to infer more and to evaluate rather more for her/himself the point of the opening of the story. In other words, the sequencing in passage "B" is not the preferred sequence of propositions. It is a dispreferred sequence. And when dispreferred sequences are adopted then extra implicatures are generated. Passage "A" contains, it can be argued, a naming proposition, an entailed existential proposition and a number of evaluative/attributive propositions; passage "B" contains no naming proposition and no evaluative propositions though, unlike passage "A", it does contain a locational proposition. Importantly, it also contains a presupposed actional proposition ("pretending that nothing had happened") where the reader infers that significant action has preceded the description here. The position of the reader in the reception of this information is, I want to argue, conditioned by the way in which the expected narrative schemata are handled. The more an author is in overt control of a narrative, the more the preferred or expected sequence of propositions - existential, naming, locational, evaluative and actional - will be presented without disturbance of a reader's expectations. Hemingway is a writer who regularly unsettles the reader, even though the surface of his writing contains many "simple" and "normal" structures.

It might be hypothesized further that there is something in the nature of a cline or scale by which the extent to which propositions A-E (above) are present or absent or are in unusual sequence can be measured relative to the degree of authorial control exercised. For example, if we were to propose that the following five made-up sentences were opening sentences to a narrative and mark them along a scale:

X _____ X

Author/Narrator Reader/Narratee

1. Once upon a time there was a princess
2. A man was walking down a road
3. David decided to go out
4. The man put the knife in the drawer
5. He stood in that same place and wondered why he had done it.

then, I would argue, that we would be likely to place (1), (2) and (3) rather more towards the author/narrator role and (4) and (5) rather more under the direction of the reader's own interpretative activity. Such decisions are not unconnected with the linguistic-stylistic marking of the propositions but they also link with the semantic expectations we have about the information conveyed by textual openings. These expectations relate to the degree of inference required of a reader in recovering both the propositions themselves and an appropriate order for them. For example, (5) entails an existential proposition, and presupposes both a locational proposition and a markedly prior actional proposition; (3) entails an existential and presupposes a naming proposition; (1) asserts a simple existential proposition. It might be suggested here that the notion of a cline does correlate with the degree of *reconstruction* of the depicted world required of the reader/narratee and the extent to which the openings are marked as relatively reader's or author's control of, and distance from, the discourse.

This last exercise is, of course, a contrived one. There is too great a degree of idealization involved in such invented single-sentence openings. That placement along the cline involves considerable approximation is due not only to this but also to the fact that much more work still needs to be done on the part played by deictics (including differences between definite and indefinite articles), and the effects of both asserted and presupposed propositions and implicatures in the determination of the role of the reader in relation to narrative voice.

The complexity of the linguistic and literary issues involved can be illustrated by reference to two further openings. The first passage shows the difficulties involved in assigning significance to openings where expected propositions are absent:

> There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel. They did not know any of the people they passed on the stairs on their way to and from their room. Their room was on the second floor facing the sea. It also faced the public garden and the war monument. There were big palms and green benches in the public garden. In the good weather there was always an artist with his easel. Artists liked the way the palms grew and the bright colours of the hotels facing the gardens and the sea. Italians came from a long way off to look up at the war monument. It was made of bronze and glistened in the rain. It was raining. The rain dripped from the palm trees. Water stood in pools on the gravel paths. The sea broke in a long line in the rain and slipped back

> down the beach to come up and break again in a long line in the rain. The motor-cars were gone from the square by the war monument. Across the square in the doorway of the cafe a waiter stood looking out at the empty square.
>
> (Ernest Hemingway: *Cat in the Rain*)

Here there is an explicitly asserted existential proposition, a density of locational propositions, *but* the naming proposition is an ethnic-generic label, there are no evaluative propositions and the actional propositions refer to actions which are repetitive and circular. Further, the locational propositions provide an orientation which is restricted to an unnamed place. The reader is compelled actively to assess the relevance of both what he is told and of what he is not told as well as to work out what he is assumed to know and why he is assumed to know it. In the case of the second passage the overt opening existential proposition signals to readers possessing the requisite structure of narrative expectations that, as in the case of *Cat in the Rain*, but more so, we might anticipate a story which is allegorical or fabular in organization, (e.g. There was once a . . .):

> There was a rough stone age and a smooth stone age and a bronze age, and many years afterward a cut-glass age. In the cut-glass age, when young ladies had persuaded young men with long, curly moustaches to marry them, they sat down several months afterward and wrote thank-you notes for all sorts of cut-glass presents - punch-bowls, finger-bowls, dinner-glasses, wine-glasses, ice-cream dishes, bonbon dishes, decanters, and cases - for, though cut glass was nothing new in the nineties, it was then especially busy reflecting the dazzling light of fashion from the Back Bay to the fastnesses of the Middle West.
>
> After the wedding the punch-bowls were arranged on the sideboard with the big bowl in the centre; the glasses were set up in the china-closet; the candlesticks were put at both ends of things - and then the struggle for existence began. The bonbon dish lost its little handle and became a pin-tray upstairs; a promenading cat knocked the little bowl off the sideboard, and the hired girl chipped the middle-sized one with the sugar-dish; then the wine-glasses succumbed to leg fractures, and even the dinner-glasses disappeared one by one like the ten little niggers, the last one ending up, scarred and maimed, as a toothbrush holder among other shabby genteels on the bathroom shelf. But by the time all this had happened the cut-glass age was over, anyway.
>
> (Scott Fitzgerald: *The Cut-Glass Bowl*)

Here, the existence of naming propositions which name non-animate entities constitutes a further reversal of normal expectation leaving

the reader even more uncertain about how he is to regard what follows than might be the case with *Cat in the Rain*.[9] Both openings indicate that further propositions, for example, ones marked for animacy and for temporality, might need to be added to the model and that refinement in the form of sub-categorization of naming propositions and actional propositions may be necessary. In the case of actional propositions several degrees of delicacy might be posited relative to verb-type, e.g. predicates can be sub-categorized as material action, mental process, material event process, relational process, and so on.

Interpreting Context and Convention

Most important of all, we have to recognise the relatively subjective nature of this kind of discourse analysis. Some measure of inter-subjective validity can be obtained from informant testing (see section on "Sequential Ordering", above), but the proposition-based analysis of the kind of discourse content found at the beginning of all texts, and especially of literary texts, is not an unequivocal translation of sentence meaning into a linguistic format. It is dependent on an interpretation of what the writer means and this interpretation is in turn dependent on our knowledge of details over and above those given in the textual record. For example, for some readers, knowledge of Hemingway's biography, recognition of common patterns in openings to other stories by him, or, more trivially, personal experience of rainy days at the Italian coast, may mean that what I have assigned in the first passage as locational propositions are for them evaluative propositions. The role of conventions and context is a potentially endless one. As Mailloux puts it:

> These other features - material setting, ideologies and purposes of the interpreter, his political relationship to the text and to his audience, the historical circumstances of his action and so on - all constrain the interpreter's use of shared hermeneutic procedures.[10]

Teaching Contexts

I have stressed that the above "model" should be seen as no more or less than a hypothesis to be tested against as wide a range of data as possible. It is clear that the hypotheses will need to be revised and refined in the light of further testing. However, from a pedagogic point of view not only is this process of exploratory investigation itself a valuable one but students engaged in such activities are exploring matters fundamental to the development of their literary competence and to the study of literature *as discourse*. They are examining the role of the reader, questions of narrative viewpoint and degree of authorial omniscience, comparing texts which have different designs on their readers (often because of different assumptions and shared knowledge), and which vary in design from one text type (realistic, symbolist, fable, etc.) to another and from one period of literary history to another. They

will be developing competence in procedural activities of interpretation and in the drawing of inferences specific to the recognition of different discourse conventions as well as becoming sensitized to the functions and values of different signals in the stylistic organization of the text.[11]

Concludings

> Beginnings do not exist; we have only continuations.[12]
> (Randolph Quirk)

Placing of names and places in narrative openings is, of course, part of a wider sequence; and this preliminary investigation is part of a wider investigation by linguistic stylisticians and discourse analysts interested in narrative organization. But I have tried to show in this paper that names, locations, evaluations and descriptions of action are ordered differently in different narrative openings and that readers respond to and interpret such sequencing in different ways. A rose may be a rose by any other name; but placed in a connected narrative discourse we are likely not just to record its name but to interpret what its position represents. And read on.

NOTES

1 For a review of different approaches in stylistics, see R.A. Carter, "Stylistics", *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 5 (1985) pp.92-100.

2 See, for example: M. Minsky, "A Framework for Representing Knowledge", in *The Psychology of Computer Vision*, ed. P.M. Winston (New York, 1975); D. Tannen, "What's in a Frame?: Surface Evidence for Underlying Expectations", in *New Directions in Discourse Processing*, ed. R.O. Freedle (Norwood, 1979) II; A.J. Sanford and S.C. Garrod, *Understanding Written Language* (Chichester, 1981).

3 J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London, 1975) and *The Pursuit of Signs* (London, 1981) pp.100-18; S. Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Harvard, 1980). See also G. Prince, "On Presuppositions and Narrative Strategy", *Centrum* 1 (1973) pp.23-31.

4 Quoted in G. Brown and G. Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge, 1983) p.247.

5 W. Labov, *Language in the Inner City* (University of Pennsylvania, 1972) pp.354-96. For applications of this model see M.L. Pratt, *Towards a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington, 1977); R.A. Carter and P.W. Simpson, "Studying Narrative", in *Belfast Working Papers in Language and Linguistics* 6 (1982) pp.123-53.

6 G.N. Leech, *Semantics* (Harmondsworth, 1981) p.154

7 For relevant further discussion see J. Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse", *New Literary History* 6 (1975) pp.319-32.

8 R. Hasan, "The Nursery Tale as Genre", *Nottingham Linguistic Circular* 13, pp.71-102.

9 For fuller discussion of this passage from *The Cut Glass Bowl* see W. Nash, "Openings and Preconditions: a Note on Narrative", *Nottingham Linguistic Circular* 10 (1) pp.57-70.

10 S. Mailloux, "Convention and Context", *New Literary History* 14 (1983) pp.399-409.

11 Discussion of relevant pedagogical issues is undertaken by H.G. Widdowson, *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* (London, 1975) and *Explorations in Applied Linguistics* (London, 1979) pp.153-62; also R. Fowler, "How to See Through Language: Perspective in Fiction", *Poetics* 11 (1982) pp.213-35.

12 R. Quirk, *Style and Communication in the English Language* (London, 1982) pp.121-32.