



## A STRANGER IS WATCHING

Mary Higgins Clark, 1977

### Contexte et objectifs

- Niveau : B1/B2
- Classe : 1<sup>ère</sup>
- Objectifs :
  - grammaticaux
    - temps du récit : *prétérit simple. Emploi du participe présent.*
    - style direct et style indirect libre.
    - hypothèse non réalisée : *IF + HAD + V-EN, WOULD + HAVE + V-EN*
    - comparatif et accroissements / diminutions parallèles.
    - phrases emphatiques avec inversion.
  - lexicaux
    - le vocabulaire de la maison
    - les différences de lexique entre l'anglais britannique et l'anglais américain
    - familles de mots : adjectifs, adverbes, verbes et noms.
    - vocabulaire de l'analyse littéraire
  - procédés littéraires :
    - récit et son organisation
    - rythme
    - le style indirect libre
    - description des sens et des sensations physiques
    - point de vue et création du suspense

### Anticipation du type de texte grâce au paratexte

**Using the paratext and the different types of print, identify the title of the document, explain your expectations as to the text you are going to read.**

Looking at the paratext, we notice the italics and the capital letters in *A Stranger is Watching* which indicate that it is the title of the work from which the extract is taken. The combination of someone unknown observing someone else (us?) is unnerving. The capital letters that follow and the preposition 'by' show us that Mary Higgins Clark must be the author. By choosing this title, Mary Higgins Clark aims at creating an impression of uneasiness and eeriness.

**Apport professeur** Indeed, she is a well-known author of thrillers and suspense novels, which confirms the impression you got from the title. In fact, she is known as the 'Queen of Suspense'!

### Personnage principal (délai d'identification ≠ frénésie immédiate d'action)

**Look for capital letters in the text to help you identify characters and places.**

The words with capital letters are:

- Steve : 4 times (ll. 12, 16, 21, 32)
- Sharon : 6 times (ll. 4, 5, 6, 7, 16, 30)
- Neil : 8 times (ll. 5, 6, 8, 9, 18 twice, 23, 30)
- Mr Peterson : (l. 23)

- the Perrys : 3 times (ll. 29, 30, 32)
- Foxy : (l. 37)
- Driftwood Lane (which is preceded by the preposition of place 'onto') must be the name of a place.

### Apport méthodologique professeur

An admitted convention is that it should be clear from the very beginning who the protagonists are. So let's concentrate on the beginning of the text.

### Find the personal pronoun that appears repeatedly at the beginning of the text and its associated possessive adjective. Say who you think the pronoun refers to amongst the names of the characters you found.

The subject pronoun 'he' is repeated most often (8 times). The associated object pronoun also appears ('him', l. 1) and the possessive adjective 'his' is repeated (4 times in the first five lines). 'He' can't be Sharon, as Sharon is a girl's name. It could be Neil perhaps, as Neil is a boy's name. However, the names Neil and Sharon appear in inverted commas three times (ll. 5, 6, 7) followed by three dots. This shows us that 'he' (whoever 'he' is) is calling their names and that there is no reply, so 'he' can't be Neil because 'he' calls out to Neil.

### Looking at the rest of the text, identify the name that is repeatedly the subject of the verb:

It's Steve. 'Steve felt the cup' (l. 12) 'Steve raced from the den' (l. 16), 'Steve raced to the phone' (l. 21), 'Steve reached for the phone again.' (l. 32)

### Find where the name Steve first appears:

It appears for the first time in line 12! / It doesn't appear until line 12!

### Observe the repeated verb in these phrases and say what it shows you.

The repeated verb is 'raced', it shows us Steve was in a hurry / in a rush.

### Confirm this idea with other verbs from the text.

'Racing' (l. 4), 'Hurrying', 'rushed' (l. 12), 'ran' (l. 13)

### Say what conclusions this observation allows you to draw.

The text is written in the third person. Steve must be the main character.

### Think back to the convention I mentioned about identifying characters at the beginning of a text and say what you can deduce as to the writing technique used here.

This extract doesn't comply with convention. We know we are following a male character (thanks to the pronoun 'he') who is frantically doing a series of actions, but the revelation of his name is delayed until the middle of the text. There is a sharp contrast between the urgent feeling of time running out, and the length of time we are kept in the dark as to the character's identity. This arouses our curiosity and our impatience, thus creating suspense.

### Using the possessive adjectives you found, pick out the nouns associated with them, and sort them into categories.

The possessive adjective 'his' appears in front of 'place' (l. 2), 'body' (l. 2), 'driveway' (l. 4), 'key' (l. 5), 'hands' (l. 7) and 'breath' (l. 27). The nouns 'place', 'driveway' and 'key' have to do with home: we can guess that Steve is coming home, which is located in Driftwood Lane because we identified that as a place before (l. 1). The nouns 'body', 'hands' and 'breath' all suggest some kind of physical reaction to the events being experienced by the character.

## Cadre de l'action

Let's first focus on Steve's coming home. Can you confirm your assumption with vocabulary related to the home?

'living room' (l. 9), 'kitchen' (l.12, 21), 'hall' (l. 13).

**Apport professeur** 'foyer' (l. 7) = the first room in the house, so the entrance hall;  
'den' (l. 13) = a comfortable, less formal room for quiet family activities.

Many rooms are referred to. Steve is rushing through each of them in turn.

**Apport professeur** Travail sur le lexique lié à la maison :

US English	UK English
foyer	hall, entrance hall (foyer can be used for hotels and theatres)
living room	living room, sitting room, (lounge*)
closet	cupboard (used more generally in UK), built-in wardrobe
den	family room / study
bathroom	loo, lavatory, (toilet*)
faucet	tap
yard	garden
mailbox	letter box
apartment, condo	flat
elevator	lift
apartment complex	block of flats
townhouse	terraced house
first floor	ground floor
zip code	post code
drapes	curtains
trash can, garbage can	dustbin, rubbish bin
stove (separate from oven)	cooker (includes the stove or hob, oven and grill)
broiler	grill
dish towel	tea towel
a 'lumin <u>u</u> m /ə'lu:mi:nəm/ foil	alu'mini <u>u</u> m /,ælə'minjəm/ foil (differences in spelling and stress)
vacuum cleaner	hoover or vacuum cleaner
crib	cot

\*si utilisé, mot révélateur d'une classe sociale inférieure. : the words 'lounge' and 'toilet' are considered 'plebby' by the British upper middle classes.

## État émotionnel du personnage

Let's now focus on Steve's reaction (cf. words referring to his body): identify what it is with the help of known words in the same sentences.

- 'his body' (l. 2) => 'fear'
- 'his hands' (l. 7) => 'silence'
- 'his breath' (l. 27) => 'hard'

**Apport professeur** Pointer que tous les sens sont sollicités (toucher, ouïe, vue, proprioception [conscience de son propre corps]) <=> synaesthesia. Donner un autre exemple : celui de 'chilling silence' (l. 7).

### What, in your opinion, caused these physical manifestations?

Steve's reaction is one of fear / utter discomfort, especially since what is happening is literally 'a little too close to home'. Home should be a comforting, safe place but from the very first line his home already seems sinister to Steve because it is plunged into darkness. Calling out to Sharon and Neil, he notices the complete silence inside the house.

### Let's sum up what we have discovered so far.

**Trace écrite** In this extract the main character, Steve, is coming home. The context of a home (the epitome of comfort) where, suddenly, something has gone terribly wrong and people have vanished —thus causing the main character's extreme anxiety— reminds us of crime fiction or of a thriller. The title of the novel (which already sends a shiver/chill down our spines), the darkness linked to the idea of the familiar becoming sinister, Steve's increasing anxiety and disarray, as well as the mysterious situation, indicate that *A Stranger Is Watching* is indeed a thriller or a suspense novel.

We are told how Steve reacts to his home environment physically. These physical reactions reveal his emotional state. His senses are heightened because of the dramatic situation he is in. When he saw the lights weren't on in his house, Steve's body tensed and he was seized by fear. We learn that his body was chilled by the silence, despite the warmth of the house. We notice the use of synaesthesia (the combination of two sense impressions) which intensifies the description.

His hands were clammy or sweaty and moist with apprehension. → He notices the clamminess of his hands.

He felt **as though** he **were** suffocating / being stifled. He felt overwhelmed / overcome by the sense of dread and danger. He felt **as if** he **couldn't** go on.

He felt powerless / helpless and desperate/hopeless. → He was searching desperately for answers.

He was overcome by a sense of powerlessness / helplessness and desperation / hopelessness. He could hardly breathe / He was gasping / fighting for breath because he was in such a panic / because he was so terrified / fearful / frightened.

His anxiety and dread prevented / kept him from breathing properly. → He was in a complete panic and so he couldn't breathe properly. → **So terrified was he** that he could hardly breathe. **Hardly had he arrived** when his worst fears were confirmed. **No sooner had he noticed** a new detail than he was gripped by another wave of fear.

**PRL** : expression des impressions / ressentis avec **AS THOUGH** / **AS IF** + **prétérit modal**.  
phrases emphatiques avec **inversion**.

**Apport professeur** Travail sur le lexique : le tableau qui suit inclut le vocabulaire utilisé dans le texte et en classe. Il permet un travail sur les catégories grammaticales des mots de la même famille et notamment sur la dérivation à l'aide de suffixes.

**-LY = adverb**

**-FULL = presence (with) / -LESS = privation (without)**

**-NESS = concept**

Possible cumul de deux suffixes (ex. : hope + -LESS + -LY / fear + -FUL + -NESS)

Adjective	Adverb	Verb	Noun
sick	sickly	to sicken	sickness, sickliness
dreadful, dreaded	dreadfully	to dread	dread, dreadfulness
anxious	anxiously		anxiety, anxiousness
worried, worrying, worrisome	worriedly	to worry	worry
apprehensive	apprehensively	to apprehend	apprehension, apprehensiveness
frightened, frightening, frightful	frighteningly, frightfully	to frighten	fright, frightfulness
fearful, fearsome, fearless	fearfully, fearsomely, fearlessly	to fear	fear, fearfulness, fearsomeness, fearlessness
chilly, chilled, chilling	chillily, chillingly	to chill	chill, chilliness
slippery	slipperily	to slip	slipperiness
cold	coldly		cold, coldness
wet	wetly	to wet	wet, wetness
clammy	clammily		clamminess
damp	damply	to damp, to dampen	damp, dampness
moist	moistly	to moisten	moistness, moisture
desperate	desperately		desperation
hopeless, hopeful	hopelessly, hopefully	to hope	hope, hopelessness
powerless, powerful	powerlessly, powerfully		power, powerlessness, powerfulness
helpless, helpful	helplessly, helpfully	to help	help, helplessness, helpfulness

## Manifestation de la peur du personnage (+ procédés littéraires)

**Confirm your ideas about Steve's emotional state using the punctuation you find throughout the text.**

The author repeatedly uses exclamation (4 times) and question marks (3 times), as well as suspension points (5 times). These punctuation signs betray strong emotions: this points to the inner turmoil the character is undergoing while not making sense of what is happening to him. He is frantic (exclamations), wonders what is going on (questions), and is disorientated and jumps from one assumption to the other (suspension points).

**Identify the most common words right before these noticeable punctuation signs.**

- l. 2: 'off'
- l. 6: 'Sharon...' x 2, 'Neil...'
- l. 8: 'Sharon...'
- l. 18: 'there!'
- l. 19: 'it?', 'Neill!'
- l. 24: 'anything...'
- l. 26: 'record....'
- l. 27: 'they?', 'them?'
- l. 29: 'Perrys!'

'Sharon' (3 times) and 'Neil' (twice) come most often before the punctuation signs. 'they' and 'them' must be pronouns referring to both of them.

### Using your previous conclusions, make assumptions as to who 'Sharon' and 'Neil' might be, and what is going on.

They are mentioned often, and called by their first name, so they must be familiar to Steve. What's more, he feels strongly about them, so we can deduce they are close to the character / there is a strong bond between them. Finally, they are mentioned in connection with the character's home, thus they are likely to be members of the character's family. As Sharon is a girl's name and comes first, Sharon must be Steve's wife / partner. Neil is a boy's name, so he must be Steve's son. There is an enumeration of rooms in the house, which might mean that the character is going through all those rooms one after the other, checking whether Sharon and Neil are in any of them, and not finding either of them.

### Confirm with an observation of the verbs: pick out sentences which contain more than one verb of action.

'Ignoring the slippery road, he floored the accelerator and the car shot forward, careened down the block.' (ll. 2-3)

'He turned into his driveway and jammed to a halt behind Sharon's car.' (ll.3-4)

'Racing up the stairs, he thrust his key in the lock and pushed the front door open.' (ll. 4-5)

'Chilling silence offset the warmth of the foyer, made his hands clammy.' (l. 7)

'Hurrying over, Steve felt the cup.' (ll. 11-12)

'He rushed into the kitchen, noticed the saucepan in the sink, then ran down the hall to the den.' (ll. 12-13)

'Not knowing what he was looking for, Steve raced from the den back to the foyer and noticed Sharon's overnight bag and purse.' (ll. 15-16)

'Neil must have had one of those violent attacks, the kind that come on so suddenly, that almost suffocated him.' (ll. 17-19)

**Apport professeur** V-ED + V-ED (+ V-ED, etc.): series of action verbs => rapid rhythm  
V-ING + V-ED = present participle at the beginning of the sentence followed by main verb in the simple past to indicate two almost simultaneous actions => speed and confusion.

Steve's fear is growing and he is becoming frantic. He therefore does various actions in quick succession and that's why there are all those verbs concentrated into some twenty lines of text.

### Contrast with sentences containing state verbs ('was' / 'were') in the same part of the text (ll. 1-19): what observations does Steve make? What can you deduce?

- 'It was his place - the lights were off!' (ll. 2-3)
- 'Papers were scattered on the floor' (l. 9)
- 'there were scissors and scraps on one open page.' (l. 10)
- 'An untouched cup of cocoa and a glass of sherry were on the small end table near the fireplace.' (ll. 10-11)
- 'The cocoa was cold.' (l. 12)
- 'The sense of danger was overwhelming, stifling.' (ll. 13-14)
- 'The den was empty too.' (l. 14)
- 'Her cape was there!' (ll. 16-17)

There are numerous details listed one by one:

- **If** everything **had been** normal, Sharon and Neil **would have been** home.
- **If** Sharon and Neil **had been** home, Steve **would have found** them in one of the rooms he searched.
- **If** Sharon and Neil **had been** home as expected, they **would have put** the lights on.
- **If** they **had** / they'd **been** at home, the lights **would have been** on and they **would have answered** Steve when he called them.
- **If** there **hadn't been** a problem, Neil **would have finished** his cutting-out and (**would have**) **tidied** it up. He **would** / He'd **have drunk** his cocoa and Sharon (**would have drunk**) her sherry.
- **If** she **hadn't left** in a hurry, Sharon **would have taken** her cape with her.

### What is the effect of this list of details?

Steve becomes more and more worried and so do we. The more details he notices, the more he rushes about in an attempt to find out what has happened. The more details we discover, the more anxious we are to find out what has happened too!

### So let's sum up on how accumulation is used and its effect.

**Trace écrite** The concentrated accumulation of dynamic verbs creates a rapid rhythm and creates intensity, as does the repeated use of a present participle at the beginning of a sentence followed by a main verb in the simple past. The overall effect is one of confusion and urgency.

There is also an accumulation of details listed in quick succession and revealed to the reader as Steve notices them. For example, Steve knows that **if** Sharon and Neil **had been** (→ **if they'd been**) safely at home, the lights **would have been** on. **If** there **hadn't been** a problem, Neil **would have tidied up** his cutting-out. **He'd have drunk** his cocoa. **If** there **hadn't been** some kind of crisis, Sharon **would have taken** (she'd have taken) her purse and her cape with her.

We learn about these details at the same time as Steve and share his point of view. This makes us identify with the main character / puts us in the main character's shoes, which increases our involvement in the story.

Steve notices **more and more worrying** details. He gradually becomes **more and more anxious** and **less and less reassured**.

We discover the details of the situation at the same time as Steve, so we share his point of view. It is as though we were in Steve's shoes.

**The more details** Steve notices, **the less reassured** he feels and **the more aware** he becomes that something is terribly wrong.

**The greater** our understanding of the situation, **the more anxious** we feel too. **The more desperate** Steve becomes, **the more worried** we become too. **The further** we go into the text, **the greater** the suspense becomes and **the more we want** to know what has happened.

**PRL** hypothèse non réalisée (hypothesis about what is not possible anymore): **IF + HAD + V-EN, WOULD + HAVE + V-EN.**

Rappel de l'emploi de la forme contractée 'd : pour auxiliaire HAD, suivi du participe passé / pour le modal WOULD, suivi de la base verbale.

doubles comparatifs : **MORE AND MORE / LESS AND LESS + adj.**

accroissements / diminutions parallèles : **THE + comparative / THE + quantifieur + noun / verb x2**

### Accès à la conscience du personnage (+ procédé littéraire)

**Think back to the pronouns used in the text as well as the punctuation signs you picked out. Deduce information as to the narrator and the main character: who asks the questions and makes the exclamations?**

We've seen that the main character is referred to as 'he' and 'Steve' so we have a third person narrator. However, as we said before, the questions and exclamations are Steve's, despite there being no speech marks.

**Apport professeur** This is called free indirect speech, which is neither direct speech ("Oh my God, the lights are off!"), nor reported speech (Steve thought to himself that the lights were off.)

**Come back to the other examples you found thanks to the punctuation, and analyse.**

l. 18 'Her cape was there! What would make her rush out without it? Neil!'

This is what Steve says to himself... In direct speech he would say 'Her cape is here! What would make her rush out without it? Neil!' There are very few differences between this and the original text — only the change in tense and adverb and the addition of inverted commas.

In indirect speech the text would be: 'Steve exclaimed to himself that Sharon's cape was there. He wondered what would have made her rush out without it. He exclaimed to himself that it was because of Neil.'

If Mary Higgins Clark had used indirect speech, the sentences would have been longer and this would have slowed the rhythm in the extract. So free indirect speech is much shorter, not so long-winded, and it thus contributes to the dynamism and rhythm of the text.

The use of the third person narrator means that we observe Steve as the narrator does, from the 'outside'. However, the use of free indirect speech means that we have direct access to Steve's thoughts. We both observe him and identify with him.

D'autres exemples se trouvent ligne 27 et suite et peuvent être présentés sous forme d'un tableau. Vous pouvez ensuite demander aux élèves de repérer les changements et d'expliquer les effets.

**Trace écrite** *Free indirect speech* allows Mary Higgins Clark to give the reader direct access to Steve's thoughts without explaining them. This allows the writer to maintain a dynamic rhythm thanks to the shorter, sharper sentences and exclamations and questions that are immediately recognisable. We feel **as though / as if** we were reading Steve's mind directly with neither the barrier of inverted commas as in direct speech, nor that of introductory/explanatory verbs as in indirect speech. Free indirect speech creates immediacy as well as intimacy with the character as the reader feels **as though** he/she had direct access to the character's thoughts.

The combination of a third person narrator and the use of free indirect speech is extremely effective. We simultaneously observe Steve along with the narrator -in a sense we are also 'strangers who are watching' him- and we are caught up in his thoughts and emotions, thus sharing his terror and his desperation.

#### **PRL FEEL / LOOK + AS THOUGH / AS IF + prétérit modal.**

Comparaison avec l'expression LIKE + proposition (agrammaticale, mais malheureusement utilisée, même dans la presse écrite, de plus en plus souvent pour remplacer 'as though' / 'as if'.

L'intérêt de la trace écrite est surtout lexical.

### **Nœud de l'intrigue**

**Remember what we said about suspense writing before (i.e., delaying important information). So, examine the last paragraph in the text and confirm / infirm your previous assumptions.**

The first sentence in the last paragraph: 'If you want your kid and girlfriend alive' confirms that Sharon is Steve's partner or girlfriend and Neil is his son, and shows they have been kidnapped. Steve is warned —very insistently (cf. italics)— not to call the police. The final sentence of the text tells us that Foxy is the name (or the nickname / pseudonym) of the person who wrote the message.

Once again, the revelation of important information is delayed, here until the very end of the text. We are almost as desperate as Steve to find out what has happened!

### **Trace écrite recapitulative**

**Using all of the elements you have found, confirm the type of story *A Stranger Is Watching* is, and sum up the techniques Mary Higgins Clark uses.**

**Trace écrite** In this extract, Mary Higgins Clark creates suspense and intensity thanks to various techniques. The reader is immediately plunged into a tense and worrying atmosphere owing to the accumulation of action or dynamic verbs, short sentences, the use of free indirect speech and the evocation of the main character's physical and emotional reactions to what he discovers. These techniques mean that the rhythm is varied and dynamic and that the reader shares the protagonist's point of view and so his anxiety and dread. It is almost as though the text echoed Steve's jagged breathing. Describing Steve's sensations and discoveries, and revealing what has happened only at the very end of the extract, the author makes the writing gripping and suspenseful. We can guess that the novel, like this extract, is unputdownable and we understand why Mary Higgins Clark is known as 'the Queen of Suspense'.