

*Nice Work* is a contemporary novel written by David Lodge and published in 1988. The extract under analysis is taken from Chapter two. Its function is to introduce a new character: Robyn Penrose. She is one of the main characters of the novel along with Vic Wilcox, who is mentioned at the beginning of the extract.

Robyn Penrose is introduced by a third person omniscient narrator, whose presence is visible thanks to:

- Comments added between parenthesis.
- Phrases such as “as an evidence for this she will point out”. The narrator reports Robyn’s mind workings.

The narrator draws the reader’s attention to characters and settings. The setting of the extract is, however, quite unclear: “back an hour or two in time, a few miles in space”.

The character’s introduction is built on different categories and does not follow the rules of a “traditional” introduction (e.g. the introduction is opened by the character’s name).

First of all, the narrator focuses the attention on the character’s way of thinking. Robyn, who is a character herself, doesn’t believe in novel characters: the narrator points out a sort of paradox that needs to be solved in order to go on with the novel. Robyn’s idea will be explained in-depth after the character’s introduction.

In the second place, the narrator focuses on the character’s language: it is interesting to point out the association between language and thought. In particular, the narrator focuses on her spoken language: the character is introduced with one of the phrases she often uses during conversations – “that is to say”.

The narrator now reveals the character’s name: Robyn Penrose. Her first name is a man’s name, but the narrator has already made clear that she is a woman – indeed, the narrator said “a character who herself doesn’t believe etc...”. Her surname is made of two words: “Pen” recalls the character’s job, which will be discussed in the following paragraph; “rose” may be a reference to the character’s nature: the reader may hypothesize that Robyn is a nice person who has negative sides, just like a rose is beautiful and has thorns.

“Temporary Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Rummidge” is Robyn’s occupation. It is made of different elements and it must be analysed piece by piece. First, the “University of Rummidge” is a fictional place created by Lodge for his novel: Rummidge is a city based on the English city of Birmingham, while the University of Rummidge is based on the University of Birmingham. It is likely to think that the extract may be set there. As for “Temporary Lecturer”, Robyn’s job seems to be affected by instability: indeed, economy cuts funds for schools and Universities and Robyn fights to make things better. Funds cuts are still a living matter. “English Literature” is the main focus of Robyn’s work as a Lecturer: as the reader will discover hereinafter, she is particularly interested in industrial novel. Her interest may be justified by her working conditions.

In addition to the focus on her spoken language, the narrator now draws the reader’s attention on her body language: Robyn gestures to convey better her ideas or to convey her listener something she does not say out loud.

Later in the text, the narrator provides some information about her culture and reading interests: “Jacques Derridà is famous to people like Robyn, anyway”.

The reader’s attention is once again drawn on Robyn’s philosophy. It can be summed up in the quotation “we produce ourselves in language”, which refers to the previous association between language and thought. Moreover, Robyn calls herself a feminist.

After providing the basic information about the character’s identity, the narrator explains better Robyn’s non-belief in novel characters: she does not believe in characters because they are a product of capitalism. Such idea raises a question: whether or not the author/narrator agrees with Robyn’s point of view. Indeed, the author himself is writing a novel and he is introducing a character who does not believe in characters: it is a quite awkward situation, as the narrator commented at the beginning of the extract. In order to understand the narrator’s position, the reader has to focus on his comments.

At the beginning of the second paragraph, the narrator reports Robyn's thoughts using her own words: "Both are expressions of a secularized Protestant ethic, both dependent on the idea of an autonomous individual self who is responsible for and in control of his/her own destiny, seeking happiness and fortune in competition with other autonomous selves." The sentence is reported without being introduced by a phrase like "Robyn thinks that...". The following sentence is opened by "This is true": the narrator's judgement suggests that he may agree with her.

By supporting her opinion, however, the "paradox" is still unsolved. At the end of the extract, the narrator steps in and claims to "take the liberty to treat her as a character": her ideas "in practice don't seem to affect her behaviour" and Robyn "seems to have ordinary human feelings".

Moreover, Robyn's ideas of a character are conveyed to the reader by means of a strictly logical and rigorous argumentation. The narrator explains the role and function of each piece of information in Robyn's argumentation: see the phrase "as evidence for this assertion". It suggests that she Robyn is a reflective and smart person.

The character's introduction is closed in a circle: the reference to Vic Wilcox recalls the beginning of the extract.

The extract is an interesting example of metanarrative, which is particularly spread in postmodern Literature. The character's introduction raises questions about the relationship between the author and the character, between the author and his/her own creation. In the extract, the narrator focuses on Robyn's thoughts as if he needed her consent to proceed with the narration: thus, the author is conditioned by the creation itself.