

Task for *The Natural Way of Things*

Charlotte Wood's use of language

Language is used in *The Natural Way of Things* to construct a mini-world – part realistic, part fantastic – within which gender relations in contemporary Australia can be explored. The voice of the omniscient narrator is presented in **formal Standard English**, often in quite **lengthy sentences**. Less formal language is used for the directly quoted speech of various characters in order to create a sense of them as believable 'real' people. For example, the social class background of the two main characters, Yolanda and Verla, is differentiated by Yolanda's occasional **use of colloquialisms** ('durries'), **her non-Standard pronunciation** ('Wouldja like ta buy some moss') and her **use of profanities** ('fucking nowhere'; 'for fuck knew what') and Verla's **more educated speech** ('Admissions. Do you not even have laptops?') Other women characters are economically constructed through physical description and directly quoted speech to give a sense of their personalities and through their location within discourses of popular culture (reality television; Jamie Oliver food shows) and consumerism ('Phaedra'; 'Martha Jones and Nyfodd and Nature Science Series II').

The main guard Boncer is a monstrous gothic stock character, the patriarchal scourge of the imprisoned women. His position in this role is indicated by his association with **the symbol** of the phallus: 'the hard bulge of his stick'. **Vivid language** is used to describe him as physically unattractive ('pale and pock-marked'; 'greasy black hair'), bad-tempered and vindictive ('aggrieved sulky face') and preoccupied with his traditional view of masculinity (he calls Teddy 'a faggot'.) He constantly throws at the women the **appalling language** of **misogynistic insult** ('dogs'; 'sluts' and so on) that men post anonymously on social media sites in the real world to threaten and intimidate women.

Simple detailed descriptive language is used to create a picture of the various buildings of the prison compound and of its physical location. This **straightforward language** is contrasted with the use of **lyrical, poetic** language to describe the beauty of the surrounding bush which becomes increasingly a refuge for the girls, especially Yolanda and Verla. References to stars and birds as **symbols of freedom** occur throughout the novel. During Verla's illness the language becomes **dream-like**, hallucinatory with references to an imaginary river ('a wide rope of bronze silk twirling'), a beautiful white dream horse and Verla's image of herself as a small brown trout in a stream. This sort of language is also used in the magical realism of Yolanda's metamorphosis into 'a little furred figure'.

Inserted phrases

- formal Standard English
- straightforward language
- the symbol
- use of profanities
- vivid language
- misogynistic insult
- lengthy sentences
- lyrical, poetic
- simple detailed descriptive language
- more educated speech
- appalling language
- dream-like
- use of colloquialisms
- symbols of freedom
- non-Standard pronunciation