TEXT INTERPRETATION

THE ELEMENTS OF FICTION

(book one)

Tamar Japaridze

plot, character, setting, point of view, theme, symbol & allegory, tone & style.

Judit Diasamidze

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თამარ ჯაფარიძე

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პროზის ელემენტები

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The Elements of Fiction has been designed for students of English Department at the universities who study text-interpretation or any other kind of literary criticism as one of the aspects of Academic English. It offers a wide range of useful critical vocabulary that can be applied to literature in general, as well as to any other field of academic discussion.

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PREFACE

The book consists of the discussions of the nine basic elements that go into the making of a story, and the way in which such elements relate to each other and to the work as a whole. Each discussion is followed by a story to be analyzed.

The intention is to provide both a method of literary analysis and a useful critical vocabulary that can be transferred from one text to another. Rightly pursued, such an approach will encourage students to sharpen and clarify their responses to literature and equip them to articulate those responses.

The book also provides a glossary of the literary terms to acquaint students with the meaning of terms used most frequently in literary criticism.

Tbilisi State University, 2005 Tamar Japaridze

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INTRODUCTION

READING AND STUDYING LITERATURE

WHY WE READ

Our impulse to read literature is a universal one, answering a number of psychological needs that all of us share. Such needs may vary greatly from individual to individual due to their different tastes, experiences and education. They also vary *within* each of us; they shift and alter as we change and grow. Our reading tastes will also differ from one day to the next, depending upon our current moods and intellectual and aesthetic needs. There is nothing particularly unusual in such a variety of attitudes towards reading, for we generally have a lot of different purposes in it. Four of these - that can exist independently or simultaneously - are quite evident:

Reading for Escape

Many works of literature, classics as well as pulps, survive precisely because they temporarily detach us from time and place we live in and transport us to some imaginary world. Although some people regard such a motive anti-intellectual, the fact remains that literature flourishes, in part at least, because of the escape it suggests our imagination.

Reading to Learn

Literature offers the reader "knowledge" in the form of information. When you think about it, there is scarcely a story, a poem or a play that does not offer us some new piece of information that broadens our knowledge of the world. This sort of information is all the more fascinating, because it is part of the author's skillfully re-created world. Most often literature read in this way serves as a "social document" giving us insight into the laws, customs, institutions, attitudes and values of the time and place in which it was written or in which it is set.

Reading to Confront Experience

One of the most compelling aspects of literature is its relationship to human experience. We would be in great error if we thought that human experience is gained only through the personal experience of an individual, for we also gain it from various other sources: from what we hear or see around us, from what we watch or feel daily, and, especially, from what we read. Reading is an act of engagement and participation. It is, simultaneously, an act of clarification and discovery. Literature allows us the chance to overcome, as perhaps no other medium can, the limitations of our own subjectivity and the limitations imposed by sex, age, social and economic conditions, and the times in which we live. Literary characters offer us immediate access to a wide range of human experiences we otherwise might never know.

The relationship between literature and experience, however, is highly reciprocal. Just as literature allows us to broaden our own human experience, so too our own experience helps us to understand the experiences of the others, suggested by the literature. It also guides, predetermines or alters our literary tastes and needs.

Reading for Aesthetic Pleasure

We also read for the sheer aesthetic pleasure of observing good craftsmanship. And if, as the poet John Keets insisted, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever", then well-ordered and well-chosen words are certainly one form of immortality. Whatever its other uses, a poem, a play or a novel is a self-contained work of art, with a describable structure and style. Sensible and experienced readers will respond to unified stylistic effects, though they may not be initially conscious of what they are responding to, or why. When that response is a positive one, we speak of our pleasure or delight. If we push our inquiry further and try to analyze our response, we begin to move in the direction of literary criticism and linguistic research, i.e. scholarly approach to literary text and its interpretation.

LITERARY CRITICISM

(TEXT INTERPRETATION)

Literary criticism, in its broad sense, is nothing more or less than an attempt to raise and then answer certain basic questions like ***what*** was said and ***how***. It also allows us to form some judgements about the relative merits or quality of the work as a whole.

To move from this general consideration of the function of literary criticism to the ways in which it can profitably be applied to the study of a given work of fiction, poetry, or drama, we have chosen an analytical approach (*viz. text interpretation*). This sort of approach attempts to increase the understanding and appreciation of literature by introducing the typical devices, figures of speech, expressive means or other elements that comprise it. Besides, this approach provides a critical vocabulary – a set of generally agreed-upon definitions and terms that are essential while discussing a work intelligently. Without the appropriate vocabulary we cannot organize our responses to a work or communicate them to the others.

The elements of literature presented and discussed in three books of the three major genres - fiction, poetry and drama – relate to one or more of the genres. Although these elements have no particular order or importance – some are more significant in one work or genre than in another – they do offer a logical sequence for their examination; a discussion of *f i c t i o n*, for example, which is the main point of this book, may begin conveniently with those elements that create a fictional story (*plot, character, setting*), followed by those that govern an author's interpretation and handling of the story (*point of view, theme, symbol*, and *allegory*, as well as *style* and *tone*).

1

WHAT IS FICTION?

When we speak of *fiction* most of us are referring to the short story or the novel – the two genres that have dominated Western literary culture since the late 19th century. Broadly defined, however, the word *fiction* refers to any narrative, in prose or in verse, that is wholly or in part the product of the imagination. As such, plays and narrative poems (poems that tell a story) can be classified as fiction, as can folktales, parables, fables, legends, allegories, satires and romances - all of which contain certain fictional elements. When we talk about fiction in this sense, then, we are not talking about fiction as a genre (the short story and novel) but about the way of treating subject matter; we are, that is, making a statement about the relationship between real life and the life depicted in literature.

The precise relationship between fiction and life has been debated among critics and authors since classical times. Such a distinction can at times be troublesome, as for example when we recognize that some works we refer to as fiction describe a real time and place, events and people that historians can document as authentic. Most modern critics agree, however, that ***fiction is*** finally to be regarded as ***a structural imitation of life*** and is not to be confused with a literal transcription of life itself.

Fiction organizes and refines the raw material of facts to empathize and clarify what is most significant in life. The world of fiction is a re-created world apart, a world of the possible or the probable, rather than the actual. It is governed by its own rules and internal completeness.

The writer of fiction, however, may deliberately choose not to deal with the world of our everyday experience at all. His selected manner of treatment may be symbolic or allegorical rather than realistic; the tone may be comic, or satiric, or ironic, rather than serious. The writer of fiction, in short, is free to exercise tremendous freedom in his choice of subject matter and the fictional elements so as to achieve any one of a number of desired effects. In every instance, the writer's success depends on how well he or she has succeeded in unifying the story and controlling its impact.

2

PLOT

Sometimes, in fact very often, beginners cannot easily draw the distinction between *story*[1] and *plot*, or they merely confuse these two aspects of fiction. On the following pages we'll attempt to distinguish between them in very simple terms.

"STORY" Versus PLOT

The American author and critic E. M. Forster suggested to distinguish between ***story*** and ***plot*** by juxtaposing them with each other. "We can define *story*", he writes, "as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A *plot* is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality"[2].

What Forster precisely means in his remark can easily be illustrated with the following – when we, for instance, say: "The King died, and then the Queen died", it's a story, but when we say: "The King died and then the Queen died of grief", it's already a plot. To put it all into a nut-shell, if the information about the Queen's death answers the question "And then"? – it's rendered in a story, and if it answers the question "Why"? – it's already rendered in a plot. That is the fundamental difference between these two aspects of fiction. The time-sequence in the plot is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. We can go the other way round and say: "The Queen died, no one

[1] The word "story" here is used to denote "events" or "happenings", not the genre.

[2] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel and Related Writings* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1927), pp. 130-131.

knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the King". This narrative suggests the similar plot, but with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development.

In the examples above, the moment that grief is established as the motive for the death of the Queen, two merely coincidental events become linked together as cause and effect. Consequently, what once was just a story – a direct, unedited rendering of facts – has been rearranged and translated into a potentially interesting and exciting plot.

Thus, the term ***p l o t*** **implies the controlling intelligence of an author, who has a mass of raw facts and incidents at his disposal and arranges them suggesting their causal relationship.** William Shakespeare, for instance, scarcely ever invented stories – he simply took the existing ones and rearranged them into wonderful plots, thus creating masterpieces of drama.

The Elements of Plot

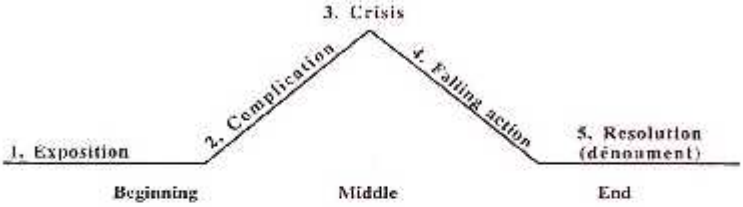
When we refer to the ***p l o t*** of a work of fiction, we are referring to the ***deliberately arranged sequence of interrelated events*** that constitute the basic narrative structure of a novel or a short story. Events of any kind, of course, inevitably involve people, and for this reason it is virtually impossible to discuss plot in isolation from character. ***Character and plot are,*** in fact, ***intimately and reciprocally related,*** especially in modern fiction. Generally speaking, ***a literary character is nothing but the determination of incident, and the incident is nothing but the illustration of character***. Consequently, ***the major function of plot can be defined as the representation of characters in action*** which, in its turn, can be internal and psychological as well as external and physical.

In order for a plot to begin, some kind of catalyst is necessary. It

will generate a sequence of events, provide direction to the plot, and focus the reader's attention. Most plots originate in some significant *conflict*. The conflict may be either *external*, when the *protagonist* (also referred to as the *hero* or the *focal character*) is pitted against some object outside himself, or *internal*, when the issue to be resolved is the one within the protagonist's psyche or personality. External conflict may reflect a basic opposition between man and nature (such as in Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea") or between man and society (as in Richard Wrigh's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man"). It may also take a form of an opposition between man and man (between *protagonist* and the *antagonist* - his *human adversary*), as for example in most detective fiction. Internal conflict, on the other hand, is confined to the protagonist. In this case, the opposition is between two or more elements within his own character.

Most plots, it should be noted, contain more than one conflict. It should be noted as well that the conflict of a story may exist prior to the formal initiation of the plot itself. Some conflicts, in fact, are never made explicit and must be inferred by the reader from what the characters say or do as the plot unfolds (as in most part of Ernest Hemingway's short stories). *Conflict*, then, **is the basic opposition, or tension, that sets the plot of a novel or short story in motion; it engages the reader, builds the suspense or mystery of the work, and arouses expectation for the events that are to follow.**

The plot of the traditional short story is often built on five distinct stages or elements, that can be diagramed as follows:



In some novels this five-stage structure is repeated in many of the individual chapters.

EXPOSITION: A work of fiction, as a rule, describes some significant events or several-year-long periods of the characters' lives; it hardly ever starts "at the very beginning", i.e. with the moment they are born. Thus, the readers always need some preliminary background information, which will help them to easily "penetrate" into the characters' problems at some particular stage of their lives. This preliminary information is generally provided in the beginning section of the plot, viz. *exposition.* The exposition sets the scene, dates the action, establishes situation, or merely moulds the profitable mood in the reader. It may also introduce characters and the conflict, or the potential for the conflict. The exposition may be accomplished in a single sentence or paragraph, or, in the case of some novel, occupy an entire chapter or more. Some plots require more exposition than others.

COMPLICATION: The complication (which is sometimes referred to as the *r i s i n g a c t i o n*) breaks the existing equilibrium and introduces the characters and the conflict (if they have not already been introduced by the exposition). It also activates the conflict through some events or details that help to develop it gradually and intensely.

CRISIS: The crisis (also referred to as the *c l i m a x*) is that moment at which the plot reaches its point of the greatest emotional

intensity; it is the turning point of the plot, directly precipitating its resolution.

FALLING ACTION: Once the crisis has been reached, the tension subsides and the plot moves towards its appointed conclusion.

RESOLUTION: The final section of the plot is its resolution; it records the outcome of the conflict and establishes some new equilibrium or stability. The resolution is also referred to as the *c o n c l u s i o n* or *d é n o u e m e n t*, the latter is a French word meaning "unknotting" or "untying".

Highly plotted works, such as detective novels and stories, which contain distinct beginnings, middles, and ends, usually follow such conventional plot development. In the case of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, for example, the *exposition* is usually presented by the faithful Dr. Watson:

"One summer night, a few months after my marriage, I was seated by my own hearth smoking a last pipe and nodding over a novel, for my day's work had been an exhausting one. My wife had already gone upstairs and the sound of the locking of the door some time before told me that the servants had also retired... I suddenly heard the clang of the bell... I opened the door. To my astonishment, it was Sherlock Holmes who stood upon my step.

'Ah, Watson', said he, 'I hoped that I might not be too late to catch you' ".

_ From "The Crooked Man" (1893)

The *complication* comes about almost at once. The crime is reported, and with Holmes's famous "come, Watson, the game is afoot", the period of *rising action* and *suspense* begins. Holmes, of course, is the *hero-protagonist*, the villain is the *antagonist*, for a time at least,

the conflict or will and intellect seem almost even. Once Holmes solves mystery, the *crisis* has been reached. The suspense and tension drop away, and the plot enters into the *falling action*, which is devoted to Holmes's detailed explanation of his method of detection. The *resolution* is short and belongs either to Watson or to Holmes:

"And that's the story of the Musgrave Ritual, Watson. They have the crown down at Hurlstone – though they had some legal brother, and a considerable sum to pay before they were allowed to retain it... Of the woman nothing was ever heard, and the probability is that she got away out of England..."

_ From "The Musgrave Ritual" (1893)

It should be noted, that all plots do not lend themselves to such neat and exact formulations. Even when they do, it is not unusual for critics and readers to disagree about, for example, where the major crisis, or turning point, of the narrative actually occurs (as far as it can, in fact, occur at any moment – at the beginning, near the middle or even at the very end of the story). Besides, as it generally happens in the most of James Joyce's "Dubliners", any of the plot elements (excluding climax!) can be omitted in favor of the plot. In much modern and contemporary fiction the plot consists of a "slice of life" into which we enter on the eve of crisis, and the readers are left to guess the beginning and the end and the precise nature of the conflict from what they are able to learn. This is the case in such famous Hemingway short stories as "Hills Like White Elephants" and "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place", in which the author chooses to eliminate not only the traditional beginning, but also the ending in order to focus our attention on a more limited moment of time, the middle, which takes the form of a single, self-contained episode. Conflict and complication in each case are neither

shown nor prepared for, but only revealed; the situation and the "story" are to be understood and completed through the active participation of the reader. Such stories are sometimes referred to as "plotless" in order to suggest that the author's emphasis and interests have been shifted elsewhere, most frequently to character or idea.

From what has been said above, we can conclude, that highly plotted works, developed through the "happenings" (or events), mostly contain all the plot elements (in other words, they have the *closed plot structure*), whereas the plotless ones (with the emphasis on the character's psychics or some idea) lack some or the most of the plot elements (in other words, they have the *open plot structure*).

Understanding the plot on a schematic level becomes even more difficult when dealing with bigger works, usually novels, that have more than one plot. Many of them contain several *subplots*, and some even develop a double plot, as in Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" where we are asked to follow the careers of two ladies – Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley.

Selectivity

When writing a short story, the author has to take into consideration the limited amount of plot that can be included in it. This is when the author's selectivity comes fully into play. In general, the shorter the narrative, the greater the degree of selectivity that will be required. But no matter how much space there is at the writer's disposal, it is not possible to tell the reader everything that "happened" to the characters (James Joyce once contemplated writing a short story recording a single day in the lives of Stephan Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. The result was the brilliant novel "Ulysses", which grew to 767 pages and even then covered only twenty-one and a half hours of their lives).

In constructing a plot, the author must decide how much emphasis to give individual episodes, how these episodes are to be related to one another, which of the incidents are most relevant to the story to be told, which of them should be expanded into dramatic scenes by using description, dialogue, and action and which should be given relatively less emphasis. All the selected episodes, major or minor, needn't necessarily advance the plot in precisely the same way, but each of them should contribute to the whole of the work of fiction.

The Ordering of Plot

The customary way of ordering the several episodes in a plot is to present them chronologically – one after another, according to their occurrence in time. This kind of plotting can be handled in a variety of ways:

- It can be tightly controlled, as in the conventional five-stage detective story by Arthur Conan Doyle, that has been sketched previously. This is also the method in many historical novels, in which the separate episodes are linked closely and evidently in a firm cause/effect relationship, to give the impression of historical verisimilitude – "the way it was". Each episode here logically unfolds from the preceding one, until the plot is driven towards its appointed resolution.
- Chronological plot structure can also be loose and episodic. That is the case in Henry Fielding's "Tom Jones" and Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn" where the plots are composed of series of separate and self-contained *episodes*, which are ordered chronologically, but without cause/effect relationship. The unifying element in such plots is only the protagonist, wandering into and out of series of adventures.
- A third type of chronologically arranged plot is encountered in

psychological novels, such as James Joyce's "Ulysses" and William Faulkner's "The Sound and Fury", in which the reader's attention is centered on the protagonist's unfolding state of mind as it wrestles with some internal conflict or problem. Here the interest is in the flow of "psychological time", which, in these two novels, is presented through a technique called *stream of consciousness*. Reflecting the twentieth-century interest in psychology, stream of consciousness attempts to give the illusion of "overhearing" the actual working of a human mind by recording the continuous flow of ideas, feelings, sensations, associations and perceptions as they register on the protagonist's consciousness. The technique is difficult to sustain; and its effectiveness has been much debated among literary critics, in part because of the burden that it imposes on the reader's patience and perceptiveness.

Finally, it is important to recognize that, even within plots which are mainly chronological, the temporal sequence is often deliberately broken and chronological parts rearranged for the sake of emphasis and effect. Some authors may begin in the middle (as it happens in the two Hemingway stories cited above); others may begin at the end and then, having intrigued and captured the reader, work backward to the beginning and then forward again to the middle of things (as it happens in many of Harold Pinter's plays). In still other cases, the chronology of the plot may shift backward and forward in time (as for example in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"). The most frequently used device for interrupting the flow of a chronologically ordered plot is the *flashback*, a summary or fully dramatized episode framed by the author in such a way as to make it clear that the very event took place at some earlier period of time. Flashbacks are often crucial to our understanding of the story, for they give us the information which helps

us to find the necessary key to the present events.

The main thing to remember about plot is that it is open to infinite variety. The only requirement that the writer of fiction must answer is that the plot be interesting.

Evaluating Plot

The customary test of a plot's effectiveness is its unity. Each episode presented and the place it occupies in the narrative structure of the work should logically (or psychologically) drive the reader to the resolution of the initial conflict. If the events and their resolution "violate" the reader's sense of possible or probable (if, in other words, the plot lacks plausibility), then the work of fiction is of low or no quality at all. This kind of violation is often associated with popular commercial fiction, in which a happy ending, for example, seems to be grafted on a plot for the sake of convenience, for everything that preceded pointed in the opposite direction. Although *chance* (events that occur without any cause or sufficient preparation) and *coincidence* (the accidental occurrence of two events that have a certain correspondence) do occur in real life, their use in literature becomes suspect in case they are merely artificial devices for arranging events. They can very easily destroy a plot's plausibility and unity. In some cases, though, they may appear very logical and helpful.

Analyzing Plot – TASKS

1. Read and tell the story "RUTHLESS"

2. Analyze the plot answering such questions as the following:

- What is the conflict on which the plot turns? Is it internal, external, or a combination of the two?
- Which of the heroes is the protagonist? *Who* or *what* is the antagonist?
- What are the chief episodes or incidents that make up the plot? Is its development strictly chronological, or is the chronology rearranged in some way?
- Describe the plot in terms of its exposition, complication, crisis, falling action and resolution.
- Is the plot unified? Do the individual episodes logically relate to one another?
- Is the plot plausible? What role do the chance and coincidence play?

RUTHLESS

Judson Webb was an American businessman. He had a comfortable flat in New York but in summer he used to leave the dusty city and go to the country. There he had a cottage, which consisted of three rooms, a bathroom and a kitchen. In one of the rooms there was a big closet. He liked his cottage very much, especially his closet where he kept his guns, fishing rods, wine and other things. It was his own closet and even his wife was not allowed to have a key, for Judson Webb loved his personal possessions and got very angry when anybody else touched them.

It was autumn now and Judson was packing his things for the winter. In a few minutes he would be driving back to civilization – to New York.

As he looked at the shelf on which the whiskey stood his face was serious. All the bottles were unopened except one. It was placed invitingly in front with a whiskey-glass by its side. The bottle was less than half full. As he took it from the shelf, Helen, his wife, spoke from the next room:

"I've packed everything. Hasn't Alec come to run the water off and get the keys?"

Alec lived nearby and acted as caretaker.

"He's at the lake taking the boats out of the water. He said he'd been back in half an hour!"

Helen came into the room carrying her suitcase. She stopped and looked in surprise as she saw the bottle in her husband's hand.

"Judson," she exclaimed, "you're not taking a drink at ten in the morning, are you?"

"No, my dear. I'm not taking anything out of this bottle. I am just putting something into it." He took two small white tablets out of his pocket and put them on the table. Then he opened the bottle.

"The person who broke into my closet last winter and stole my whiskey will probably try to do it again while we are away", he went on, "only this time he'll be very sorry if he comes."

Then one by one he dropped the tablets into the bottle and held it up to watch them dissolve. His wife looked at him in horror.

"What are they?" she asked him at last. "Will they make the man sick?"

"Not only sick. They will kill him," he answered with satisfaction.

He closed the bottle and put it back on the shelf near the little whiskey-glass. He was pleased. He said:

"Now, Mr. Thief, when you break in, drink as much as you wish..."

Helen's face was pale.

"Don't do it, Judson," she cried. "It's horrible, it's murder!"

"The law does not call it murder if I shoot a thief who is entering my house by force."

"Don't do it," she begged, "the law does not punish burglary by death, what right have you?"

"When it comes to protecting my property, I make my own laws."

He was now like a big dog, which was afraid that somebody would take away his bone. "But all they did was to steal a little whiskey," she said, "probably some boys. They did not do any real damage."

"It does not matter. If a man robs me of five dollars it is the same as if he took a hundred. A thief's a thief." She made one last effort:

"We won't be here till next spring. I shall worry all the time if I know that this bottle full of poison is here. Suppose something happens to us and nobody knows..."

He laughed at her earnestness. "We'll risk it," he said. "I've made my money by taking risks. If I die, it will all belong to you, and you can do as you please."

She knew it was useless to argue. He had always been ruthless in business. She went to the door with a sigh of defeat.

"I'll walk down the road and say good-bye at the farmhouse," she said quietly. She had made up her mind to tell the caretaker's wife about it. Someone had to know.

"All right, my dear," he smiled, "and don't worry about your poor little burglar. No one is going to be hurt unless he breaks in."

Helen went down the road and Judson started to close the closet door. He suddenly remembered that he had not packed his hunting boots drying outside on the heavy table in the garden. So, leaving the door open, he went to fetch them. But when he wanted to reach for his boots he suddenly slipped on a stone and his head struck the massive table as he fell.

Several minutes later he felt a strong arm round him and Alec's voice was saying: "It's all right, Mr. Webb, it was not a bad fall. Take this – it'll make you feel better."

A small whiskey-glass was pressed to his lips. Halfconscious, he drank.

3

CHARACTER

The relationship between plot and character is a vital and necessary one. Without character, there would be no plot, and, hence, no story. For most readers of fiction the primary attraction lies in the characters, in the fascinating collection of men and women whose experiences and adventures in life form the basis of plots of novels and stories in which they appear.

Part of the fascination with the characters of fiction is that we come to know them well (perhaps at times too well). In real life we come to know people for the most part only on the basis of externals – of what they say and what they do; the essential complexity of their inner lives can be inferred only after years of close acquaintance, if at all. Fiction, on the other hand, often provides us with direct and immediate access to that inner life – to the intellectual, emotional, and moral complexities of human personality that lie beneath the surface.

When we speak of characters in terms of the text interpretation, we are concerned essentially with three separate but closely connected activities: 1) with being able to establish the personalities of characters themselves and to identify their intellectual, emotional, and moral qualities; 2) with the techniques an author uses to create, develop, and present characters to the reader; 3) with whether the characters so presented are credible and convincing. In evaluating the success of characterization, the third issue is particularly crucial, for although the plot can carry a work of fiction to a point, it is a rare work whose final value and importance are not somehow intimately connected with just how convincingly the author has managed to portray the characters.

Naturally, such an evaluation can only take place within the context of the novel or short story as a whole, which inevitably links character to the other elements of fiction.

Characters in Fiction

The term c h a r a c t e r applies to any individual in a literary work. For purposes of analysis, characters in fiction are customarily described by their relationship to plot, by the degree of development they are given by the author, and by whether or not they undergo significant character change.

The central character of the plot, i.e. ***protagonist is*** usually easy enough to identify: he or she is ***the essential character without whom there would be no plot***. It is the protagonist's fate (the conflict or problem being wrestled with) on which the attention of the reader is focused. ***The character against whom the protagonist struggles or contends is the antagonist***. The terms *protagonist* and *antagonist* do not, however, imply a judgement about the moral worth of either, for many protagonists and antagonists (like their counterparts in real life) embody a complex mixture of both positive and negative qualities. For this reason they are more suitable terms then *hero, heroine,* or *villain* which connote a degree of moral absoluteness that major characters in great fictional works, as opposed, say, to popular melodrama, simply do not exhibit.

The antagonist can be somewhat more difficult to identify, especially if he is not a human being, as with marlin that challenges the courage and endurance of the old fisherman Santiago in Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea". In fact, as was intimated earlier, the

antagonist may not be living creature at all, but rather the hostile social or natural environment with which the protagonist is forced to contend, as with the war in the same Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain".

To describe the relative degree to which fictional characters are developed by their creators, E.M. Forster[3] distinguishes between what he calls *flat* and *round characters*. ***Flat characters are those who embody or represent a single trait, or idea, or at most a very limited number of such qualities.*** Flat characters are also referred to as *type characters*, as *one-dimentional characters*, or, when they are distorted to create humour, *as caricatures*. Fiction is full of such individuals, and they are almost always immediately recognizable – by their mannerisms, by the recurring words they utter. Those characters and their deeds are always predictable and never vary, for as Forster notes, they are not changed by circumstances.

Flat characters are usually *minor characters* in the novels and stories in which they appear, but not always so. For example, Montresor and Fortunato are the protagonist and antagonist, respectively, in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado". Yet they are both flat characters.

Round characters are just the opposite. They ***embody a number of qualities and traits, and are complex in nature.*** They are *multidimentional characters* of considerable intellectual and emotional depth who have the capacity of grow and change. *Major characters* in fiction are usually round characters, and it is with the very complexity of such characters that most of us become engrossed and fascinated. The terms *round* and *flat* do not automatically imply value judgements. Each kind of

[3] Forster, op. cit., p. 104.

character has its uses in literature. Even when they are minor characters, as they usually are, flat characters often prove to be convenient devices to draw out and help us to understand the personalities of characters who are more fully realized. Finally, round characters are not necessarily more alive or more convincing than flat ones.

Characters in fiction can also be distinguished on the basis of whether they demonstrate the capacity to develop or change as the result of their experiences. *Dynamic characters* exhibit a capacity to change; *static characters* do not. The degree and rate of character change varies widely, even among dynamic characters. In some works, the development is so subtle that it may go almost unnoticed; in others, it is sufficiently drastic and profound to cause a total reorganization of the character's personality or system of values. Change in character may come slowly and incrementally over many pages and chapters, or it may take place with a dramatic suddenness that surprises, and even overwhelms, the character. With characters who fully qualify as dynamic, such change can be expected to alter subsequent behavior in some significant way.

Dynamic characters include the protagonists in most novels, that by virtue of their very size and scope provide excellent vehicles for illustrating the process of change. So-called initiation novels, such as "David Copperfield", "Huckleberry Finn" and "The Great Gatsby", are examples.

Static characters leave the plot as they enter it, largely untouched by the events that have taken place. A protagonist may prove to be a static character as well, though it's a comparatively rare case. For the most part, an author creates static characters as *foils* to emphasize and set off by contrast the development taking place in others.

SMH/SM that makes another's good or bad qu more noticeable

In presenting and establishing character, an author has two basic methods or techniques at his disposal. One method is ***telling**, which **relies on exposition and direct commentary by the author.*** The other method is the indirect, dramatic method of ***showing**, which **allows the characters to reveal themselves directly through their dialogue and their actions.*** If in *telling* the guiding hand of the author is very much in evidence, *showing* involves the author's stepping aside, shifting much of the burden of character analysis to the reader, who is required to infer character on the basis of the evidence provided in the narrative.

Telling was the method preferred by many older fiction writers, whereas the modern writers give preference to showing. Nevertheless, telling and showing are not mutually exclusive. Most authors employ a combination of the two. Neither can we assert that any of the two methods is necessarily better or more fruitful than the other.

The choice of a method of characterization, as a rule, depends on a number of different circumstances. These include the author's temperament, the particular literary conventions of the period in which he or she is writing, the size and scope of the work, the degree of distance and objectivity the author wishes to establish between himself and the characters, the author's literary and philosophical beliefs about how a sense of reality can best be captured and conveyed to the reader, and, of course, the kind of story the author wishes to tell. All these factors heavily influence the technique of characterization: collectively they determine why and how the author does what he does. And all these factors are worthy of consideration in the course of literary analysis and text interpretation.

Direct methods of revealing character – *characterization by telling* – include the following methods:

1. CHARACTERIZATION THROUGH THE USE OF NAMES.

Names are often used to provide essential clues that aid in characterization. Some characters are given names that suggest their dominant or controlling traits as, for example, Edward Murdstone in Dickens' "David Copperfield". The man is a cold-hearted villain his name suggests. Other characters are given names that reinforce their physical appearance, much in the way that Ichabod Crane, the schoolmaster in Irving's "The legend of Sleeping Hollow", resembles his long-legged namesake. Names can also contain allusions that aid in characterization by means of association. The name "Ethan Brand" contains an allusion to the mark or brand of Cain, a legacy of guilt that the outcast Brand shares with his Biblical counterpart. Some names are used ironically. Such is the case with foolish Fortunato of Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado", who surely must rank with the most unfortunate of men. Such names may be referred to as *token* or *tell-tale* names, for they give information to the reader about their bearers.

2. CHARACTERIZATION THROUGH APPEARANCE.

Although in real life most of us are aware that appearances are often deceiving, in the world of fiction details of appearance (what a character wears and how he looks) often provide essential clues to character. Details of dress may offer clues to background, occupation, economic and social status, and perhaps, even a clue to the character's degree of self-respect. Details of physical appearance can help to identify a character's age and the general state of his physical and emotional health and well-being: whether the character is strong or weak, happy or sad, calm or agitated.

Appearance can be used in other ways as well, particularly with minor characters who are flat and static. By common agreement, certain physical attributes have become identified over a period of time with certain kinds of inner psychological states. For example, characters who are tall and thin are often associated with intellectual or aesthetic types who are withdrawn and introspective. Portly or fat characters, on the other hand, suggest an opposite kind of personality, one characterized by a degree of laziness, self-indulgence, and congeniality. Such convenient and economical shortcuts to characterization are perfectly permissible, of course, as long as they result in characters who are in their own way convincing.

But there are cases when the appearance of the character does not fit into the conventional stereotypes. This is when literature appeals to some other methods of characterization.

3. CHARACTERIZATION BY THE AUTHOR.

In the most customary form of telling, the author interrupts the narrative and reveals directly, through a series of editorial comments, the nature and personality of the characters, including the thoughts and feelings that enter and pass through the characters' minds. By so doing the author asserts and retains full control over characterization. The author not only directs our attention to a given character, but also tells us exactly what our attitude toward that character ought to be. Nothing is left to the reader's imagination. Unless the author is being ironic – and there is always that possibility – we can do little more than assent and allow our conception of character to be formed on the basis of what the author has told us.

By contrast, there are essentially two methods of indirect *characterization by showing*: characterization through dialogue (what characters say) and characterization through action (what characters do). Unlike the direct method of characterization already discussed,

showing involves the gradual rather than the immediate establishment of character. Such a process requires rather than excludes the active participation of the reader and in so doing calls upon what Forster called "intelligence and memory".

4. CHARACTERIZATION THROUGH DIALOGUE.

Real life is quite literally filled with talk. People are forever talking about themselves and between themselves, communicating bits and pieces of information. Not all of this information is important or even particularly interesting; much of it smacks of the kind of inconsequential small talk we expect at a party; it tells us relatively little about the personality of the speaker, except, perhaps, whether he or she is at ease in social situations. The best authors trim everything that is inconsequential. What remains is weightly and substantial and carries with it the force of the speaker's attitudes, values, and beliefs.

When a character addresses no one in particular, or when others are not present, his speech is called a *monologue*, although strictly speaking, monologues occur more frequently in drama than in fiction[4]. But it is a rare work of fiction whose author does not employ dialogue in some way to reveal, establish, and reinforce character.

The task of establishing character through dialogue is not a simple one. Some characters are careful and guarded in what they say; others are open and candid. The reader must be prepared to analyze the dialogue in a number of different ways: for (a) what is said, (b) the identity of the speaker, (c) the occasion, (d) the identity of the person or persons the speaker is addressing, (e) the quality of the exchange, and (f) the speaker's tone of voice, stress, dialect, and vocabulary.

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[4] A specialized form of monologue in fiction is the stream-of-consciousness technique, in which the author enters the mind or consciousness of his character and directly expresses unfolding thoughts and emotions.

5. CHARACTERIZATION THROUGH ACTION.

Character and action, as we have noted, are often regarded as two sides of the same coin. Behavior is a logical and necessary extension of psychology and personality. Inner reality can be measured through external event. ***What a given character is is revealed by what he does.*** In short, the single most important and definitive method of revealing character is through action.

To establish character on the basis of action, it is necessary to scrutinize the several events of the plot for what they seem to reveal about the characters, about their unconscious emotional and psychological states as well as about their conscious attitudes and values. Some actions, of course, are inherently more meaningful in this respect than the others. A gesture or a facial expression usually carries with it less significance than some larger and overt act. But usually this is not always the case. Very often it is the small and involuntary action, by very virtue of its spontaneous and unconscious quality, that tells us more about a character's inner life than a larger, premeditated act reflecting decision and choice. In either case, whether the action is large or small, conscious or unconscious, it is necessary to identify the common pattern of behavior of which each separate action is a part. One helpful way of doing so is on the basis of *motive*. If we are successful in finding a consistent pattern of motivation, then we are able to make some important discoveries about the character.

Evaluating Character

Although it is unreasonable to expect that the characters of fiction will necessarily be close approximations of the kind of people that we know – for part of the joy of fiction is having the opportunity to meet

new people – we can expect the author's creations to be convincing and credible on their own terms. If they are not, such characters can be counted as relative failures, for our interest in them will surely flag.

What we chiefly require in the behavior of fictional characters, however, is *consistency*. Characterization, as James Pickering suggests, "implies a kind of unspoken contract between author and reader; and the reader has the right to expect that a character, once established, will not behave in ways contrary to his or her nature".[5] If a character undergoes change, such change should be well motivated by events and consistent in some basic way with the nature of the character. Thus, in seeking to test for consistency, we most frequently ask ourselves whether the motive for a particular action or series of actions is adequate, justified, and probable. If the question can be answered in the affirmative, the principle of consistency has not been violated.

[5] James H. Pickering, Jeffrey D. Hoeper, *Literature* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1982), p. 27.

Analyzing Character - TASKS

1. *Read and tell the story " THE LADY'S MAID"*

2. *Analyze the characters answering the following questions:*

- Who is the protagonist of the work and who (or what) is the antagonist? Describe the major traits and qualities of each.
- What is the function of the work's minor characters?
- Identify the characters in terms of whether they are flat and round, dynamic or static.
- What methods does the author employ to establish and reveal the characters? Are the methods primarily of showing or of telling? Why is the dialogue turned into a monologue? How does it contribute to the method chosen?
- Try to restore the dialogue. Does it make any difference? If it does, what is the difference?
- Are the actions of the characters properly motivated and consistent?
- Are the characters of the work finally credible and interesting?

THE LADY'S MAID

... I hope I haven't disturbed you, madam. You weren't asleep – were you? But I've just given my lady her tea, and there was such a nice cup over, I thought, perhaps...

... Not at all, madam. I always make a cup of tea last thing. She drinks it in bed after her prayers to warm her up. I put the kettle on when she kneels down and I say to it, "Now you needn't be in too much of a hurry to say *your* prayers." But it's always boiling before my lady is half through. You see, madam, we know such a lot of people and they've all got to be prayed for – every one. My lady keeps a list of the names in a little red book. Oh dear! Whenever someone new has been to see us and my lady says afterwards, "Ellen, give me my little red book," I feel quite wild, I do. "There's another," I think, "keeping her out of her bed in all weathers." And she won't have a cushion, you know, madam; she kneels on the hard carpet. It fidgets me something dreadful to see her, knowing her as I do. I've tried to cheat her; I've spread out the eider-down. But the first time I did it – oh, she gave me such a look – holy it was, madam. "Did our Lord have an eider-down, Ellen?" she said. But – I was younger at that time – I felt inclined to say, "No, but our Lord wasn't your age, and He didn't know what it was to have your lumbago." Wicked – wasn't it? But she's *too* good, you know, madam. When I tucked her up just now and seen – saw her lying back, her hands outside and her head on the pillow – so pretty – I couldn't help thinking, "Now you look just like your dear mother when I laid her out!"

... Yes, madam, it was all left to me. Oh, she did look sweet. I did her hair, soft-like, round her forehead, all in dainty curls, and just to one side of her neck I put a bunch of most beautiful purple pansies. Those pansies made a picture of her, madam! I shall never forget them. I thought to-night, when I looked at my lady, "Now, if only the pansies was there no one could tell the difference."

... Only the last year, madam. Only after she'd got a little – well – feeble as you might say. Of course, she was never dangerous; she was the sweetest old lady. But how it took her was – she thought she'd lost something. She couldn't keep still, she couldn't settle. All day long she'd be up and down, up and down; you'd meet her everywhere – on the stairs, in the porch, making for the kitchen. And she'd look up at you, and she'd say – just like a child, "I've lost it; I've lost it. "Come along," I'd say, "come along and I'll lay out your patience for you." But she'd catch me by the hand – I was a favourite of her – and whisper, "Find it for me, Ellen. Find it for me." Sad, wasn't it?

... No, she never recovered, madam. She had a stroke at the end. Last words she ever said was – very slow, "Look in – the look in – " And then she was gone.

...No, madam. I can't say I noticed it. Perhaps some girls. But you see, it's like this, I've got nobody but my lady. My mother died of consumption when I was four, and I lived with my grandfather, who kept a hairdresser's shop. I used to spend all my time in the shop under a table dressing my doll's hair – copying the assistants, I suppose. They were ever so kind to me. Used to make me little wigs, all colours, the latest fashions and all. And there I'd sit all day, quiet as quiet – the customers never knew. Only now and again I'd take my peep from under the tablecloth.

...But one day I managed to get a pair of scissors and – would

you believe it, madam? – I cut off all my hair; snipped it all off in bits, like the little monkey I was. Grandfather was *furious*! He caught hold of tongs – I shall never forget it – grabbed me by the hand and shut my fingers in them. "That'll teach you!" he said. It was a fearful burn. I've got the mark of it to-day.

... Well, you see, madam, he'd taken such pride in my hair. He used to sit me up on the counter, before the customers came, and do it something beautiful – big, soft curls and waved over the top. I remember the assistants standing round, and me ever so solemn with the penny grandfather gave me to hold while it was being done... But he always took the penny back afterwards. Poor grandfather! Wild he was, at the fright I'd made of myself. But he frightened me that time. Do you know what I did, madam? I ran away. Yes, I did, round the corners, in and out, I don't know how far I didn't run. Oh, dear, I must have looked a sight, with my hand rolled up in my pinny and my hair sticking out. People must have laughed when they saw me...

... No, madam, grandfather never got over it. He couldn't bear the sight of me after. Couldn't eat his dinner, even, if he was there. So my aunt took me. She was a cripple, an upholstress. Tiny! She had to stand on the sofa when she wanted to cut out the backs. And it was helping her I met my lady...

... Not so very, madam. I was thirteen, turned. And I don't remember ever feeling – well – a child, as you might say. You see there was my uniform, and one thing and another. My lady put me into collars and cuffs from the first. Oh yes – once I did! That was – funny! It was like this. My lady had her two little nieces staying with her – we were at Sheldon at the time – and there was a fair on the common.

"Now, Ellen", she said, "I want you to take the two young ladies for a ride on the donkeys." Off we went; solemn little loves they were;

each had a hand. But when we came to the donkeys they were too shy to go on. So we stood and watched instead. Beautiful those donkeys were! They were the first I'd seen out of a cart – for pleasure, as you might say. They were a lovely silver-grey, with little red saddles and blue bridles and bells jing-a-jingling on their ears. And quite big girls – older than me, even – were riding them, ever so gay. Not at all common. I don't mean, madam, just enjoying themselves. And I don't know what it was, but the way the little feet went, and the eyes – so gentle – and soft ears – made me want to go on a donkey more than anything in the world!

... Of course, I couldn't. I had my young ladies. And what would I have looked like perched up there in my uniform? But all the rest of the day it was donkeys – donkeys on the brain with me. I felt I should have burst if I didn't tell someone; and who was there to tell? But when I went to bed – I was sleeping in Mrs. James's bedroom, our cook that was, at the time – as soon as the lights was out, there they were, my donkeys, jingling along, with their neat little feet and sad eyes... Well, madam, would you believe it, I waited for a long time and pretended to be asleep, and then suddenly I set up and called out as loud as I could, "*I do want to go on a donkey! I do want a donkey-ride*!" You see, I had to say it, and I thought they wouldn't laugh at me, if they knew I was only dreaming. Artful – wasn't it? Just what a silly child would think...

... No, madam, never now. Of course, I did think of it at one time. But it wasn't to be. He had a little flower-shop just down the road and across from where we was living. Funny, wasn't it? And me such a one for flowers. We were having a lot of company at the time and I was in and out of the shop more often than not, as the saying is. And Harry and I (his name was Harry) got to quarrelling about how things ought to be arranged – and that began it. Flowers! you wouldn't believe it, mad-

am, the flowers he used to bring me. He'd stop at nothing. It was lilies-of-the-valley more than once, and I'm not exaggerating! Well, of course, we were going to be married and live over the shop, and it was all going to be just so, and I was to have the window to arrange... Oh, how I've done that window of a Saturday! Not really, of course, madam, just dreaming, as you might say. I've done it for Christmas – motto in holly, and all – and I've had my Easter lilies with a gorgeous star all daffodils in the middle. I've hung – well, that's enough of that. The day came he was to call for me to choose the furniture. Shall I ever forget it? It was a Tuesday. My lady wasn't quite herself that afternoon. Not that she'd said anything, of course; she never does or will. But I knew by the way that she kept wrapping herself up and asking me if it was cold – and her little nose looked... pinched. I didn't like leaving her; I knew I'd be worrying all the time. At last I asked her if she'd rather I put it off. "Oh no, Ellen," she said, "you mustn't mind about me. You mustn't disappoint your young man." And so cheerful, you know, madam, never thinking about herself. It made me feel worse than ever. I began to wonder... then she dropped her handkerchief and began to stoop down to pick it up herself – a thing she never did. "Whatever are you doing!" I cried, running to stop her. "Well," she said, smiling, you know, madam, "I shall have to begin to practice." Oh, it was all I could do not to burst out crying. I went over to the dressing-table and made believe to rub up the silver, and I couldn't keep myself in, and I asked her if she'd rather I... didn't get married. "No, Ellen," she said – that was her voice, madam, like I'm giving you – "No, Ellen, *not for the wide world!*" But while she said it, madam – I was looking in her glass; of course, she didn't know I could see her – she put her little hand on her heart just like her dear mother used to, and lifted her eyes... Oh, madam.

When Harry came I had his letters all ready, and the ring and a ducky little brooch he'd given me – a silver bird it was, with a chain in its beak, and on the end of the chain a heart with a dagger. Quite the thing! I opened the door to him. I never gave him time for a word. "There you are," I said. "Take them all back." I said, "it's all over. I'm not going to marry you," I said. "I can't leave my lady." White! he turned as white as a woman. I had to slam the door, and there I stood, all of a tremble, till I knew he had gone. When I opened the door – believe me or not, madam – that man *was* gone! I ran out into the road just as I was, in my apron and my houseshoes, and there I stayed in the middle of the road... staring. People must have laughed if they saw me...

... Goodness gracious! – What's that? It's the clock striking! And here I've been keeping you awake. Oh, madam, you ought to have stopped me... Can I tuck in your feet? I always tuck in my lady's feet, every night, just the same. And she says, "Good night, Ellen. Sleep sound and wake early!" I don't know what I should do if she didn't say that, now.

...Oh dear, I sometimes think... whatever should I do if anything were to... But, there, thinking's no good to anyone – is it, madam? Thinking won't help. Not that I do it often. And if ever I do I pull myself up sharp. "Now then, Ellen. At it again – you silly girl! If you can't find anything better to do than to start thinking...!"

4

SETTING

Fiction can be defined as character in action at a certain time and place. The first two elements of this equation, *character* and *action*, have already been discussed. Now we turn our attention to ***s e t t i n g***, a term that, ***in its broadest sense, encompasses both the physical locale that frames the action and the time of the day or year, the climatic conditions, and the historical period during which the action takes place***. At its most basic, setting helps the reader visualize the action of the work. There are, however, many different kinds of setting in fiction and they function in a variety of ways.

Some settings are relatively unimportant. They serve as little more than incidental and decorative backdrops. Some others, on the other hand, are intimately and necessarily connected with the meaning and unity of the total work. It is with these that we must be chiefly concerned. The most important fictional settings are those that are "dramatic", for those are organic and essential parts of the work as a whole.

In order to understand the purpose and function of setting, the reader must pay particular attention to the descriptive passages in which the details of setting are introduced. Generally speaking, unless such passages are intended merely as local color, the greater the attention given to them, the greater their importance in the total work. In most short stories and in many novels, setting is established at or near the beginning of the work as a means of orienting the reader and framing the action that is to follow. Where the emphasis on setting in such passages is slight, as it is, for example, in most of Hemingway's short stories, or where the setting once established is then referred to again only

incidentally, if at all, one can assume that setting as such is subordinate to the author's other concerns and purposes. If, on the other hand, the emphasis on the setting in early passages is substantial, and if similar references to the setting recur periodically as a kind of echoing refrain, one can reasonably assume that the setting is designed to serve some larger function in relation to the work as a whole.

The quality of the language by which the author projects the setting provides another clue as to his or her intention. When that intention is to invest the setting with a photographic vividness that appeals essentially to the reader's eye, the details of the setting will be rendered through language that is concrete and denotative. On the other hand, the author may want us to "feel" rather than simply "see" the setting, as is the case when setting is to be used as a means of creating atmosphere. In that case the appeal will be to the reader's imagination and emotions through language that is connotative, emotionally heightened, and suggestive. Often the author will want the reader to both see and feel the setting and will use the resources of language to bring about both effects simultaneously.

The Functions of Setting

Setting in fiction is called on to perform a number of desired functions which are not mutually exclusive. In many works of fiction, setting can and does perform a number of different functions simultaneously. On the following pages we shall discuss some of these functions, that seem most prominent.

1. SETTING AS BACKGROUND FOR ACTION.

British author Elizabeth Bowen[6] once remarked: "Nothing can hap-

[6] Elizabeth Bowen, *Pictures and Conversations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 178.

pen nowhere". For this reason, fiction requires a setting or background of some kind, even if it only resembles the stage set of a daytime television soap opera. Sometimes this background is extensive and highly developed, as in many historical novels. In other cases, as in many modern short stories, setting is so slight that it can be dispensed with a single sentence or must be inferred altogether from dialogue and action. When we speak of setting as background, then, we have in mind a kind of setting that exists largely for its own sake, without any clear relationship to action or characters, or at best a relationship that is only tangential and slight.

To see whether setting acts as an essential element in the fiction, or whether it exists merely as a decorative and functionless background, we need to ask ourselves this: Could the work in question be set in another time and another place without doing it essential damage? If the answer is yes, then the setting can be said to serve as a decorative background whose function is largely irrelevant to the purpose of the work as a whole.

2. SETTING AS ANTAGONIST.

Often, the force of nature functions as a causal agent or antagonist, helping to establish conflict and to determine the outcome of events (as is the case in many Jack London's stories set in the severe climate of the north).

3. SETTING AS A MEANS OF CREATING APPROPRIATE ATMOSPHERE.

Many authors manipulate their settings as a means of arousing the reader's expectations and establishing an appropriate state of mind for events to come. No author is more adept in this respect than Edgar Allan Poe. In his "The Fall of the House of Usher" the room, which Poe skillfully makes us both see and feel, is as "inaccessible" and

"gloomy" as its owner and as such establishes an appropriate mood that anticipates and foreshadows our eventual meeting with Roderick himself.

4. SETTING AS A MEANS OF REVEALING CHARACTER.

Very often the way in which a character perceives the setting, and the way he or she reacts to it, will tell the reader more about the character and his state of mind than it will about the setting itself. This is particularly true of the works in which the author carefully controls the point of view.

An author can also clarify and reveal character by deliberately making setting a metaphoric or symbolic extension of character. For example, the house in which a character lives may be a perfect representation of its owner-occupant. In other words, the setting and the character may be mirror images of each other.

5. A NOTE ON SETTING IN TIME.

Setting can also be used as a means of reinforcing and clarifying the themes and ideas of a novel or short story. Such is, for instance, setting in time.

In most of the preceding items we have emphasized the physical aspects of setting at the expense of the temporal ones. But the time of day, time of year, or period in history at which a given event or series of events occurs can also contribute importantly to setting. If we think a moment, we shall discover that many of the most climactic moments of fiction, in fact, seem to take place at night, as if to suggest that it is after the rest of the world is asleep that we stand most ready to reveal the essential truths about ourselves to the world. In much the same way, certain seasons of the year lend themselves more to certain kinds of events than to others. Authors often use the cycle of the year and the

cycle of the day to establish settings *precisely because of the traditional association with the successive cycles and moods in human life:* spring-morning-youth (optimism); summer-noon-maturity (spiritual and physical strength); autumn|fall-evening-old age (pessimism, weakness); winter-night-death (the end of everything).

In support of our suggestion, we shall just quote from Hemingway: *" In the fall the war was always there"*.

Analyzing Setting - TASKS

1. *Read and tell the story " A ROSE FOR EMILY "*

2. *Analyze the setting answering the following:*

- What is the work's setting in space and time?
- How are the episodes ordered from the standpoint of chronology? How does this order help to reveal the character of the protagonist?
- How does the author go about establishing setting? Does he want the reader to see or feel the setting; or does he want the reader both to see and feel it?
- What is the function of the setting? Is it used to reveal, reinforce or influence character, plot or theme?
- Is the setting an appropriate one?

A ROSE FOR EMILY

I

When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant – a combined gardener and cook – had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and gasoline pumps – an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor – he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron – remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father

had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell. The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered—a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a

body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Satoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves."

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff... I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the – "

"See Colonel Sartoris, I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily – "

"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!" The Negro appeared. "Show these gentlemen out."

II

So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell. That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart – the one we believed would marry her – had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly ever saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to

call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man – a young man then – going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man – any man – could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

"But what will you have me do about it, madam?" he said.

"Why, send her word to stop it," the woman said. "Isn't there a law?"

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Judge Stevens said. "It's probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I'll speak to him about it."

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. "We really must do something about it, Judge. I'd be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we've got to do something." That night the Board of Aldermen met – three graybeards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.

"It's simple enough," he said. "Send her a word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don't..."

"Dammit, sir," Judge Stevens said, "will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his

shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all outbuildings. As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law

and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

III

She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows – sort of tragic and serene.

The town had just let the contracts for paving the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began to work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee – a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town. Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige* – without calling it *noblesse oblige*. They just said, "Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the

estate of old lady Wyatt, the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could..." This behind their hands; rustling of crated silk and satin behind jalousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough – even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. Like when she bought the rat poison, the arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily", and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eyesockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom –"

"I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is _"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is... arsenic? Yes, ma'am. But what you want –"

"I want arsenic."

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If

that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

IV

So the next day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked – he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club – that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily behind the jalousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men didn't want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister – Miss Emily's people were Episcopal – to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.

So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure

that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H.B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron – the streets had been finished some time since – was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid of the cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw the Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent to church on Sundays with a twenty-five cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow grayer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows – she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house – like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation – dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro. He talked to no one, probably not even

to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight.

V

The Negro met first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old man – some in their brushed Confederate uniforms – on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touched, divided from them now by narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie

everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded: beneath in the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotten beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.

5

POINT OF VIEW

A story must have a plot, character, and setting. It must also have a storyteller: *a narative voice*, real or implied, that presents the story to the reader. When we talk about narrative voice, we are talking about: ***point of view, the method of narration that determines the position, or angle of vision, from which the story is told.*** The nature of relationship between the narrator and the story, the teller and the tale, is always crucial to the art of fiction. It colors and shapes the way in which everything else is presented and perceived, including plot, character, and setting. Alter or change the point of view, and you alter and change the story.

The choice of point of view is the choice of who is to tell the story, who talks to the reader. It may be a narrator outside the work (***omniscient point of view***); a narrator inside the work, telling the story from a ***limited omniscient*** or ***first-person point of view***; or apparently no one (***dramatic point of view***). These four basic points of view, and their variations, involve at the extreme a choice between omniscient point of view and a dramatic point of view – a choice that involves, among other things, the distance that the author wishes to maintain between the reader and the story and the extent to which the author is willing to involve the reader in its interpretation. However, the question of point of view is as complex and complicated as it is important.

1. OMNISCIENT POINT OF VIEW.

With the ***omniscient point of view*** (sometimes also referred to as ***panoramic, shifting*** or ***multiple point of view***), an "all-knowing" narrator firmly imposes himself between the reader and the story, and retains full and complete control over the narrative. The omniscient narrator is not a character in the story and is not at all involved in the plot. From a vantage point outside the story, the narrator is free to tell us much or little, to dramatize or summarize, to interpret, speculate, philosophize, moralize or judge. He or she can tell us directly what the characters are like and why they behave as they do; record their words and conversations and dramatize their actions; or enter their minds to explore directly their innermost thoughts and feelings. When the omniscient narrator speaks to us in his own voice, there is a natural temptation to identify that voice with the author's. Sometimes such an identification is warranted; at other times it may not be, for the voice that tells the story and speaks to the reader, although it may seem to reflect the author's beliefs and values, is as much the author's creation as any of the characters in the story.

Omniscient narrator frequently occurs in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels (e.g. Fielding's "Tom Jones" and Thackeray's "Vanity Fair"). In "Vanity Fair" the narrator frankly assumes the role of puppeteer, "the Manager of the Performance", in a manner that may seem offensive and condescending to modern readers who are used to more realistic treatment:

"But my kind reader will please to remember that this story has "Vanity Fair" for a title, and that Vanity Fair is a very vain, wicked,

foolish place, full of all sorts of humbugs and falsenesses and pretensions. And while the moralist, who is holding forth on the cover (an accurate portrait of your humble servant), professes to wear neither gown nor bands, but only the very same long-eared livery in which his congregation is arrayed; yet, look you, one is bound to speak the truth as far as one knows it, whether one mounts a cap and bells or a shovel-hat; and a deal of disagreeable matter must come out in the course of such an undertaking."

_ From "Vanity Fair", William Makepeace Thackeray (1848)

Some critics draw a distinction between omniscient methods that permit their narrators to comment freely in their own voices, using "I" or the editorial "We" (***editorial omniscience***) and those that present the thoughts and actions of characters without such overt editorial intrusions (***neutral*** or ***impartial omniscience***). In the example cited Thackeray is clearly among the former.

Although there is an observable direction in modern literature away from using omniscience – in part because of an intellectual temperament that tends to distrust, and even deny, absolutes, certainties, and all-knowing attitudes – twentieth century authors continue to debate its value and to exploit its advantages. The choice of point of view is always a matter of appropriateness. The omniscient point of view, while inappropriate to some short stories, is certainly very appropriate to large, panoramic novels like Tolstoy's epic "War and Peace", in which this mode of narration is used to suggest the complexity and scope of Russian life itself.

The great advantage of the omniscient point of view, then, is the flexibility it gives its "all-knowing" narrator, who can direct the reader's attention and control the sources of information.

As we move away from omniscient telling in the direction of dra

matic showing, the narrator progressively surrenders these advantages, restricts the channels through which information can be transmitted to the reader; as a result, the reader is involved more and more directly in the task of interpretation.

2. LIMITED OMNISCIENT POINT OF VIEW.

With a ***limited omniscient*** (sometimes referred to as ***third-person*** or ***selective omniscient) point of view,*** the narrator limits his ability to penetrate the minds of characters by selecting a single character to act as the center of revelation. What the reader knows and sees of events is always restricted to what this focal character can know and see. This point of view differs significantly from the first-person point of view. At times the reader may be given direct access to this focal character's own "voice" and thoughts, insofar as these are reproduced through dialogue or presented dramatically through monologue, represented speech[7] or stream of consciousness. On all other occasions, the reader's access is indirect: it is the narrator's voice, somewhere on the sidelines, that tells the story and transmits the action, characterization, description, analysis, and other informing details upon which the reader's understanding and interpretation depend. Although the focal character is a visible presence within the story in a way that a fully omniscient narrator is not, at any moment that character is only as available and accessible to the reader as the narrator will permit.

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[7] The term "represented speech" is used to denote the representation of the actual words of the speaker's utterance or thoughts through the mouth of the writer (i.e. in the third-person), shifting tenses back (as in the reported speech), but retaining the peculiarities of the speaker's mode of expression (as in the direct speech), as well as the forms of the direct interrogation, exclamation and emotional repetition. E.g. *"Now he, drenched all over, had to stand there in the wind and wait for the bloody bustard to appear! Oh, God! Oh, God! Could it be true?"*

The character chosen as narrative center, and often referred to through the use of a third-person pronoun as *he* or *she*, may be the protagonist or may be some other major character. Often, however, the assignment is given to a minor character who functions in the role of an onlooker, watching and speculating from the periphery of the story and only minimally involved, if at all, in its action.

The advantages of the limited omniscient point of view are the tightness of focus and control that it provides and the intensity of treatment that it makes possible. These advantages explain why the limited omniscient point of view is so admirably suited to the short story, whose restricted scope can accommodate full omniscience only with great difficulty.

3. FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW.

The use of ***first-person point of view*** places still another restriction on the voice that tells the story. It involves the author's decision to limit his omniscience to what can be known by a single character. This character refers to himself or herself as "I" in the story and addresses the reader as "you", either explicitly or by implication.

As with limited omniscience, first-person narration is tightly controlled and limited in its access to information. ***The first-person narrator,*** while free to speculate, ***can only report information that falls within his own first-hand knowledge of the world or what he comes to learn second hand from others.***[8] First-person narratives, however, are necessarily subjective. The only thoughts and feelings that first-person narrators experience directly are their own. The

[8] Some authors get around this limitation by introducing letters, diaries, and journals into their narratives, thus giving the narrator (and the reader) direct and immediate access to the thoughts and feelings of the others. Bram Stocker's "Dracula" (1897) is a good example of the use of this device and as a result is sometimes referred to as an epistolary novel.

implications of this uncorrected subjectivity are crucially important, for it means that the reader can never expect to see characters and events as they actually are but only as they *appear* to be to "I" narrator. For this reason it is always necessary to pay particular attention to the character that fills that role – to his or her personality; built-in biases, values, and beliefs; and degree of awareness and perceptivity – in order to measure his reliability as a narrator.[9]

The first-person point of view has its advantages, however, not the least of which is the marvelous sense of immediacy, credibility, and psychological realism that autobiographical storytelling always carries with it.

First-person narrators are usually identified and differentiated on the basis of their degree of involvement with the events of the plot. They may be protagonists, like Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, who tell the stories of their own lives and adventures:

"You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody, but lied, one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly – Tom's Aunt Polly, she is – and Mary, and the Widow Douglas, is all told about in that book – which is mostly a true book; with some stretches, as I said before."

– From " The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn", Mark Twain (1885)

[9] It is also true, of course, that the *author's* biases can and often do colour the writing. In first-person point of view, these biases may be an intentional element in the plot. In other points of view, they may be unintentional, but equally important.

What Huck says and the confidential and intimate way in which he says it are of course deliberately calculated to engage the reader's sympathy and trust.

Protagonist-narrators may narrate events ostensibly as they take place, as in Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe", or in leisurely retrospect, with the narrator looking backward over a period of time on adventures that have already been concluded, as in James Joyce's "Araby".

Not all the protagonist-narrators tell their own stories. Sometimes the protagonist-narrator is charged with the responsibility of telling someone else's story, as Nick Carraway, the protagonist of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby", is charged with the responsibility of telling Jay Gatsby's.

The first-person narrator is frequently not the protagonist at all, but rather a character whose role in the plot is clearly secondary. He or she may, in fact, have almost no visible role in the plot and exist primarily as a convenient device for transmitting the narrative to the reader. The narrator of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" is a good example. Often such narrators have greater freedom then the protagonist-narrator. From their positions at the periphery of the action they may move among the other characters with relative ease, using them as sources to acquire helpful information. Minor characters serving as first-person narrators very often appear in the role of *confidant*, in whose wisdom or judgement (or presumed neutrality) others seem willing to confide.

In their relationship to the other characters and to the actions of the plot, first-person narrators may be either interested and involved or disinterested and detached. In either case, however, they are always subject to hidden biases no less than major ones, must be

(and prejudices in their telling of the story. Minor characters serving as narrators,)

watched constantly, especially if the reader has reason to suspect that they may be other than totally reliable guides to the truth of what they report.

4. STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

Stream of consciousness is the technique of characterization that renders from the inside the conscious or unconscious content of the human mind and the myriad of thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and associations that ebb and flow there. To the extent that an author chooses to locate the center of narrative authority exclusively inside the mind of a single character and to record external reality (including speech and action) only as it registers its impression upon that mind, ***stream of consciousness can also be used as a variation of first-person point of view.*** An excellent example is offered by opening passage of William Faulkner's "The Sound and Fury":

" Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. Then they went on, and I went along the fence. Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass".

_ From " The Sound and Fury", William Faulkner (1929)

The speaker is Benjy Compson, the thirty-three-year-old idiot whose point of view dominates the first section of Faulkner's novel. But the voice that addresses the reader is not Benjy's *speaking* voice. Rather we are made privy to his thought and sensation unfolding within

Benjy's infantile mind as he watches golfers through the fence.

Stream-of-consciousness used as first-person point of view is of course difficult to sustain over a long period of time because of the heavy demands it makes on the author and reader alike. Besides, it prevents the author from providing stage directions and clarifying comments and from asserting other forms of direct control over the development of the narrative. To avoid these difficulties, and still take full advantage of the possibilities of stream-of-consciousness narration, authors will typically utilize either the omniscient or limited omniscient point of view, which allows the necessary external control while making it possible to explore the content of the mind of one or more of the characters.

5. DRAMATIC POINT OF VIEW.

In the dramatic (or objective) ***point of view the story is told ostensibly by no one.*** The narrator, who to this point in our discussion has been visible, mediating authority standing between the reader and the work, now disappears completely and the story is allowed to present itself dramatically through action and dialogue. With the disappearance of the narrator, telling is replaced by showing; and the illusion is created that the reader is a direct and immediate witness to an unfolding drama.[10] Without a narrator to serve as guide, the reader is left largely on his own. There is no way of entering the minds of the characters; no evaluative comments are offered; the reader is not told directly how to respond, either intellectually or emotionally, to the events or the characters. The reader is permitted to view the work only in its externals.

[10] The words *ostensibly* and *illusion* are used advisedly here, for a narrative voice is almost always present somewhere in the story, if only to provide a few brief sentences of description or stage direction. In truth, narrator never totally disappears in a work of fiction, and the task of the critic is to know where and when he makes his presence felt.

from the outside. Although the author may supply certain descriptive details, particularly at the beginning of the work, the reader is called on to shoulder much of the responsibility for analysis and interpretation. He or she must deduce the circumstances of the action, past and present, and how and why the characters think and feel as they do on the basis of their overt behavior and conversation.

In its relation to the reader, dramatic point of view is often compared to the perspective from which we observe a film or a stage play. This analogy, although helpful, is by no means perfect. The writer of fiction, whose medium is language, selects and arranges language within a printed page and exercises far greater control than either the filmmaker or dramatist in focusing the reader's attention.

The dramatic point of view appeals to many modern and contemporary writers because of the impersonal and objective way it presents experience and because of the vivid sense of the actual that it creates.

Reliable and Unreliable Narrators

In analyzing the point of view of a given work of fiction, the reader is often forced to confront the question of the relative trustworthiness or reliability of the narrator. With omniscient point of view, this question is usually not a troublesome one. Much the same thing is true with the dramatic point of view. When, however, the narrative voice is positioned inside the work and belongs to a character who is directly involved in the action, the question of the narrator's reliability often becomes pertinent indeed.

Reliability, it should be noted, is not a matter of whether the reader happens to agree with the narrator's views or opinions. Often an unreliable narrator is a stylistic device used by the author to make

an obvious thematic point. For example, in Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man", Dave's equation of a gun with manliness underscores the false and corrupted values of the society in which he lives. In such a case, the author usually provides somewhere a clear indication of the narrator's unreliability.

The question of reliability becomes most complex with perfectly honest and well-intentioned narrators who make every effort to tell the truth. Sincerity and good intentions are one thing; reliability is another. Such narrators may prove to be unreliable because they are ignorant or because they commit an error in judgement by drawing the wrong conclusions from the facts available. They may also prove to be unreliable because they are victims of their own self-deception ("The Lady's Maid" by Katherine Mansfield is a good example). Whatever the cause, once the reader begins to suspect that the narrator is unreliable, a note of ambiguity or irony is introduced into the work.

To overcome this problem, the reader must first be able to identify the narrator and perceive his unreliability, and having done so the reader must be able to supply, on his own, an alternative perspective which will allow him to view the work correctly. Sometimes the necessary correction can be made by analyzing moral qualities of the narrator or by studying carefully what the other characters have to say about him or her.

Analyzing Point of View – TASKS

1. *Read and tell the story "THE BROKEN BOOT".*

2. *Analyze the point of view following the questions below:*

- What is the point of view; who talks to the reader? Is the point of view consistent throughout the work or does it shift in some way?
- Where does the narrator stand in the relation to the work?
- Is the chosen point of view an appropriate and effective one? How does the chosen point of view contribute to revealing the character and the theme?
- How would the work be different if told from another point of view?

THE BROKEN BOOT

The actor, Gilbert Caister, who had been "out" for six months, emerged from his east-coast seaside lodging about noon in the day, after the opening of "Shooting the Rapids", on tour, in which he was playing Dr Dominick in the last act. A salary of four pounds a week would not, he was conscious, remake his fortunes, but a certain jauntiness had returned to the gait and manner of one employed again at last.

Fixing his monocle, he stopped before a fishmonger's and, with a faint smile on his face, regarded a lobster. Ages since he had eaten a lobster! One could long for a lobster without paying, but the pleasure was not solid enough to detain him. He moved upstreet and stopped again, before a tailor's window. Together with the actual tweeds, in which he could so easily fancy himself refitted, he could see a reflection of himself, in the faded brown suit, wangled out of the production of "Marmaduke Mandeville" the year before the war. The sunlight in this damned town was very strong, very hard on seames and buttonwholes, on knees and elbows! Yet he received the ghost of aesthetic pleasure from the reflected elegance of a man long fed only twice a day, of an eyeglass well rimmed out from a sort brown eye, of a velour hat salved from the production of "Educating Simon" in 1912; and in front of the window he removed that hat, for under it was his new phenomenon, not yet quite evaluated, his *muche blanche*. Was it an asset, or the beginning of the end? It reclined backwards on the right side, conspicious in his dark hair, above that shadowy face always interesting to Gilbert Caister. They said it came from

atrophy of the – something nerve, an effect of the war, or of under-nourished tissue. Rather distinguished, perhaps, but - !

He walked on, and became conscious that he had passed a face he knew. Turning, he saw it also turn on a short and dapper figure – a face rosy, bright, round, with an air of chemhic knowledge, as of a getter up of amateur theatricals.

Bryce-Green, by George!

"Caister? It is! Haven't seen you since you left the old camp. Remember what sport we had over 'Gotta-Grampus'? By Jove! I am glad to see you. Doing anything with yourself? Come and have lunch with me."

Bryce-Green, the wealthy patron, the moving spirit of entertainment in that south-coast convalescent camp. And drawling slightly, Caister answered:

"I shall be delighted." But within him something did not drawl: "By God, you're going to have a feed, my boy!"

And – elegantly threadbare, roundabout and dapper – the two walked side by side.

"Know this place? Let's go in here! Phyllis, cocktails for my friend Mr Caister and myself, and caviar on biscuits. Mr Caister is playing here; you must go and see.

The girl who served the cocktails and the caviar looked up at Caister with interested blue eyes. Precious! – he had been "out" for six months!

"Nothing of a part," he drawled, "took it to fill a gap." And below his waistcoat the gap echoed: "Yes, and it'll take some filling."

"Bring your cocktail along, Caister, we'll go into the little further room, there'll be nobody there. What shall we have – a lobstah?"

And Caister murmured:"I love lobstahs."

"Very fine and large here. And how are you, Caister? So awfully glad to see you – only real actor we had."

"Thanks," said Caister, "I'm all right." And he thought: "He's a damned amateur, but a nice little man."

"Sit here. Waiter, bring us a good big lobstah and a salad; and then – er – a small fillet of beef with potatoes fried crisp, and a bottle of my special hock! Ah! and a rum omelette – plenty of rum and sugah. Twig?"

And Caister thought: "Thank God, I do."

They had sat down opposite each other at one of two small tables in the little recessed room.

"Luck!" said Bryce-Green.

"Luck!" replied Caister; and the cocktail trickling down him echoed: "Luck!"

"And what do you think of the state of the drama?"

Oh! ho! A question after his own heart, balancing his monocle by a sweetish smile on the opposite side of his mouth, Caister drawled his answer: "Quite too bally awful!"

"H'm! Yes," said Bryce-Green; "nobody with any genius, is there?"

And Caister thought: "Nobody with any money."

"Have you been playing anything great? You were so awfully good in 'Gotta-Grampus'!"

"Nothing particular. I've been – er – rather slack." And with their feel around his waist his trousers seemed to echo: "Slack!"

"Ah!" said Bryce-Green. "Here we are! Do you like claws?" Tha-a-nks. Anything!" to eat – until warned by the pressure of his waist against his trousers! What a feast! And what a flow of his own tongue suddenly released – on drama, music, art; mellow and

between lace and toecap. Quite! He knew it. A boot left him from the role of Bertie Carstairs, in "The Dupe", just before the war. Good boots. His only pair, except the boots of Dr Dominick, which he was nursing. And from the boot he looked back at Bryce-Green, sleek and concerned. A drop, black when it left his heart, suffused his eye behind the monocle; his smile curled bitterly; he said:

"Not at all, thanks! Why?"

"Oh, n-n-nothing. It just occurred to me." His eyes – but Caister had withdrawn the boot. Bryce-Green paid the bill and rose.

"Old chap, if you'll excuse me; engagement at half past two. So awf'ly glad to have seen you. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Caister. "Thanks."

He was alone. And, chin on hand, he stared through his monocle into empty coffee cup. Alone with his heart, his boot, his life to come..." And what have you been in lately, Mr Caister?" "Nothing very much lately. Of course I've played almost everything." "Quite so. Perhaps you'll leave your address; can't say anything definite, I'm afraid." "I – I should – er be willing to rehearse on approval; or – if I could the part?" "Thank you, afraid we haven't got as far as that." "No? Quite! Well, I shall hear from you, perhaps." And Caister could see his own eyes looking at the manager. God! What a look!... A topping life! A dog's life! Cadging – cadging – cadging for work! A life of draughty waiting, of concealed beggary, of terrible depression, of want of food!

The waiter came skating round as if he desired to clear. Must go! Two young women had come in and were sitting at the other table between him and the door. He saw them looking at him, and his sharpened senses caught the whisper:

"Sure – in the last act. Don't you see his *muche blanche*?"

"Oh! yes – of course! Isn't it – wasn't he – I"

Caister straightened his back; his smile crept out, he fixed his monocle. They had spotted his Dr Dominick!

"If you've quite finished, sir, may I clear?"

"Certainly. I'm going." He gathered himself and rose. The young women were gazing up. Elegant, with a faint smile, he passed them close, so that they could not see, managing – his broken boot.

6

THEME

Theme is one of those terms that mean very different things to different people. But ***when we speak of theme in connection with the critical analysis of a literary work, we mean the central idea or statement about life that unifies and controls the total work.*** By this definition, the theme is not the issue, or problem, or subject with which the work deals. Rather, it is the comment or statement the author makes about that subject as it necessarily and inevitably emerges from the interplay of the various elements of the work.

Theme in literature, whether it takes the form of a brief and meaningful insight or a comprehensive vision of life, ***is the author's way of communicating and sharing ideas, perceptions and feelings with his readers or, as is so often the case, of probing and exploring with them the puzzling question of human existence, most of which do not yield neat, tidy, and universally acceptable answers.*** Although we cannot, as critics, judge a work solely on the basis of the quality of the ideas presented, it is nevertheless true that one of the marks of a great work of literature – a work that we generally regard as a "classic" – is the significance of its theme; an author's ability to construct a work whose various elements work together to yield a significant theme is an important test of the quality of the author's mind and art.

Theme does not exist as an intellectual abstraction that an author superimposes on the work; ***it is organically and necessarily related to the work's total structure and texture – particularly to the interaction of character and incident.*** Thus, any

discussion of the theme must be prepared to take those other elements of the work into account. This is the point made by Flannery O'Connor, one of the America's most important twentieth-century writers of fiction, using one of her typically homely metaphors:

" People talk about the theme of a story as if the theme were like a string that a sack of chicken feed is tied with. They think that if you can pick out the theme, the way you pick the right thread in the chicken-feed sack, you can rip the story open and feed the chickens. But this is not the way meaning works in fiction... The meaning of a story has to be embodied in it, has to be made concrete in it. A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is."

– From "Writing Short Stories," Flannery O'Connor (1969)

Theme in fiction is discoverable to the extent that we are willing as critics to subject its various elements – its "every word" – to the process of analysis and interpretation.

Three more important points about theme in fiction need to be made. First of all, theme may be less prominent and less fully developed in the case of detective, gothic,[1] and adventure fiction, where the author wants primarily to entertain by producing mystifications, including chills and nightmare, or engaging the reader in a series of exciting, fast-moving incidents.

Second, it is entirely possible that intelligent readers and critics will differ, at times radically, on just what the theme of a given work

[1] "Gothic" is used to describe stories in which strange, mysterious adventures happen in dark and lonely places such as the ruins of a castle.

is. It is on the basis of such disagreements that the reputations of literary critics are frequently made, or discredited.

Third, and last, the theme of a given work need not be in accord with the reader's particular belief and values. We are under no obligation as readers or critics to accept a story's theme as it is presented to us, especially if we believe that it violates the truth of our own experience and that of others. But we must remember that although literature is full of ideas that may strike us, at least initially, as unpleasant, controversial, or simply wrong-headed, literary sophistication and plain common sense should warn us against dismissing them out of hand. At the very least, before rejecting an author's ideas, we owe it to the author and to ourselves to make certain that we understand why we reject them.

An author's ideas, as they are embodied in the theme, may be *unconvincing* on still other, more important, grounds. The theme may be unconvincing because the work itself fails to substantiate that theme, that is, because the interplay of the elements of the story as we experience and analyze them may not support or justify the theme that the author apparently wanted us to draw from it. Thus, if the reader can sometimes fail to do full justice to an author, an author may, on occasion, fail equally to do full justice to his reader.

Identifying Theme

When we attempt to identify the theme of a work of fiction we are attempting to formulate in our own words the statement about life or human experience that is made by the total work. The task is often far from easy because it necessarily involves us in the analysis of a number of elements in their relation to one another and to the work as a whole.

Some themes are topical in nature (that is, they involve ideas that are valid only in relation to a specific time and place, or to a specific set of circumstances); others are universal in their application. On some occasions the theme may be explicitly stated by one of the characters (who serves as a spokesman for the author) or by the author in the guise of an omniscient narrator. In many cases, however, theme is not stated but rather implied by the work's total rendering of experience; it is only gradually revealed through the treatment of character and incident and by the development of the story.

As different kinds of works will yield different themes in different ways, there is no one correct approach to identifying theme. The following suggestions and comments, however, may prove helpful:

1. It is important in considering theme to avoid confusing it with the work's subject or situation. Theme is the abstract, generalized statement or comment that the work makes about a concrete subject or situation. Thus, we must first establish the subject, and the works basic situation, in order to establish its theme. Once the subject and situation are identified, we can formulate a thematic statement about the work.

2. We must be as certain as we can that our statement of theme does the work full justice. There is always the danger of either understating the theme by failing to discover its total significance or of overstating and enlarging it beyond what the elements of the story can be shown to support. In Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" the subject is Gatsby himself, who believes that he can recapture the past by regaining Daisy Buchanan. The situation that we have watched unfolding through Nick Carraway's eyes, can lead us into the temptation of identifying the theme of the novel as 'the danger of founding one's idealism on false gods', as Gatsby does in his belief.

At one level it might seem true, but in the final two pages Fitzgerald deliberately gives his theme (and his book) a much wider implication by equating Gatsby's dream with the American continent, 'the last and greatest of all human dreams'. In this way, the theme of "the Great Gatsby" becomes Fitzgerald's statement about 'the failure of the American Dream itself'.

3. We defined theme as a 'statement about life that unifies and controls the total work'; thus, ***the test of any theme that we may propose is whether it is fully and completely supported by the work's other elements.*** If our statement of the theme leaves certain elements or details unexplained, or if those elements and details fail to confirm our statement, then unless the work itself is flawed, chances are we have been only partially successful in our identification.

4.The title that an author gives the work often suggests a particular focus or emphasis for the reader's attention. Frequently, the title of a work serves to identify the work's protagonist or essential character. They can also provide clues about theme. On the other hand, titles can be as deceptive or misleading in their relation to theme as to anything else. They may be clearly ironic (as the title of Charles Dickens' novel "Great Expectations").

4. As readers get more and more involved with literary study they want to know more about the life and personalities of the authors they read. Biographical and autobiographical explorations are helpful and illuminating – as are the personal statements an author makes about his or her life and work in prefaces, letters, journals, notebooks, and critical writings – and they can tell us a great deal about the author, the times in which he lived and wrote, and the relationship between the author and the work. They can also tell us something about the author's *intentions.* Although there is a great

and natural temptation to take the author at his word, conclusions about theme that are erected on the author's own statement need careful evaluation. Authors, especially when writing in retrospect, are often as fallible as the rest of us in explaining motive, and in some cases may be the least reliable of guides as to what their work finally means. D.H. Lawrence is certainly correct in this respect, when he reminds us in his studies in classic American Literature (1923). "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale".

Analyzing Theme – TASKS

1. *Read and tell the story "HONEYMOON".*

2. *Analyze the theme answering the following questions:*

- How does the title suggest a particular focus for identifying the theme?
- Is the theme of the work stated or implied according to the chosen point of view?
- What generalization or statement about life or human experience does the work make? Is the theme topical or universal?
- How does the setting and characters contribute to the formulation of the theme?

HONEYMOON

And when they came out of the lace shop there was their own driver and the cab they called their own cab waiting for them under a plane tree. What luck! Wasn't it luck? Fanny pressed her husband's arm. These things seemed always to be happening to them ever since they – came abroad. Didn't he think so too? But George stood on the pavement edge, lifted his stick, and gave a loud "Hi!" Fanny sometimes felt a little uncomfortable about the way George summoned cabs, but the driver didn't seem to mind, so it must have been all right. Fat, good-natured, and smiling, they stuffed away the little newspaper they were reading, whipped the cotton cover off the horse, and were ready to obey.

"I say," George said as he helped Fanny in, "suppose we go and have tea at the place where the lobsters grow. Would you like to?"

"Most awfully," said Fanny fervently, as she leaned back wondering why the way George put things made them sound so very nice.

"R-right, *bien*." He was beside her. *"Allay"*, he cried gaily, and off they went.

Off they went, spanking along lightly, under the green and gold shade of the plane trees, through the small streets that smelled of lemons and fresh coffee, past the fountain square where women, with water-pots lifted, stopped talking to gaze after them, round the corner past the cafe, with its pink and white umbrellas, green tables, and blue siphons, and so to the sea front. There a wind, light, warm, came flowing over the boundless sea. It touched George, and Fanny it

seemed to linger over while they gazed at the dazzling water. And George said, "Jolly, isn't it?" And Fanny, looking dreamy, said, as she said at least twenty times a day since they – came abroad: "Isn't it extraordinary to think that here we are quite alone, away from everybody, with nobody to tell us to go home, or to – to order us about except ourselves?"

George had long since given up answering "Extraordinary!" As a rule he merely kissed her. But now he caught hold of her hand, stuffed it into his pocket, pressed her fingers, and said, "I used to keep a white mouse in my pocket when I was a kid."

"Did you?" said Fanny, who was intensely interested in everything George had ever done. "Were you very fond of white mice?"

"Fairly," said George, without conviction. He was looking at something, bobbing out there beyond the bathing steps. Suddenly he almost jumped in his seat. "Fanny!" he cried. "There's a chap out there bathing. Do you see? I'd no idea people had begun. I've been missing it all these days." George glared at the reddened face, the reddened arm, as though he could not look away. "At any rate," he muttered, "wild horses won't keep me from going in tomorrow morning."

Fanny's heart sank. She had heard for years of the frightful dangers of the Mediterranean. It was an absolute death-trap. Beautiful, treacherous Mediterranean. There it lay curled before them, it's white, silky paws touching the stones and gone again... But she'd made up her mind long before she was married that never would she be the kind of woman who interfered with her husband's pleasures, so all she said was, airily, "I suppose one has to be very up in the currents, doesn't one?"

"Oh, I don't know," said George. "People talk an awful lot of rot about the danger."

But now they were passing a high wall on the land side, covered with flowering heliotrope, and Fanny's little nose lifted. "Oh, George," she breathed. "The smell! The most divine..."

"Topping villa," said George. "Look, you can see it through the palms."

"Isn't it rather large?" said Fanny, who somehow could not look at any villa except as a possible habitation for herself and George.

"Well, you'd need a crowd of people if you stayed there long," replied George. "Deadly, otherwise. I say, it is ripping. I wonder who it belongs to." And he prodded the driver in the back.

The lazy, smiling driver, who had no idea, replied, as he always did on these occasions, that it was the property of a wealthy Spanish family.

"Masses of Spaniards on this coast," commented George, leaning back again, and they were silent until, as they rounded a bend, the big, bone-white hotel-restaurant came into view. Before it there was a small terrace built up against the sea, planted with umbrella palms, set out with tables, and at their approach, from the terrace, from the hotel, waiters came running to receive, to welcome Fanny and George, to cut them off from any possible kind of escape.

"Outside?"

Oh, but of course they would sit outside. The sleek manager, who was marvelously like a fish in a frock-coat, skimmed forward.

"Dis way, sir. Dis way, sir. I have a very nice little table," he gasped. "Just the little table for you, sir, over in de corner. Dis way."

So George, looking most dreadfully bored, and Fanny, trying to look as though she'd spent years of life threading her way through strangers, followed after.

"Here you are, sir. Here you will be very nice," coaxed the man-

ager, taking the vase off the table, and putting it down again as if it were a fresh little bouquet out of the air. But George refused to sit down immediately. He saw through these fellows; he wasn't going to be done. These chaps were always out to rush you. So he put his hands in his pockets, and said to Fanny, very calmly, "This all right for you? Anywhere else you'd prefer? How about over there?" And he nodded to a table right over the other side.

What it was to be a man of the world! Fanny admired him deeply, but all she wanted to do was to sit down and look like everybody else.

"I – I like this," said she.

"Right," said George hastily, and he sat down almost before Fanny, and said quickly, "Tea for two and chocolate eclairs."

"Very good, sir," said the manager, and his mouth opened and shut as though he was ready for another dive under the water. "You will not 'ave toasts to start with? We 'ave very nice toasts, sir."

"No," said George shortly. "You don't want toast, do you, Fanny?"

"Oh no, thank you, George," said Fanny, praying the manager would go.

"Or perhaps de lady might like to look at de live lobsters in de tank while de tea is coming?" And he grimaced and smirked and flicked his serviette like a fin.

George's face grew stony. He said "No" again, and Fanny bent over the table, unbuttoning her gloves. When she looked up the man was gone. George took off his hat, tossed it on to a chair, and pressed back his hair.

"Thanks God," said he, "That chap's gone. These foreign fellows bore me stiff. The only way to get rid of them is simply to shut up as you saw I did. Thank heaven!" sighed George again, with so

in the air... Nothing was heard except a thin, faint voice, the memory of a voice singing something in Spanish. It wavered, beat on, touched the high notes, fell again, seemed to implore, to entreat, to beg for something, and then the tune changed, and it was resigned, it bowed down, it knew it was denied.

Almost before the end a little child gave a squeak of laughter, but everybody was smiling – except Fanny and George. Is life like this too? thought Fanny. There are people like this. There is suffering. And she looked at that gorgeous sea, lapping the land as though it loved it, and the sky, bright with the brightness before evening. Had she and George the right to be so happy? Wasn't it cruel? There must be something else in life which made all these things possible. What was it? She turned to George.

But George had been feeling differently from Fanny. The poor old boy's voice was funny in a way, but, God, how it made you realise what a terrific thing it was to be at the beginning of everything, as they were, he and Fanny! George, too, gazed at the bright, breathing water, and his lips opened as if he could drink it. How fine it was! There was nothing like the sea for making a chap feel fit. And there sat Fanny, his Fanny, leaning forward, breathing so gently.

"Fanny!" George called to her.

As she turned to him something in her soft, wondering look made George feel that for two pins he would jump over the table and carry her off.

"I say," said George rapidly, "let's go, shall we? Let's go back to the hotel. Come. Do, Fanny darling. Let's go now."

The band began to play. "Oh, God!" almost groaned George. "Let's go before the old codger begins squawking again." And a moment later they were gone.

7

SYMBOL AND ALLEGORY

Symbol

A symbol, according to Webster's Dictionary, is '*something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance... a visible sign of something invisible*'. Symbols, in this sense, are with us all the time, for there are few words or objects that do not evoke, at least in certain contexts, a wide range of associated meanings and feelings.

Most of our daily symbol-making and symbol-reading is unconscious and accidental, the inescapable product of our experience as human beings. ***In literature,*** however, ***symbols*** – *in the form of words, images, objects, settings, events and characters* – ***are often used deliberately to suggest and reinforce meaning, to provide enrichment by enlarging and clarifying the experience of the work, and to help to organize and unify the whole.***

The identification and understanding of literary symbols require a great deal from the reader. They demand an ability to detect when the emphasis an author places on certain elements within the work can be legitimately said to carry those elements to larger, symbolic levels, and when the author means to imply nothing beyond what is literally stated. They also make demands on the reader's maturity and sophistication. As William York Tindall observes, "What the reader gets from a symbol depends not only upon what the author has put into it but upon the reader's sensitivity and his consequent apprehension of what is there".[12]

[12] William York Tindall, *The Literary Symbol* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 12.

It is perfectly true, of course, that the meaning of any symbol is, by definition, indefinite and open-ended, and that a given symbol will evoke a slightly different response in different readers. Yet there is an acceptable range of possible readings for any symbol beyond which we must not stray. We are always limited in our interpretation of symbols by the total context of the work in which they occur and by the way in which the author has established and arranged its other elements; and we are not free to impose – from the outside – our own personal and idiosyncratic meanings simply because they appeal to us.

Types of Symbols

Symbols are often classified as being traditional, original, or private, depending on the source of the associations that provide their meanings.

1. TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS are those whose associations are common property of a society or a culture and are so widely recognized and accepted that they can be said to be almost universal. The symbolic associations that generally accompany the forest and the sea, the moon and the sun, night and day, the colours black, white and red, and the seasons of the year are examples of traditional symbols. They are so much a part of our culture, that we take their significance pretty much for granted. A special type of traditional symbol is the archetype, a term that derives from anthropologist James G. Frazer's famous study of myth and ritual *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) and the depth psychology of Carl Jung (Jung says that certain symbols are so deeply rooted in the repeated and shared experiences of our common ancestors – he refers to them as the "collective uncon-

sciousness", of the human race – as to evoke an immediate and strong, if unconscious, response in any reader). "Blackness" or "darkness" with its obvious overtones of mystery, evil and Satanism, is an example of archetypal symbol.

The presence of traditional symbols, it should be noted, does not mean that we are free to ignore the framing context of the work and impose from the outside one pattern or another as we see fit. Traditional symbols, for all their accompanying associations, must always be established by the context of the work and find their significance inside the work, not beyond it.

2. ORIGINAL SYMBOLS are those whose associations are neither immediate nor traditional; instead, they derive their meaning, largely if not exclusively, from the context of the work in which they are used.

3. PRIVATE SYMBOLS restrict the source of their meaning even more than original symbols. Just as all of us have certain objects in our lives that call to mind a variety of private associations (the way a family heirloom does), certain authors employ symbols that are the products of their own peculiar and idiosyncratic systems of philosophy or belief. Private symbols, by virtue of their source, are esoteric and largely unintelligible, except to those whom the author or the author's critics and interpreters have succeeded in educating.

valuable object belonging to generations

Allegory

Allegory is a technique for expanding the meaning of a literary work by having the characters, and sometimes the setting and the events, represent certain abstract ideas, qualities, or

concepts – usually moral, religious, or political in nature. Unlike symbolism[13], the abstractions of allegory are fixed and definite and tend to take the form of simple and specific ideas that, once identified, can be readily understood. As they remain constant, they also are easily remembered. In their purest form, works of allegory operate consistently and simultaneously at two separate but parallel levels of meaning: one located inside the work itself, at the concrete surface level of plot and character; the other, outside the work, at the level of the particular ideas or qualities to which these internal elements point. Such works function best when these two levels reinforce and complement each other: we read the work as narrative, but are also aware of the ideas that lie beyond the concrete representations.

As a fictional mode of presentation, allegory is out of favour among modern and contemporary authors and critics, for reasons that have to do with the nature of allegory itself.

First of all, the didacticism of allegory and its tendency towards a simplified, if not simplistic, view of life is suspect in a world where there is very little common agreement about truth and the validity of certain once universally respected ideas and ideals. Second, in allegory the characters, and ideas and ideals those characters embody, are presented as a given. The modern author, on the other hand, prefers to build characters and to develop and reveal their personalities gradually, in stages, throughout the course of the work. And, finally, twentieth-century critics tends to be intolerant of any literary work whose meaning is not totally contained within the structure of the work.

[13] Allegory and symbolism are not antithetical; in fact, allegory can be said to be a simplified form of symbolism. Allegory, like symbolism, functions as a type of metaphor, but in the case of allegory, the two halves of the metaphor are stated and definite.

Analyzing Symbol and Allegory – TASKS

1. Read and tell the story "AUGUST 2002: NIGHT MEETING"

2. Analyze it paying attention to the following questions:

- What symbols or patterns of symbolism (or allegory) are present in the work? Are the symbols traditional, original or private?
- What aspects of the work (e.g., theme, setting, plot, characterization) does the symbolism (allegory) serve to explain, clarify, or reinforce?
- Does the author's use of symbolism (allegory) seem contrived or forced in any way, or does it arise naturally out of the interplay of the story's major elements?

Tomás

AUGUST 2002: NIGHT MEETING

Before going on up into the blue hills, Tomás Gomez stopped for gasoline at the lonely station.

"Kind of alone out here, aren't you, Pop?" said Tomás.

The old man wiped off the windshield of the small truck. "Not bad."

"How do you like Mars, Pop?"

"Fine. Always something new. I made up my mind when I came here last year I wouldn't expect nothing, nor ask nothing, nor be surprised at nothing. We've got to forget Earth and how things were. We've got to look at what we're in here, and how *different* it is. I get a hell of a lot of fun out of just the weather here. It's *Martian* weather. Hot as hell daytimes, cold as hell nights. I get a big kick out of the different flowers and different rain. I came to Mars to retire and I wanted to retire in a place where everything is different. An old man needs to have things different. Young people don't want to talk to him, other old people bore hell out of him. So I thought the best thing for me is a place so different that all you got to do is open your eyes and you're entertained. I got this gas station. If business picks up too much, I'll move on back to some other old highway that's not too busy, where I can earn just enough to live on and still have time to feel the *different* things here."

"You've got the right idea, Pop," said Tomás, his brown hands idly on the wheel. He was feeling good. He had been working in one of the new colonies for ten days straight and now he had two days off and was on his way to a party.

"I'm not surprised at anything any more," said the old man. "I'm just looking. I'm just experiencing. If you can't take Mars for what she is, you might as well go back to Earth. Everything's crazy up here, the soil, the air, the canals, the natives (I never saw any yet, but I hear they're around), the clocks. Even my clock acts funny. Even *time* is crazy up here. Sometimes I feel I'm here all by myself, no one else on the whole damn planet. I'd take bets on it. Sometimes I feel about eight years old, my body squeezed up and everything else tall. Jesus, it's just the place for an old man. Keeps me alert and keeps me happy. You know what Mars is? It's like a thing I got for Christmas seventy years ago – don't know if you ever had one – they called them kaleidoscopes, bits of crystal and cloth and beads and pretty junk. You held it up to the sunlight and looked in through at it, and it took your breath away. All the patterns! Well, that's Mars. Enjoy it. Don't ask it to be nothing else but what it is. Jesus, you know that highway right there, built by the Martians, is over sixteen centuries old and still in good condition? That's one dollar and fifty cents, thanks and good night."

Tomás drove off down the ancient highway, laughing quietly.

It was a long road going into darkness and hills and he held to the wheel, now and again reaching into his lunch bucket and taking out a piece of candy. He had been driving steadily for an hour, with no other car on the road, no lights, just the road going under, the hum, the roar, and Mars out there, so quiet. Mars was always quiet, but quieter tonight than any other. The deserts and empty seas swung by him, and the mountains against the stars.

There was a smell of Time in the air tonight. He smiled and turned the fancy in his mind. There was a thought. What did Time smell like? Like dust and clocks and people. And if you wondered what Time

sounded like it sounded like water running in a dark cave and voices crying and dirt dropping down upon hollow box lids, and rain. And, going further, what did Time *look* like? Time looked like snow dropping silently into a black room or it looked like a silent film in an ancient theater, one hundred billion faces falling like those New Year balloons, down and down into nothing. That was how time smelled and looked and sounded. And tonight – Tomбs shoved a hand into the wind outside the truck – tonight you could almost *touch* Time.

He drove the truck between hills of Time. His neck prickled and he sat up, watching ahead.

He pulled into a little dead Martian town, stopped the engine, and let the silence come in around him. He sat, not breathing, looking out at the white buildings in the moonlight. Uninhabited for centuries. Perfect, faultless, in ruins, yes, but perfect, nevertheless.

He started the engine and drove on another mile or more before stopping again, climbing out, carrying his lunch bucket, and walking to a little promontory where he could look back at that dusty city. He opened his thermos and poured himself a cup of coffee. A night bird flew by. He felt very good, very much at peace.

Perhaps five minutes later there was a sound. Off the hills, where the ancient highway curved, there was a motion, a dim light, and then a murmur.

Tomбs turned slowly with the coffee cup in his hand.

And out of the hills came a strange thing.

It was a machine like a jade-green insect, a praying mantis, delicately rushing through the cold air, indistinct, countless green diamonds winking over its body, and red jewels that glittered with multifaceted eyes. Its six legs fell upon the ancient highway with the sounds of a sparse rain which dwindled away, and from the back of the ma-

chine a Martian with melted gold for eyes looked down at Tomás as if he were looking into a well.

Tomás raised his hand and thought Hello! automatically but did not move his lips, for this *was* a Martian. But Tomás had swum in blue rivers on Earth, with strangers passing on the road, and eaten in strange houses with strange people, and his weapon had always been his smile. He did not carry a gun. And he did not feel the need for one now, even with the little fear that gathered about his heart at this moment.

The Martian's hands were empty too. For a moment they looked across the cool air at each other.

It was Tomás who moved first.

"Hello!" he called.

"Hello!" called the Martian in his own language.

They did not understand each other.

"Did you say hello?" they both asked.

"What did you say?" they said, each in different tongue.

They scowled.

"Who are you?" said Tomás in English.

"What are you doing here?" In Martian; the stranger's lips moved.

"Where are you going?" they said, and looked bewildered.

"I'm Tomás Gomez."

"I'm Muhe Ca."

Neither understood, but they tapped their chests with the words and then it became clear.

And then the Martian laughed. "Wait!" Tomás felt his head touched, but no hand had touched him. "There!" said the Martian in English. "That is better!"

"You learned my language, so quick!"

"Nothing at all!"

They looked embarrassed with a new silence, at the steaming coffee he had in one hand.

"Something different?" said the Martian, eyeing him and the coffee, referring to them both, perhaps.

"May I offer you a drink?" said Tomбs.

"Please."

The Martian slid down from his machine.

A second cup was produced and filled, steaming. Tomбs held it out.

Their hands met and – like mist – fell through each other.

"Jesus Christ!" cried Tomбs, and dropped the cup.

"Name of the Gods!" said the Martian in his own tongue.

"Did you see what happened?" they both whispered.

They were very cold and terrified.

The Martian bent to touch the cup but could not touch it.

"Jesus!" said Tomбs.

"Indeed." The Martian tried again and again to get hold of the cup, but could not. He stood up and thought for a moment, then took a knife from his belt. "Hey!" cried Tomбs. "You misunderstand, catch!" said the Martian, and tossed it. Tomбs cupped his hands. The knife fell through his flesh. It hit the ground. Tomбs bent to pick it up but could not touch it, and he recoiled, shivering.

Now he looked at the Martian against the sky.

"The stars!" he said.

"The stars!" said the Martian, looking, in turn, at Tomбs.

The stars were white and sharp beyond the flesh of the Martian, and they were sewn into his flesh like scintillas swallowed into the thin, phosphorescent membrane of a gelatinous sea fish. You could see stars flickering like violet eyes in the Martian's stomach and chest, and through his wrists, like jewelry.

"I can see through you!" said Tomás.

"And I through you!" said the Martian, stepping back.

Tomás felt of his own body and, feeling the warmth, was reassured. *I* am real, he thought.

The Martian touched his own nose and lips. "I have flesh", he said, half aloud. "I am alive."

Tomás stared at the stranger. "And if *I* am real, then you must be dead."

"No, you!"

"A ghost!"

"A phantom!"

They pointed at each other, with starlight burning in their limbs like daggers and icicles and fireflies, and then fell to judging their limbs again, each finding himself intact, hot, excited, stunned, awed, and the other, ah yes, that other over there, unreal, a ghostly prism flashing the accumulated light of distant worlds.

I'm drunk, thought Tomás, I won't tell anyone of this tomorrow, no, no.

They stood there on the ancient highway, neither of them moving.

"Where are you from?" asked the Martian at last.

"Earth."

"What is that?"

"There." Tomás nodded to the sky.

"When?"

"We landed over a year ago, remember?"

"No."

"And all of you were dead, all but a few. You're rare, don't you *know* that?"

"That's not true."

"Yes. Dead. I saw the bodies. Black, in the rooms, in the houses, dead. Thousands of them."

"That's ridiculous. We're *alive!*"

"Mister, you're invaded, only you don't know it. You must have escaped."

"I haven't escaped: there was nothing to escape. What do you mean? I'm on my way to a festival now at the canal, near the Eniall Mountains. I was there last night. Don't you see the city there?" The Martian pointed.

Tomбs looked and saw the ruins. "Why, that city's been dead thousands of years."

The Martian laughed. "Dead. I slept there yesterday!"

"And I was in it a week ago and the week before that, and I just drove through it now, and it's a heap. See the broken pillars?"

"Broken? Why, I see them perfectly. The moonlight helps. And the pillars are upright."

"There is dust in the streets," said Tomбs.

"The streets are clean!"

"The canals are empty right there."

"The canals are full of lavender wine!"

"It's dead."

"It's alive!" protested the Martian, laughing more now. "Oh, you're quite wrong. See all the carnival lights? There are beautiful boats as slim as women, beautiful women as slim as boats, women the colour of sand, women with fire flowers in their hands. I can see them, small, running in the streets there. That's where I'm going now, to the festival; we'll float on the waters all night long; we'll sing, we'll drink, we'll make love. Can't you *see* it?"

"Mister, that city is dead as a dried lizard. Ask any of your party.

Me, I'm on my way to Green City tonight; that's the new colony we just raised over near Illinois Highway. You're mixed up. We brought in a million board feet of Oregon lumber and a couple dozen tons of good steel nails and hammered together two of the nicest little villages you ever saw. Tonight we're warming one of them. A couple rockets are coming in from Earth, bringing our wives and girl friends. There'll be barn dances and whisky—"

The Martian was now disquieted. "You say it is over *that* way?"

"There are the rockets." Tomás walked him to the edge of the hill and pointed down. "See?"

"No."

"Damn it, there they *are!* Those long silver things."

"No."

Now Tomás laughed. "You're blind!"

"I see very well. You are the one who does not see."

"But you see the new *town*, don't you?"

"I see nothing but an ocean, and water at low tide."

"Mister, that water's been evaporated for forty centuries."

"Ah, now, now, that *is* enough."

"It's true, I tell you."

The Martian grew very serious. "Tell me again. You do not see the city the way I describe it? The pillars very white, the boats very slender, the festival lights – oh, I see them *clearly!* And listen! I can hear them singing. It's no space away at all."

Tomás listened and shook his head. "No."

"And I, on the other hand," said the Martian, "cannot see what you describe. Well."

Again they were cold. An ice was in their flesh.

"Can it be . . .?"

"What?"

"You say 'from the sky'?"

"Earth."

"Earth, a name, nothing," said the Martian. "*But* . . . as I came up the pass an hour ago . . ." He touched the back of his neck. "I felt . . ."

"Cold?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"Cold again. Oddly. There was a thing to the light, to the hills, the road," said the Martian. "I felt the strangeness, the road, the light, and for a moment I felt as if I were the last man alive on this world . . ."

"So did I!" said Tomбs, and it was like talking to an old and dear friend, confiding, growing warm with the topic.

The Martian closed his eyes and opened them again. "This can only mean one thing. It has to do with Time. Yes. You are a figment of the Past!"

"No, you are from the Past," said the Earth Man, having had time to think of it now.

"You are so *certain*. How can you prove who is from the Past, who from the Future? What year is it?"

"Two thousand and one!"

"What does that mean to *me?*"

Tomбs considered and shrugged. "Nothing."

"It is as if I told you that it is the year 4462853 S.E.C. It is nothing and more than nothing! Where is the clock to show us how the stars stand?"

"But the ruins prove it! They prove that *I* am the Future, *I* am alive, *you* are dead!"

"Everything in me denies this. My heart beats, my stomach hungers, my mouth thirsts. No, no, not dead, but alive, either of us. More alive than anything else. Caught between is more like it. Two strangers passing in the night, that is it. Two strangers passing. Ruins, you say?"

"Yes. You're afraid?"

"Who wants to see the Future, who *ever* does? A man can face the Past, but to think – the pillars *crumbled*, you say And the sea empty, and the canals dry, and the maidens dead, and the flowers withered?" The Martian was silent, but then he looked on ahead. "But there they *are*. I *see* them. Isn't that enough for me? They wait for me now, no matter *what* you say."

And for Tomбs the rockets, far away, waiting for *him*, and the town and the women from Earth. "We can never agree," he said.

"Let us agree to disagree," said Martian. "What does it matter who is Past or Future, if we are both alive, for what follows will follow, tomorrow or in ten thousand years. How do you know that those temples are not the temples of your own civilization one hundred centuries from now, tumbled and broken? You do not know. Then don't ask. But the night is very short. There go the festival fires in the sky, and the birds."

Tomбs put out his hand. The Martian did likewise in imitation.

Their hands did not touch; they melted through each other.

"Will we meet again?"

"Who knows? Perhaps some other night."

"I'd like to go with you to that festival."

"And I wish I might come to your new town, to see this ship you speak of, to see these men, to hear all that has happened."

"Good-by," said Tomбs.

"Good night."

The Martian rode his green metal vehicle quietly away into the hills. The Earth Man turned his truck and drove it silently in the opposite direction.

"Good lord, what a dream that was," sighed Tombs, his hands on the wheel, thinking of the rockets, the women, the raw whisky, the Virginia reels, the party.

How strange a vision was that, thought the Martian, rushing on, thinking of the festival, the canals, the boats, the women with golden eyes, and the songs.

The night was dark. The moons had gone down. Starlight twinkled on the empty highway where now there was not a sound, no car, no person, nothing. And it remained that way all the rest of the cool dark night.

8

TONE AND STYLE

Tone

All of us are familiar with the term ***tone*** as it is used to characterize the special qualities of accent, inflections, and duration in a speaker's voice. From early childhood on we learn to identify and respond to these elements of speech. For example, a mother can tell her child to "Come here!" in a manner that is angry, threatening, concerned, amused, sympathetic, or affectionate, simply by altering her tone of voice. In each case, the mother's meaning is the same – she wants her child to come. However, the relationship she creates with her auditor (the child) will differ dramatically according to her tone. ***Tone***, then, ***is a means of creating a relationship or conveying an attitude.*** The particular qualities of a speaking voice are unavailable to a writer in creating tone, but to a certain extent rhythm and punctuation can substitute for a speaker's accent and inflection, while word order and word choice can influence tone as easily in prose as in speech.

Just as the tone of the mother's voice communicates her attitude of anger or concern, so tone in fiction is frequently a guide to an author's attitude towards the subject or audience. For example, one recognizes at once the friendly, informal, and folksy tone of Huck Finn's introduction to his advantures:

"You don't know about me, without you have read a book by name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer', but that ain't no matter."

Huck wants to make us his friends, so he writes just as he would speak, without striving for grammatical perfection. As soon as he realizes that we might be put off by the sense of self-importance in his allusion to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* he reassures us that it "ain't no matter" if we have failed to read the book. The tone and content of the sentence combine to indicate that Huck wants us to like him and that he wants to like us.

In contrast, in Mark Twain's preface to *Huckleberry Finn* his tone is threatening at the same time that it is ironic and humorous:

"NOTICE

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR
Per G.G., CHIEF OF ORDNANCE"

Why should Mark Twain make threats that are obviously exaggerated and impossible to carry out? Why, indeed, except to attract our attention to the novel's motive, moral, and plot. Thus, although Huck's tone has accurately reflected his attitude towards the reader, it is doubtful that the same is true of Mark Twain's "Notice." His tone is ironic and he means just the opposite of what he says.

Irony

The three types of irony that occur most frequently in literature are ***verbal irony*** (in which there is a contrast between what a speaker literally says and what he or she means); ***irony of situation*** (in

which an event or situation turns out to be the reverse of what is expected or appropriate); and ***dramatic irony*** (in which the state of affairs known to the reader or the audience is the reverse of what its participants suppose it to be).

Verbal irony is easily enough recognized in speech because of the intonation of the speaker's voice. In literature it becomes obvious due to the context. For example, when we read: "It must be *delightful* to find oneself in a foreign country without a penny in one's pocket," we easily guess that the italicized word (delightful) bears a meaning quite the opposite to its primary one (not delightful, unpleasant).

Irony of situation, on the other hand, results from the careful manipulation of plot, point of view, setting and atmosphere.

The dramatic irony, like irony of situation, depends on the use of plot, character and point of view. An omniscient narrator, for example, will sometimes reveal information to the reader that his characters do not yet know; this allows the narrator (and the reader) to judge the subsequent actions of those characters and to anticipate the likely outcome of events. Dramatic irony can also be established by means of characters whose innocence and naiveté cause them to misperceive or misinterpret events whose significance is perfectly clear to the reader.

AS critics Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg note, there are "In any example of narrative art... broadly speaking, three points of view – those of the characters, the narrator, and the audience." When any of the three "perceives more – or less – than another, irony must be either actually or potentially present."[14]

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[14] Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 240.

The distinctive quality of literature that sets it apart from all other forms of artistic expression is its reliance on language. Words are the writer's means of recovering and objectifying experience; and they are his or her means of presenting, shaping, and controlling subject matter. Language is also the means by which the writer controls and influences the reader.

When we talk about an author's words and the characteristic ways he uses the resources of language to achieve certain effects, we are talking about style.

In its most general sense, style consists of ***diction*** (the individual words an author chooses) and ***syntax*** (the arrangement of those words into phrases, clauses, and sentences), as well as such devices as rhythm and sound, allusion, ambiguity, irony, paradox, and figurative language. The latter elements of style are crucial to the art of poetry; and they are discussed more fully under that heading. We will touch on them here in order to establish that the language of fiction, no less than the language of poetry and drama, is distinguished by the author's ability to make full and effective use of the language at his or her command.

Each writer's style is unique. "Every writer," British critic David Lodge notes, "displays his own unique 'signature' in the way he uses language, something which all his works, however diverse, have in common and which distinguishes them from the work of any other writer."[15] By examining the style of a work of fiction we are seeking to isolate and identify those distinctive traits that comprise the

[15] David Lodge. *Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 50.

author's "signature". Besides, we are interested in understanding the effects produced by particular stylistic devices and techniques and how these effects influence our response to the work's other elements – particularly character, incident, setting, and theme – and to the work as a whole. We are also attempting to arrive at a judgement based on a consideration of just how effectively the author has managed to integrate form and content.

Elements of Style

DICTION. The analysis of diction includes the following considerations: the *denotative* (or dictionary) meaning of words, as opposed to their *connotative* meaning (the ideas associated with or suggested by them); their degree of concreteness or abstractness; their degree of allusiveness; the *part of speech* they represent; their length and construction; the *level of usage* they reflect (standard or nonstandard: formal, informal, or colloquial); the *imagery* (details of sensory experience) they contain; the *figurative devices* (simile, metaphor, personification, etc.) they embody; their *rhythm* and *sound patterns* (alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia). In studying diction, we also need to pay close attention to the use of *repetition:* the way key words recur in given passage or series of passages in such a way as to call special attention to themselves.

SYNTAX. When we examine style at the level of syntax, we are attempting to analyze the ways the author arranges words into phrases, clauses, and finally whole sentences to achieve particular effects. Although syntax is determined partly by the lexical content (or meaning) of the words and partly by the basic grammatical structure of the language, every writer enjoys considerable freedom to shape and

control the syntactic elements of style. In looking at an author's syntax we want to know how the words have been arranged and particularly how they deviate from the normal and expected.

Although one can study syntactic units smaller than the sentence (e.g. phrases) or larger than it (e.g. the whole text), syntax is probably most easily approached and analyzed in sentences. They can be examined in terms of their length – whether they are short, spare, and economical or long and involved; in terms of their form – whether they are simple, compound, or complex; and in terms of their construction – whether they are *loose* (sentences that follow the normal subject-verb-object pattern, stating their main idea near the beginning in the form of an independent clause), *periodic* (sentences that deliberately withhold or suspend the completion of the main idea until the end of the sentence), or *balanced* (sentences in which two similar or antithetical ideas are balanced).

Each type of sentence will have a slightly different effect on the reader. Long, complicated sentences slow down and retard the pace of a narrative, whereas short, simple sentences hasten it. Loose sentences, as they follow the normal, predictable patterns of speech, tend to appear more natural and less contrived than either periodic or balanced sentences, particularly when they are used in the creation of dialogue. Moreover, the deliberate arrangement of words within individual sentences or groups of sentences can result in patterns of rhythm and sound (pleasant or unpleasant) that establish or reinforce feeling and emotion. Although an author will usually vary the kinds of sentences used in order to avoid monotony (unless monotony is intended), certain syntactic patterns will dominate and become characteristic of that author's style.

Here we will suggest the stylistic analysis of passages from two short stories. It will give you the idea of how stylistic analysis could be carried out. Afterwards you will, of course, have to analyze the whole of these stories.

The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.

"And we could have all this," she said. "And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible."

"What did you say?"

"I said we could have everything."

"We can have everything."

"No, we can't."

"We can have the whole world."

"No, we can't."

"We can go everywhere."

"No, we can't. It isn't ours any more."

"It's ours."

"No, it isn't. And once they take it away, you never get it back."

"But they haven't taken it away."

"We'll wait and see."

"Come on back in the shade," he said. "You mustn't feel that way."

"I don't feel any way," the girl said. "I just know things."

- From "Hills Like White Elephants," Ernest Hemingway.

The passage perfectly illustrates the famous Hemingway style – economical and terse. It is characterized by short, simple sentences and active verbs; by an informal, commonplace vocabulary of short, denotative words; the absence of unnecessary adjectives and adverbs; and by a concentration of particular concrete images that record the surface level of experience. Descriptive details of setting are sparse though important – in this case they juxtapose the sensuous fertility across the river with the hot, sterile foreground where the conversation between the two characters takes place.

Such details, however, are clearly subordinate to the dialogue, which carries the narrative movement of the story and explores and illuminates the attitudes and temperament of the character-participants. The objective point of view places the burden of interpretation on the reader, who must pay close attention to what is being said in order to identify correctly the verbal nuances and overtones that define both character and conflict.

The dialogue itself is difficult to follow. It is random, indirect, and inexplicit, for Hemingway's characters, aware as they are that to expose oneself openly is to risk psychic injury, tend to approach each other obliquely, their real thoughts and emotions hidden and held tightly in check. In this passage the girl senses, though she cannot or will not articulate the fact, that it is not the matter of her pregnancy – or the "awfully simple operation" he proposes – that jeopardizes their relationship, but rather his failure to understand that human relationships themselves inevitably curtail and limit one's freedom. Her inability to communicate this message and his failure to understand it – the failure of dialogue, if you will – thus serves to underscore and explain both the differences in their attitudes and personalities and the size of the barrier existing between them.

Ambrose was "at the awkward age." His voice came out high-pitched as a child's if he let himself get carried away; to be on the safe side, therefore, he moved and spoke with deliberate calm and adult gravity. Talking soberly of unimportant or irrelevant matters and listening consciously to the sound of your own voice are useful habits for maintaining control in this difficult interval. En route to Ocean City he sat in the back seat of the family car with his brother Peter, age fifteen, and Magda G —— —, age fourteen, a pretty girl and exquisite young lady, who lived not far from them on B —— Street in the town of D —— ——, Maryland. initials, blanks, or both were often substituted for proper names in nineteenth-century fiction to enhance the illusion of reality. It is as if the author felt it necessary to delete the names for reasons of tact or legal liability ... Interestingly, as with other aspects of realism, it is an illusion that is being enhanced, by purely artificial means.

– From "Lost in the Funhouse," John Barth.

"A different way to come to terms with the discrepancy between art and the Real Thing," John Barth has said, "is to *affirm* the artificial element in art (you can't get rid of it anyhow), and make the artifice part of your point instead of working for higher and higher fi with a lot of literary woofers and tweeters."[17] And one way to "*affirm* the artificial element in art," he might have added, is by making the reader an equally self-conscious party to the artifice, by letting him in on the game, and then forcing him to participate in the act of

[17] John Barth, "John Barth: An Interview," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, VI:6 (Winter-Spring 1965).

creation and discovery. Such statements help to explain the playful, self-conscious quality of Barth's own fiction; they also help to explain Barth's choice of subject matter and narrative technique, and his choice of style as well. Barth's funhouse is a metaphor both for fiction and fiction-making and for the potentialities of the self, and the author openly invites the reader to participate in Ambrose's story, even to the extent of inviting him to choose which of the multiple versions of the plot is, finally, the correct one. Barth's style – with its long, complex, and convoluted sentences, its abstract diction, its rapid changes in point of view, its resort to pun, parody, allusion, and other forms of verbal wordplay, and its use of such visual devices as italics, blank spaces, quotation marks, dashes, and diagrams – is designed to "make the artifice part of" the "point" and to solicit our active involvement as intelligent readers. What Barth says and the way he says it invite us to think about fiction and fiction-making even as they create frustration by losing us, along with Ambrose, in the labyrinthine funhouse of the story.

FINAL TASKS

1. *Read and tell the following two stories.*

2. *Analyze them from all the angles you can, including the elements of style and tone.*

HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS

The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shadow and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door and into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on to Madrid.

"What should we drink?" the girl asked. She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.

"It's pretty hot," the man said.

"Let's drink beer."

"Dos cervezas," the man said into the curtain.

"Big ones?" a woman asked from the doorway.

"Yes. Two big ones."

The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glasses on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

"They look like white elephants," she said.

"I've never seen one," the man drank his beer.

"No, you wouldn't have."

"I might have," the man said. "Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything."

The girl looked at the bead curtain. "They've painted something on it," she said. "What does it say?"

"Anis del Toro. It's a drink."

"Could we try it?"

The man called "Listen" through the curtain. The woman came out from the bar.

"Four reales."

"We want two Anis del Toro."

"With water?"

"Do you want it with water?"

"I don't know," the girl said. "Is it good with water?"

"It's all right."

"You want them with water?" asked the woman.

"Yes, with water."

"It tastes like licorice," the girl said and put the glass down.

"That's the way with everything."

"Yes," said the girl. "Everything tastes of licorice. Especially all the things you've waited so long for, like absinthe."

"Oh, cut it out."

"You started it," the girl said. "I was being amused. I was having a fine time."

"Well, let's try and have a fine time."

"All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn't that bright?"

"That was bright."

"I wanted to try this new drink. That's all we do, isn't it – look at things and try new drinks?"

"I guess so."

The girl looked across at the hills.

"They're lovely hills," she said. They don't really look like white elephants. I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees."

"Should we have another drink?"

"All right."

The warm wind blew the bead curtain against the table.

"The beer is nice and cool," the man said.

"It's lovely," the girl said.

"It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig," the man said. "It's not really an operation at all."

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

"I know you wouldn't mind it, Jig. It's really not anything. It's just to let the air in."

The girl did not say anything.

"I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural."

"Then what will we do afterward?"

"We'll be fine afterward. Just like we were before."

"What makes you think so?"

"That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that's made us unhappy."

The girl looked at the bead curtain, put her hand out and took hold of two of the strings of beads.

"And you think then we'll be all right and be happy."

"I know we will. You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it."

"So have I," said the girl. "And afterward they were all so happy."

"Well," the man said, "if you don't want to you don't have to. I

wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to. But I know it's perfectly simple."

"And you really want to?"

"I think it's the best thing to do. But I don't want you to do it if you don't really want to."

"And if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?"

"I love you now. You know I love you."

"I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you'll like it?"

"I'll love it. I love it now but I just can't think about it. You know how I get when I worry."

"If I do it you won't ever worry?"

"I won't worry about that because it's perfectly simple."

"Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't care about me."

"Well, I care about you."

"Oh, yes. But I don't care about me. And I'll do it and then everything will be fine."

"I don't want you to do it if you feel that way."

The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.

"And we could have all this," she said. "And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible."

"What did you say?"

"I said we could have everything."

"We can have everything."

"No, we can't."

"We can have the whole world."

"No, we can't."

"We can go everywhere."

"No, we can't. It isn't ours any more."

"It's ours."

"No, it isn't. And once they take it away, you never get it back."

"But they haven't taken it away."

"We'll wait and see."

"Come on back in the shade," he said. "You mustn't feel that way."

"I don't feel any way," the girl said. "I just know things."

"I don't want you to do anything that you don't want to do ____"

"Nor that isn't good for me," she said. "I know. Could we have another beer?"

"All right. But you've got to realize ____"

"I realize," the girl said. "Can't we maybe stop talking?"

They sat down at the table and the girl looked across at the hills on the dry side of the valley and the man looked at her and at the table.

"You've got to realize," he said, "that I don't want you to do it if you don't want to. I'm perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you."

"Doesn't it mean anything to you? We could get along."

"Of course it does. But I don't want anybody but you. I don't want any one else. And I know it's perfectly simple."

"Yes, you know it's perfectly simple."

"It's all right for you to say that, but I do know it."

"Would you do something for me now?"

"I'd do anything for you."

"Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?"

He didn't say anything but looked at the bags against the wall of the station. There were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights.

"But I don't want you to," he said, "I don't care anything about it."

"I'll scream," the girl said.

The woman came out through the curtains with two glasses of beer and put them down on the damp felt pads. "The train comes in five minutes," she said.

"What did she say?" asked the girl.

"That the train is coming in five minutes."

The girl smiled brightly at the woman, to thank her.

"I'd better take the bags over to the other side of the station," the man said. She smiled at him.

"All right. Then come back and we'll finish the beer."

He picked up the two heavy bags and carried them around the station to the other tracks. He looked up the tracks but could not see the train. Coming back, he walked through the barroom, where people waiting for the train were drinking. He drank an Anis at the bar and looked at the people. They were all waiting reasonably for the train. He went out through the bead curtain. She was sitting at the table and smiled at him.

"Do you feel better?" he asked.

"I feel fine," she said. "There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine."

John Barth

LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE

For whom is the funhouse fun? Perhaps for lovers. For Ambrose it is *a place of fear and confusion.* He has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday, *the occasion of their visit is Independence Day, the most important secular holiday of the United States of America.* A single straight underline is the manuscript mark for italic type, *which in turn* is the printed equivalent to oral emphasis of words and phrases as well as the customary type for titles of complete works, not to mention. Italics are also employed, in fiction stories especially, for "outside", instructive, or artificial voices, such as radio announcements, the texts of telegrams and newspaper articles, et cetera. They should be used *sparingly.* If passages originally in roman type are italicized by someone repeating them, it's customary to acknowledge the fact. *Italics mine.*

Ambrose was "at the awkward age." His voice came out high-pitched as a child's if he let himself get carried away; to be on the safe side, therefore, he moved and spoke with *deliberate calm* and *adult gravity.* Talking soberly of unimportant or irrelevant matters and listening consciously to the sound of your own voice are useful habits for maintaining control in this difficult interval. *En route* to Ocean City he sat in the back seat of the family car with his brother Peter, age fifteen, and Magda G___, age fourteen, a pretty girl an exquisite young lady, who lived not far from them on B___ Street in the town of D___, Maryland. Initials, blanks, or both were often substituted for proper names in nineteenth-century fiction to enhance the illusion

of reality. It is as if the author felt it necessary to delete the names for reasons of tact or legal liability. Interestingly, as with other aspects of realism, it is an *illusion* that is being enhanced, by purely artificial means. Is it likely, does it violate the principle of verisimilitude, that a thirteen-year-old boy could make such a sophisticated observation? A girl of fourteen is *the psychological coeval* of a boy of fifteen or sixteen; a thirteen-year-old boy, therefore, even one precocious in some other respects, might be three years *her emotional junior.*

Thrice a year – on Memorial, Independence, and Labor Days – the family visits Ocean City for afternoon and evening. When Ambrose and Peter's father was their age, the excursion was made by train, as mentioned in the novel *The 42nd Parallel* by John Dos Passos. Many families from the same neighborhood used to travel together, with dependent relatives and often with Negro servants; schoolfuls of children swarmed through the railway cars; everyone shared everyone else's Maryland fried chicken, Virginia ham, deviled eggs, potato salad, beaten biscuits, iced tea. Nowadays (that is, in 19__ , the year of our story) the journey is made by automobile – more comfortably and quickly though without the extra fun though without the *camaraderie* of a general excursion. It's all part of the deterioration of American life, their father declares; Uncle Karl supposes that when the boys take *their* families to Ocean City for holidays they'll fly in Autogiros. Their mother, sitting in the middle of the front seat like Magda in the second, only with her arms on the seatback behind the men's shoulders, wouldn't want the good old days back again, the steaming trains and stuffy long dresses; on the other hand she can do without Autogiros, too, if she has to become a grandmother to fly in them.

Description of physical appearance and mannerisms is one of

the several standard methods of characterization used by writers of fiction. It is also important to "keep the senses operating" when a detail from one of the five senses, say visual, is "crossed" with a detail from another, say auditory, the reader's imagination is oriented to the scene, perhaps unconsciously. This procedure may be compared to the way surveyors and navigators determine their positions by two or more compass bearings, a process known as triangulation. The brown hair on Ambrose's mother's forearms gleamed in the sun like. Though right-handed, she took her arm from the seat-back to press the dashboard cigar lighter for Uncle Karl. When the glass bead in its handle glowed red, the lighter was ready for use. The smell of Uncle Karl's cigar smoke reminded one of. The fragrance of the ocean came strong to the picnic ground where they always stopped for lunch, two miles inland from Ocean City. Having to pause for a full hour almost within sound of the breakers was difficult for Peter and Ambrose when they were younger; even at their present age it was not easy to keep their anticipation, *stimulated by the briny spume,* from turning into short temper. The Irish author James Joyce, in his unusual novel entitled *Ulysses,* now available in this country, uses the adjectives *snot-green* and *scrotumtightening* to describe the sea. Visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory. Peter and Ambrose's father, while steering their black 1936 LaSalle sedan with one hand, could with the other remove the first cigarette from a white pack of Lucky Strikes and, more remarkably, light it with a match forefingered from its book and thumbed against the flint paper without being detached. The matchbook cover merely advertised U.S. War Bonds and Stamps. A fine metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech, in addition to its obvious "first-order" relevance to the thing it describes, will be seen upon reflection to have a second order of significance: it may be drawn

from the *milieu* of the action, for example, or be particularly appropriate to the sensibility of the narrator, even hinting to the reader things of which the narrative is unaware; or it may cast further and subtler lights upon the thing it describes, sometimes ironically qualifying the more evident sense of the comparison.

To say that Ambrose's and Peter's mother was *pretty* is to accomplish nothing the reader may acknowledge the proposition, but his imagination is not engaged. Besides, Magda was also pretty, yet in an altogether different way. Although she lived on B ___ Street she had very good manners and did better than average in school. Her figure was very well developed for her age. Her right hand lay casually on the plush upholstery of the seat, very near Ambrose's left leg, on which his own hand rested. The space between their legs, between her right and his left leg, was out of the line of sight of the rearview mirror. Uncle Karl's face resembled Peter's – rather, vice versa. Both had dark hair and eyes, short husky statures, deep voices. Magda's left hand was probably in a similar position on her left side. The boy's father is difficult to describe; no particular feature of his appearance or manner stood out. He wore glasses and was principal of a T ___ County grade school. Uncle Karl was a masonry contractor.

Although Peter must have known as well as Ambrose that the latter, because of his position in the car, would be the first to see the electrical towers of the power plant at V ___ , the halfway point of their trip, he leaned forward and slightly through the center of the car and pretended to be looking for them through the flat pinewoods and tuckahoe creeks along the highway. For as long as the boys could remember, "looking for the Towers" had been a feature of the first half of their excursions to Ocean City, "looking for the standpipe" of

the second. Though the game was childish, their mother preserved the tradition of rewarding the first to see the Towers with a candybar or piece of fruit. She insisted now that Magda play the game; the prize, she said, was "something hard to get nowadays." Ambrose decided not to join them in; he sat far back in his seat. Magda, like Peter, leaned forward. Two sets of straps were discernible through the shoulders of her sundress; the inside right one, a brassiere-strap, was fastened or shortened with a small safety pin. The right armpit of her dress, presumably the left as well, was damp with perspiration. The simple strategy for being first to espy the Towers, which Ambrose had understood by the age of four, was to sit on the righthand side of the car. Whoever sat there, however, had also to put up with the worst of the sun, and so Ambrose, without mentioning the matter, chose sometimes one and sometimes the other. Not impossibly Peter had never caught on to the trick, or through that his brother hadn't simply because Ambrose on occasion preferred shade to a Baby Ruth or tangerine.

The shade-sun situation didn't apply to the front seat, owing to the windshield; if anything the driver got more sun, since the person on the passenger side not only was shaded below by the door and dashboard but might swing down his sunvisor all the way too.

"Is that them?" Magda asked. Ambrose's mother teased the boys for letting Magda win, insinuating that "somebody [had] a girlfriend." Peter and Ambrose's father reached a long thin arm across their mother to butt his cigarette in the dashboard ashtray, under the lighter. The prize this time for seeing the Towers first was banana. Their mother bestowed it after chiding their father for wasting a half-smoked cigarette when everything was so scarce. Magda, to take the prize, moved her hand from so near Ambrose's that he could have touched it as

though accidentally. She offered to share the prize, things like that were hard to find; but everyone insisted it was hers alone. Ambrose's mother sang an iambic trimeter couplet from a popular song, femininely rhymed:

"What's good is in the Army;
What's left will never harm me."

Uncle Karl tapped his cigar ash out the ventilator window; some particles were sucked by the slipstream back into the car through the rear window on the passenger side. Magda demonstrated her ability to hold a banana in one hand and peel it with her teeth. She still sat forward: Ambrose pushed his glasses back onto the bridge of his nose with his left hand, which he then negligently let fall to the seat cushion immediately behind her. He even permitted the single hair, gold, on the second joint of his thumb to brush the fabric of her skirt. Should she have sat back at that instant, his hand would have been caught under her.

Plush upholstery prickles uncomfortably through gabardine slacks in the July sun. The function of the *beginning* of a story is to introduce the principal characters, establish their initial relationships, set the scene for the main action, expose the background of the situation if necessary, plant motifs and foreshadowings where appropriate, and initiate the first complications or whatever of the "rising action." Actually, if one imagines a story called "The Funhouse," or "Lost in the Funhouse," the details of the drive to Ocean City don't seem especially relevant. The *beginning* should recount the events between Ambrose's first sight of the funhouse early in the afternoon and his entering it with Magda and Peter in the evening. The *middle* would narrate all relevant events from the time he goes in to the time he

loses his way; middles have the double and contradictory function of delaying the climax while at the same time preparing the reader for it and fetching him to it. Then the *ending* would tell what Ambrose does while he's lost, how he finally finds his way out, and what everybody makes of the experience. So far there's been no real dialogue, very little sensory detail, and nothing in the way of *theme*. And a long time has gone by already without anything happening; it makes a person wonder. We haven't reached Ocean City yet: we will never get out of the funhouse.

The more closely an author identifies with the narrator, literally or metaphorically, the less advisable it is, as a rule, to use the first-person narrative viewpoint. Once three years previously the young people *aforementioned* played Niggers and Masters in the backyard; when it was Ambrose's turn to be Master and theirs to be Niggers Peter had to go serve his evening papers; Ambrose was afraid to punish Magda alone, but she led him to the whitewashed Torture Chamber between the woodshed and the privy in the Slave Quarters; there she knelt sweating among bamboo rakes and dusty Mason jars, pleadingly embraced his knees, and while bees droned in the lattice as if on an ordinary summer afternoon, purchased clemency at a surprising price set by herself. Doubtless she remembered nothing of this event; Ambrose on the other hand seemed unable to forget the least detail of his life. He even recalled how, standing beside himself with awed impersonality in the reeky heat, he'd stared the while at an empty cigar box in which Uncle Karl kept stone-cutting chisels: beneath the words *El Producto*, a laureled, loose-toga'd lady regarded the sea from a marble bench; beside her, forgotten or not yet turned to, was a five-stringed lyre. Her chin reposed on the back of her right hand; her left depended negligently from the

bench-arm. The lower half of scene and lady was peeled away; THE WORDS EXAMINED BY _____ were inked there into the wood. Nowadays cigar boxes are made of pasteboard. Ambrose wondered what Magda would have done. Ambrose wondered what Magda would do when she sat back on his hand as he resolved she should. Be angry. Make a teasing joke of it. Give no sign at all. For a long time she leaned forward, playing cow-poker with Peter against Uncle Karl and Mother and watching for the first sign of Ocean City. At nearly the same instant, picnic ground and Ocean City standpipe hove into view; an Amoco filling station on their side of the road cost Mother and Uncle Karl fifty cows and the game; Magda bounced back, clapping her right hand on Mother's right arm; Ambrose moved clear "in the nick of time."

At this rate our hero, at this rate our protagonist will remain in the funhouse forever. Narrative ordinarily consists of alternating dramatization and summarization. One symptom of nervous tension, paradoxically, is repeated and violent yawning; neither Peter nor Magda nor Uncle Karl nor Mother reacted in this manner. Although they were no longer small children, Peter and Ambrose were each given a dollar to spend on boardwalk amusements in addition to what money of their own they'd brought along. Magda too, though she protested she had ample spending money. The boys' mother made a little scene out of distributing the bills; she pretended that her sons and Magda were small children and cautioned them not to spend the sum too quickly or in one place. Magda promised with a merry laugh and, having both hands free, took the bill with her left. Peter laughed also and pledged in a falsetto to be a good boy. His imitation of a child was not clever. The boy's father was tall and thin, balding, fair complexioned. Assertions of that sort are not effective; the reader may

acknowledge the proposition, but. We should be much farther along than we are; something has gone wrong not much of this preliminary rambling seems relevant. Yet everyone begins in the same place; how is it that most go along without difficulty but a few lose their way?

"Stay out from under the boardwalk," Uncle Karl growled from the side of his mouth. The boys' mother pushed his shoulder *in mock annoyance*. They were all standing before Fat May the Laughing Lady who advertised the funhouse. Larger than life, Fat May mechanically shook, rocked on her heels, slapped her thighs while recorded laughter – uproarious, female – came amplified from a hidden loudspeaker. It chuckled, wheezed, wept; tried in vain to catch its breath; tittered, groaned, exploded raucous and anew. You couldn't hear it without laughing yourself, no matter how you felt. Father came back from talking to a Coast-Guardsman on duty and reported that the surf was spoiled with crude oil from tankers recently torpedoed offshore. Lumps of it, difficult to remove, made tarry tidelines on the beach and stuck on swimmers. Many bathed in the surf nevertheless and came out speckled; others paid to use a municipal pool and only sunbathed on the beach. We would do the latter. We would do the latter. We would do the latter.

Under the boardwalk, matchbook covers, grainy other things. What is the story's theme? Ambrose is ill. He perspires in the dark passages; candied apples-on-a-stick, delicious-looking, disappointing to eat. Funhouses need men's and ladies' rooms at intervals. Others perhaps have also vomited in corners and corridors may even have had bowel movements liable to be stepped in in the dark. The word *fuck* suggests suction and/or and/or flatulence. Mother and Father; grandmothers and grandfathers on both sides; great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers on four sides, et cetera. Count a gen-

eration as thirty years: in approximately the year when Lord Baltimore was granted charter to the province of Maryland by Charles I, five hundred twelve women – English, Welsh, Bavarian, Swiss – of every class and character, received into themselves the penises the intromittent organs of five hundred twelve men, ditto, in every circumstance and posture, to conceive the five hundred twelve ancestors of the two hundred fifty-six ancestors of the et cetera et cetera et cetera et cetera et cetera et cetera et cetera et cetera of the author, of the narrator, of this story, *Lost in the Funhouse*. In alleyways, ditches, canopy beds, pinewoods, bridal suites, ship's cabins, coach-and-fours, coach-and-four, sultry toolsheds; on the cold sand under boardwalks, littered with *El producto* cigar butts, treasured with Lucky Strike cigarette stubs, Coca-Cola caps, gritty turds, cardboard lollipop sticks, matchbook covers warning that A Slip of the Lip Can Sink a Ship.* The shluppish whisper, continuous as seawash round the globe, tidelike falls and rises with the circuit of dawn and dusk.

Magda's teeth. She *was* left-handed. Perspiration. They've gone all the way, through, Magda and Peter, they've been waiting for hours with Mother and Uncle Karl while Father searches for his lost sun; they draw french-fried potatoes from a paper cup and shake their heads. They've named the children they'll one day have and bring to Ocean City on holidays. Can spermatozoa properly be thought hot, dark windings, past Love's Tunnel's fearsome obstacles. Some perhaps lose their way.

Peter suggested then and there that they do the funhouse; he had been through it before, so had Magda, Ambrose hadn't and suggested, his voice cracking on account of Fat May's laughter, that they

* One of many World War II slogans designed to make Americans cautious about sharing information that might be value to the enemy.

swim first. All were chuckling, couldn't help it; Ambrose's and Peter's father came up grinning like a lunatic with two boxes of syrup-coated popcorn, one for Mother, one for Magda; the men were to help themselves. Ambrose walked on Magda's right; being by nature left-handed, she carried the box in her left hand. Up front the situation was reversed.

"What are you limping for?" Magda inquired of Ambrose. He supposed in a husky tone that his foot had gone to sleep in the car. Her teeth flashed. "Pins and needles?" It was the honeysuckle on the lattice of the former privy that drew the bees. Imagine being stung there. How long is this going to take?

The adults decided to forgo the pool; but Uncle Karl insisted they change into swimsuits and do the beach. "He wants to watch the pretty girls," Peter teased and ducked behind Magda from Uncle Karl's pretended wrath. "You've got all the pretty girls you need right here," Magda declared, and Mother said: "Now that's the gospel truth." Magda scolded Peter, who reached over her shoulder to sneak some popcorn. "Your brother and father aren't getting any." Uncle Karl wondered if they were going to have fireworks that night, what with the shortages. It wasn't the shortages, Mr. M____ replied; Ocean City had fireworks from pre-war. But it was too risky on account of the enemy submarines, some people thought.

"Don't seem like Fourth of July without fireworks," said Uncle Karl. The inverted tag in dialogue writing is still considered permissible with proper names or epithets, but sounds old-fashioned with personal pronouns. "We'll have 'em again soon enough," predicted the boys' father. Their mother declared she could do without fireworks: they reminded her too much of the real thing. Their father said all the more reason to shoot off a few now and again. Uncle Karl

asked *rhetorically* who needed reminding, just look at people's hair and skin.

"The oil, yes," said Mrs. M____ .

Ambrose had a pain in his stomach and so didn't swim but enjoyed watching the others. He and his father burned red easily. Magda's figure was exceedingly well developed for her age. She too declined to swim, and got mad, and became angry when Peter attempted to drag her into the pool. She always swam, he insisted; what did she mean not swim? Why did a person come to Ocean City?

"Maybe I want to lay here with Ambrose," Magda teased.

Nobody likes a pedant.

"Aha," said Mother. Peter grabbed Magda by one ankle and ordered Ambrose to grab the other. She squealed and rolled over on the beach blanket. Ambrose pretended to help hold her back. Her tan was darker than even Mother's and Peter's. "Help out, Uncle Karl!" Peter cried. Uncle Karl went to seize the other ankle. Inside the top of her swimsuit, however, you could see the line where the sunburn ended and, when she hunched her shoulders and squealed again, one nipple's auburn edge. Mother made them behave themselves. "*You* should certainly know," she said to Uncle Karl. Archly. "That when a lady says she doesn't feel like swimming, a gentleman doesn't ask questions." Uncle Karl said excuse *him;* Mother winked at Magda; Ambrose blushed; stupid Peter kept saying "Phooey on *feel like*!" and tugging at Magda's ankle; then even he got the point, and cannonballed with a holler into the pool.

"I swear," Magda said, in mock *in feigned* exasperation.

The diving would make a suitable literary symbol. To go off the high board you had to wait in a line along the poolside and up the ladder. Fellows tickled girls and goosed one another and shouted to

the ones at the top to hurry up, or razzed them for bellyfloppers. Once on the springboard some took a great while posing or clowning or deciding on a dive or getting up their nerve; others ran right off. Especially among the younger fellows the idea was to strike the funniest pose or do the craziest stunt as you fell, a thing that got harder to do as you kept on and kept on. But whether you hollered *Geronimo!* or *Sieg heil!* *, held your nose or "rode a bicycle," pretended to be shot or did a perfect jacknife or changed your mind halfway down and ended up with nothing, it was over in two seconds, after all that wait. Spring, pose, splash. Spring, neat-o, splash. Spring, aw fooey, splash.

The grown-ups had gone on; Ambrose wanted to converse with Magda; she was remarkably well developed for her age; it was said that that came from rubbing with a turkish towel, and there were other theories. Ambrose could think of nothing to say except how good a diver Peter was, who was showing off for her benefit. You could pretty well tell by looking at their bathing suits and arm muscles how far along the different fellows were. Ambrose was glad he hadn't gone in swimming, the cold water shrank you up so. Magda pretended to be uninterested in the diving; she probably weighed as much as he did. If you knew your way around in the funhouse like your own bedroom, you could wait until a girl came along and then slip away without ever getting caught, even if her boyfriend was right with her. She'd think *he* did it! It would be better to be the boyfriend, and act outraged, and tear the funhouse apart.

Not act; *be*.

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* "Geronimo!" was the battle cry used by American paratroopers, reportedly in reference to the famous Indian chief; "Sieg Heil!" (Ger.) – "Hail to victory!" – was the traditional Nazi salute.

"He's a master diver," Ambrose said. In feigned admiration. "You really have to slave away at it to get that good." What would it matter anyhow if he asked her right out whether she remembered, even teased her with it as Peter would have?

There's no point in going farther; this isn't getting anybody anywhere; they haven't even come to the funhouse yet. Ambrose is off the track, in some new or old part of the place that's not supposed to be used; he strayed into it by some one-in-a-million chance, like the time the roller-coaster car left the tracks in the nineteen-teens against all the laws of physics and sailed over the boardwalk in the dark. And they can't locate him because they don't know where to look. Even the designer and operator have forgotten this other part, that winds around on itself like a whelk shell. That winds around the right part like the snakes on mercury's caduceus.* Some people, perhaps don't "hit their stride" until their twenties, when the growing-up business is over and women appreciate other things besides wisecracks and teasing and strutting. Peter didn't have one-tenth the imagination *he* had, not one-tenth. Peter did this naming-their-children thing as a joke, making up names like Aloysius and Murgatroyd, but Ambrose knew *exactly* how it would feel to be married and have children of your own, and be a loving husband and father, and go comfortably to work in the mornings and to bed with your wife at night, and wake up with her there. With a breeze coming through the sash and birds and mockingbirds singing in the Chinese-cigar trees. His eyes watered, there aren't enough ways to say that. He would be quite famous in his line of work. Whether Magda was his wife or not, one evening when he

* The symbolic staff carried by the Roman god Mercury, the messenger god, bearing two entwined snakes crowned by a pair of wings.

was wise-lined and gray at the temples he'd smile gravely, at a fashionable dinner party, and remind her of his youthful passion. The time they went with his family to Ocean City; the *erotic fantasies* he used to have about her. How long ago it seemed, and childish! Yet tender, too, *n'est-ce pas*?*[1] Would she have imagined that the worldfamous whatever remembered how many strings were on the lyre on the bench beside the girl on the label of the cigar box he'd stared at in the toolshed at age ten while she, age eleven. Even then he had felt *wise beyond his years*; he'd stroked her hair and said in his deepest voice and correctest English, as to a dear child: "I shall never forget this moment."

But though he had breathed heavily, groaned as if ecstatic, what he'd really felt throughout was an odd detachment, as though someone else were Master. Strive as he might to be transported, he heard his mind take notes upon the scene: *This is what they call* passion. *I am experiencing it.* Many of the digger machines were out of order in the penny arcades and could not be repaired or replaced for the duration. Moreover, the prizes, made now in USA, were less interesting than formerly, pasteboard items for the most part, and some of the machines wouldn't work on white pennies.*[2] The gypsy fortune-teller machine might have provided a foreshadowing of the climax of this story if Ambrose had operated it. It was even dilapidateder than most: the silver coating was worn off the brown metal handles, the glass windows around the dummy were cracked and taped, her kerchiefs and silks long-faded. If a man lived by himself, he could take a

*[1] (Fr.) A rhetorical question, meaning "Isn't that right?" or "Don't you agree?"

*[2] In 1943 the government minted zinc-coated steel pennies in an effort to conserve copper needed for the war effort.

department-store mannequin with flexible joints and modify her in certain ways. *However:* by the time he was that old he'd have a real woman. There was a machine that stamped your name around a whitemetal coin with a star in the middle: A____. His son would be the second, and when the lad reached thirteen or so he would put a strong arm around his shoulder and tell him calmly "It is perfectly normal. We have all been through it. It will not last forever." Nobody knew how to be what they were right. He'd smoke a pipe, teach his son how to fish and softcrab, assure him he needn't worry about himself. Magda would certainly give, Magda would certainly yield a great deal of milk, although guilty of occasional solecisms. It don't taste so bad. Suppose the lights came on now!

The day wore on. You think you're yourself, but there are other persons in you. Ambrose gets hard when Ambrose doesn't want to, *and obversely.* Ambrose watches them disagree; Ambrose watches him watch. In the funhouse mirror-room you can't see yourself go on forever, because no matter how you stand, your head gets in the way. Even if you had a glass periscope, the image of your eye would cover up the thing you really wanted to see. The police will come; there'll be a story in the papers. That must be where it happened. Unless he can find a surprise exit, an unofficial backdoor or escape hatch opening on an alley, say, and then stroll up to the family in front of the funhouse and ask where everybody's been; *he's* been out of the place for ages. That's just where it happened, in that last lighted room: Peter and Magda found the right exit; he found one that you weren't supposed to find and strayed off into the works somewhere. In a perfect funhouse you'd be able to go only one way, like the divers off the highboard; getting lost would be impossible; the doors and halls would work like minnow traps or the valves in veins.

On account of German U-boats,[1]* Ocean City was "browned out": streetlights were shaded on the seaward side; shop-windows and boardwalks amusement places were kept dim, not to silhouette tankers and Liberty-ships[2]* for torpedoing. In a short story about Ocean City, Maryland, during World War II, the author could make use of the image of sailors on leave in the penny arcades and shooting galleries, sighting through the crosshairs of toy machine guns at swastika'd subs, while out in the black Atlantic a U-boat skipped squints through his periscope at real ships outlined by the glow of penny arcades. After dinner the family strolled back to the amusement end of the boardwalk where the Hurricane of '33 had cut an inlet from ocean to Assawoman Bay.

"Pronounced with a long *o*," Uncle Karl reminded Magda with a wink. His shirt sleeves were rolled up Mother punched his brown biceps with the arrowed heart on it and said his mind was naughty. Fat May's laugh came suddenly from the funhouse, as if she'd just got the joke; the family laughed too at the coincidence. Ambrose went under the boardwalk to search for out-of-town matchbook covers with the aid of his pocket flashlight; he looked out from the edge of the North American continent and wondered how far their laughter carried over the water. Spies in rubber rafts; survivors in lifeboats. If the joke had been beyond his understanding, he could have said: *"The laughter was over his head."* And let the reader see the serious wordplay on second reading.

He turned the flashlight on and then off at once even before the woman whooped. He sprang away, heart athud, dropping the light. What had the man grunted? perspiration drenched and chilled him by

*1 submarines.

*2 The name given to mass-produced cargo ships.

the time he scrambled up to his family. "See anything?" his father asked. His voice wouldn't come; he shrugged and violently brushed sand from his pants legs.

"Let's ride the old flying horses!" Magda cried. I'll never be an author. It's been forever already, everybody's gone home, Ocean City's deserted, the ghost-crabs are tickling across the beach and down the littered cold streets.

And the empty halls of clapboard hotels and abandoned funhouses. A tidal wave; an enemy air raid; a monster-crab swelling like an island from the sea. *The inhabitants fled in terror.* Magda clung to his trouser leg; he alone knew the maze's secret. "He gave his life that we might live," said Uncle Karl with a scowl of pain, as he. The fellow's hands had been tattooed; the woman's legs, the woman's fat white legs had. An astonishing coincidence. He yearned to tell Peter. He wanted to throw up for excitement. They hadn't even chased him. He wished he were dead.

One possible ending would be to have Ambrose come across another lost person in the dark. They'd match their wits together against the funhouse, struggle like Ulysses* past obstacle after obstacle, help and encourage each other. Or a girl. By the time they found the exit they'd be closest friends, sweethearts if it were a girl; they'd know each other's inmost souls, be bound together *by the cement of shared adventure;* then they'd emerge into the light and it would turn out that his friend was a Negro. A blind girl. President Roosevelt's son. Ambrose's former archenemy.

Shortly after the mirror room he'd groped along a musty corridor, his heart already misgiving him at the absence of phosphorescent

* The Roman name of Odysseus, the hero of Homer's *Odyssey.*

arrows and other signs. He'd found a crack of light – not a door, it turned out, but a seam between the plyboard wall panels – and squinting up to it, espied a small old man, *in appearance not unlike* the photographs at home of Ambrose's late grandfather, nodding upon a stool beneath a bare, speckled bulb. A crude panel of toggle- and knife-switches hung beside the open fuse box near his head; elsewhere in the little room were wooden levers and ropes belayed to boat cleats. At the time, Ambrose wasn't lost enough to rap or call; later he couldn't find that crack. Now it seemed to him that he'd possibly dozed off for a few minutes somewhere along the way; certainly he was exhausted from the afternoon's sunshine and the evening's problems; he couldn't be sure he hadn't dreamed part or all of the sight. Had an old black wall fan droned like bees and shimmied two flypaper streamers? Had the funhouse operator – gentle, somewhat sad and tired-appearing, in expression not unlike the photographs at home of Ambrose's late Uncle Konrad – murmured in his sleep? Is there really such a person as Ambrose, or is he a figment of the author's imagination? was it Assawoman Bay or Sinepuxent? Are there other errors of fact in this fiction? Was there another sound besides the little slap of thigh on ham, like water sucking at the chine-board of skiff?

When you are lost, the smartest thing to do is stay put till you're found, hollering if necessary. But to holler guarantees humiliation as well as rescue; keeping silent permits some saving of face – you can act surprised at the fuss when your rescuers find you and swear you weren't lost, if they do. What's more you might find your own way yet, *however belatedly.*

"Don't tell me your foot's still asleep!" Magda exclaimed as the three young people walked from the inlet to the area set aside for

ferris wheels, carrousels, and other carnival rides, they having decided in favor of the vast and ancient merry-go-round instead of the funhouse. What a sentence, everything was wrong from the outset. People don't know what to make of him, he doesn't know what to make of himself, he's only thirteen, *athletically and socially inept,* not astonishingly bright, but there are antennae; he has ... some sort of receivers in his head; things speak to him, he understands more than he should, the world winks at him through its objects, grabs grinning at his coat.

Everybody else is in on some secret he doesn't know; they've forgotten to tell him. Though simple procrastination his mother put off his baptism until this year. Everyone else had it done as a baby; he'd assumed the same of himself, as had his mother, so she claimed, until it was time for him to join Grace Methodist-Protestant and the oversight came out. He was mortified, but pitched sleepless through his private catechizing, intimidated by the ancient mysteries, a thirteen year old would never say that, resolved to experience conversion like St. Augustine.* When the water touched his brow and Adam's sin left him, he contrived by a strain like defecation to bring tears into his eyes – but felt nothing. There was some simple, radical difference about him; he hoped it was genius, feared it was madness, devoted himself to amiability and inconspicuousness. Alone on the seawall near his house he was seized by the terrifying transports he'd thought to find in toolshed, in Communion-cup. The grass was alive! The town, the river, himself, were not imaginary; time roared in his ears like wind; the world was *going on!* This part ought to be dramatized. The

* St. Augustine's (354-430) conversion to Christianity in 386 was inspired by his reading of the writing of St. Ambrose (340-397). St. Ambrose was Bishop of Milan and the friend and adviser of three Roman emperors.

Irish author James Joyce once wrote. Ambrose M ___ is going to scream.

There is no *texture of rendered sensory detail*, for one thing. The faded distorting mirrors beside Fat May; the impossibility of choosing a mount when one had but a single ride on the great carrousel; the *vertigo attendant on his recognition* that Ocean City was worn out, the place of fathers and grandfathers, strawboatered men and parasoled ladies survived by their amusements. Money spent, the three paused at Peter's insistence beside Fat May to watch the girls get their skirts blown up. The object was to tease Magda, who said: "I swear, Peter M ___ , you've got a one-track mind! Amby and me aren't *interested* in such things." In the tumbling-barrel, too, just inside the Devil's-mouth entrance to the funhouse, the girls were upended and their boyfriends and others could see up their dresses if they cared to. Which was the whole point, Ambrose realized. Of the entire funhouse! If you looked around, you noticed that almost all the people on the boardwalk were paired off into couples except the small children; in a way, that was the whole point of Ocean City! If you had X-ray eyes and could see everything going on at that instant under the boardwalk and in all the hotel rooms and cars and alleyways, you'd realize that all that normally *showed*, like restaurants and dance halls and clothing and test-your-strength machines, was merely preparation and intermission. Fat May screamed.

Because he watched the goings-on from the corner of his eye, it was Ambrose who spied the half-dollar on the boardwalk near the tumbling-barrel. Losers weepers. The first time he'd heard some people moving through a corridor not far away, just after he'd lost sight of the crack of light, he'd decide not to call to them, for fear they'd guess he was scared and poke fun; it sounded like roughnecks; he'd

hoped they'd come by and he could follow in the dark without their knowing. Another time he'd heard just one person, unless he imagined it, bumping along as if on the other side of the plywood; perhaps Peter coming back for him, or Father, or Magda lost too. Or the owner and operator of the funhouse. He'd called out once, as though merrily: "anybody know where the heck we are? But the query was too stiff, his voice cracked, when the sounds stopped he was terrified: maybe it was a queer who waited for fellows to get lost, or a longhaired filthy monster that lived in some cranny of the funhouse. He stood rigid for hours it seemed like, scarcely respiring. His future was shockingly clear, in outline. He tried holding his breath to the point of unconsciousness. There ought to be a button you could push to end your life absolutely without pain; disappear in a flick, like turning out a light. He would push it instantly! He despised Uncle Karl. But he despised his father too, for not being what he was supposed to be. Perhaps *his* father hated his father, and so on, and his son would hate him, and so on. Instantly!

Naturally he didn't have nerve enough to ask Magda to go through the funhouse with him. With incredible nerve and everyone's surprise he invited Magda, quietly and politely, to go through the funhouse with him. "I warn you, I've never been through it before," he added, *laughing easily;* "but I reckon we can manage somehow. The important thing to remember, after all, is that it's meant to be a *fun*house; that is, a place of amusement. If people really got lost or injured or too badly frightened in it, the owner'd go out of business. There'd even be lawsuits. No character in a work of fiction can make a speech this long without interruption or acknowledgment from the other characters."

Mother teased Uncle Karl: "Three's a crowd, I always heard."

But actually Ambrose was relieved that Peter now had a quarter too. Nothing was what it looked like. Every instant, under the surface of the Atlantic Ocean, millions of living animals devoured one another. Pilots were falling in flames over Europe; women were being forcibly raped in the South Pacific. His father should have taken him aside and said: "There is a simple secret to getting through the funhouse, as simple as being first to see the Towers. Here it is. Peter does not know it; neither does your Uncle Karl. You and I are different. Not surprisingly, you've often wished you weren't. Don't think I haven't noticed how unhappy your childhood has been! But you'll understand, when I tell you, why it had to be kept secret until now. And you won't regret not being like your brother and your uncle. *On the contrary*!" If you knew all the stories behind all the people on the boardwalk, you'd see that *nothing* was what it looked like. Husbands and wives often hated each other; parents didn't necessarily love their children; et cetera. A child took things for granted because he had nothing to compare his life to and everybody acted as if things were as they should be. Therefore each saw himself as the hero of the story, when the truth might turn out to be that he's the villain, or the coward. And there wasn't one thing you could do about it!

Hunchbacks, fat ladies, fools – that no one chose what he was was unbearable. In the movies he'd meet a beautiful young girl in the funhouse; they'd have hairs-breadth escapes from real dangers; he'd do and say the right things; she also; in the end they'd be lovers; their dialogue lines would match up; he'd be perfectly at ease; she'd not only like him well enough, she'd think he was *marvelous;* she'd lie awake thinking about *him*, instead of vice versa – the way his face looked in different lights and how he stood and exactly what he'd said – and yet that would be only small episode in his wonderful life,

among many many others. Not a *turning point* at all. What had happened in the toolshed was nothing. He hated, he loathed his parents! One reason for not writing a lost-in-the-funhouse story is that either everybody's felt what Ambrose feels, in which case it goes without saying, or else no normal person feels such things, in which case Ambrose is a freak. "Is anything more tiresome, in fiction, than the problems of sensitive adolescents?" And it's all too long and rambling, as if the author. For all a person knows the first time through, the end could be just around any corner; perhaps, *not impossibly* it's been within reach any number of times. On the other hand he may be scarcely past the start, with everything yet to get through, an intolerable idea.

Fill in: His father's raised eyebrows when he announced his decision to do the funhouse with Magda. Ambrose understands now, but didn't then, that his father was wondering whether he knew what the funhouse was *for* – especially since he didn't object, as he should have, when Peter decided to come along too. The ticket-woman, witchlike, mortifying him when inadvertently he gave her his name-coin instead of the half-dollar, then unkindly calling Magda's marked man!" She wasn't even cruel, he understood, only vulgar and insensitive. Somewhere in the world there was a young woman with such splendid understanding that she'd see him entire, like a poem or story, and find his words so valuable after all that when he confessed his apprehensions she would explain why they were in fact the very things that made him precious to her ... and to Western Civilization! There was no such girl, the simple truth being. Violent yawns as they approached the mouth. Whispered advice from an old-timer on a bench near the barrel: "Go crabwise and ye'll get an eyeful without upsetting!" Composure vanished at the first pitch: Peter hollered joyiously,

Magda tumbled, shrieked, clutched her skirt; Ambrose scrambled crabwise, tight-lipped with terror, was soon out, watched his dropped name-coin slide among the couples. Shame-faced he saw that to get through expeditiously was not the point; Peter feigned assistance in order to trip Magda up, shouted "I see Christmas!" when her legs went flying. The old man, his latest betrayer, cracked approval. A dim hall then of black-thread cobwebs and recorded gibber; he took Magda's elbow to steady her against revolving discs set in the slanted floor to throw your feet out from under, and explained to her in a calm, deep voice his theory that each phase of the funhouse was triggered either authomatically, by a series of photoelectric devices, or else manually by operators stationed at peepholes. But he lost his voice thrice as the discs unbalanced him; Magda was anyhow squealing; but at one point she clutched him about the waist to keep from falling, and her right cheek pressed for a moment against his belt-buckle. Heroically he drew her up, it was his chance to clutch her close as if for support and say: "I love you." He even put an arm lightly about the small of her back before a sailor-and-girl pitched into them from behind, sorely treading his left big toe and knocking Magda asprawl with them. The sailor's girl was a string-haired hussy with a loud laugh and light blue drawers; Ambrose realized that he wouldn't have said "I love you" anyhow, and was smitten with self-contempt. How much better it would he to be that common sailor! A wiry little Seaman 3rd, the fellow squeezed a girl to each side and stumbled hilarious into the mirror room, closer to Magda in thirty seconds than Ambrose had got in thirteen years. She giggled at something the fellow said to Peter; she drew her hair from her eyes with a movement so womanly it struck Ambrose's heart; Peter's smacking her backside then seemed particularly coarse. But Magda made a

pleased indignant face and cried, "All right for *you*, mister!" and pursued Peter into the maze without a backward glance. The sailor followed after, leisurely, drawing his girl against his hip; Ambrose understood not only that they were all so relieved to be rid of his burdensome company that they didn't even notice his absence, but that he himself shared their relief. Stepping from the treacherous passage at last into the mirror-maze, he saw once again, more clearly than ever, how readily he deceived himself into supposing he was a person. He even foresaw, wincing at his dreadful self-knowledge, that he would repeat the deception, at ever-rarer intervals, all his wretched life, so fearful were the alternatives. Fame, madness, suicide; perhaps all three. It's not believable that so young a boy could articulate that reflection, and in fiction the merely true must always yield to the plausible. Moreover, the symbolism is in places heavy-footed. Yet Ambrose M___ understood, as few adults do, that the famous loneliness of the great was no popular myth but a general truth – furthermore, that it was as much cause as effect.

All the preceding except the last few sentences is exposition that should've been done earlier or interspersed with the present action instead of lumped together. No reader would put up with so much with such *prolixity*. It's interesting that Ambrose's father, though presumably an intelligent man (as indicated by his role as grade-school principal), neither encouraged nor discouraged his sons at all in any way – as if he either didn't care about them or cared all right but didn't know how to act. If this fact should contribute to one of them's becoming a celebrated but wretchedly unhappy scientist, was it a good thing or not? He too might someday face the question; it would be useful to know whether it had tortured his father for years, for example, or never once crossed his mind.

In the maze two important things happened. First, our hero found a namecoin someone else had lost or discarded: *AMBROSE*, suggestive of the famous lightship*[1] and of his late grandfather's favourite dessert,*[2] which his mother used to prepare on special occasions out of coconut, oranges, grapes, and what else. Second, as he wondered at the endless replication of his image in the mirrors, second, as he *lost himself in the reflection* that the necessity for an observer makes perfect observation impossible, better make him eighteen at least, yet that would render other things unlikely, he heard Peter and Magda chuckling somewhere together in the maze. "Here!" "No, here!" they shouted to each other; Peter said, "Where's Amby?" Magda murmured. "Amb?" Peter called. In a pleased, friendly voice. He didn't reply. The truth was, his brother was a *happy-go-lucky youngster* who'd've been better off with a regular brother of his own, but who seldom complained of his lot and was generally cordial. Ambrose's throat ached; there aren't enough different ways to say that. He stood quietly while the two young people giggled and thumped through the glittering maze, hurrah'd their discovery of its exit, cried out in joyful alarm at what next beset them. Then he set his mouth and followed after, as he supposed, took a wrong turn, strayed into the pass *wherein he lingers yet.*

The action of conventional dramatic narrative may be represented by a diagram called Freitag's Triangle:*[3]

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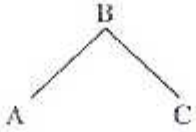
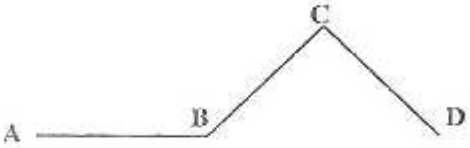
*[1] The Ambrose lightship, protecting the entrance to New York harbor.

*[2] Ambrosia, a dessert made from oranges and shredded coconut.

*[3] Named after German critic and novelist Gustav Freytag (1816-1895) who described the conventions of dramatic plot.



or more accurately by a variant of that diagram:



in which *AB* represents the exposition, *B* the introduction of conflict, *BC* the "rising action," complication, or development of the conflict, *C* the climax, or turn of the action, *CD* the denouement, or resolution of the conflict. While there is no reason to regard this pattern as an absolute necessity, like many other conventions it became conventional because great number of people over many years learned by trial and error that it was effective; one ought not to forsake it, therefore unless one wishes to forsake as well the effect of drama or has clear cause to feel that deliberate violation of the "normal" pattern can better can better effect that effect. This can't go on much longer; it can go on forever. He died telling stories to himself in the dark; years later, when that vast unsuspected area of the funhouse came to light, the first expedition found his skeleton in one of its labirinthine corridors and mistook it for part of the entertainnment. He died of starvation telling himself stories in the dark; but unbeknownst unbeknownst to him, an assistant operator of the funhouse, happening to overhear him, crouched just behind the plyboard partition and

wrote down his every word. The operator's daughter, an exquisite young woman with a figure unusually well developed for her age, crouched just behind the partition and transcribed his every word. Though she had never laid eyes on him, she recognized that there was one of Western Culture's truly great imaginations, the eloquence of whose suffering would be an inspiration to unnumbered. And her heart was torn between her love for the misfortunate young man (yes, she loved him, though she had never laid though she knew him only – but how well! – through his words, and the deep, calm voice in which he spoke them) between her love et cetera and her womanly intuition that only in suffering and isolation could he give voice et cetera. Lone dark dying. Quietly she kissed the rough plyboard, and a tear fell upon the page. Where she had written in shorthand *Where she had written in shorthand* Where she had written in shorthand *Where she* et cetera. A long time ago we should have passed the apex of Freitag's Triangle and made brief work of the denouement; the plot doesn't rise by meaningful steps but winds upon itself, degresses, retreats, hesitates, sighs, collapses, expires. The climax of the story must be its protagonist's discovery of a way to get through the funhouse. But he has found none, may have ceased to search.

What relevance does the war have to the story? Should there be fireworks outside or not?

Ambrose wandered, languished, dozed. Now and then he fell into his habit of rehearsing to himself the unadventurous story of his life, narrated from the third person point of view, from his earliest memory parenthesis of maple leaves stirring in the summer breath of tidewater Maryland end of parenthesis to the present moment. Its principal events, on this telling, would appear to have been *A, B, C,* and *D*.

He imagined himself years hence, successful, married, at ease in the world, the trials of his adolescence far behind him. He has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday: how Ocean City has changed! But at one seldom at one ill-frequented end of the boardwalk a few derelict amusements survive from times gone by: the great carrousel from the turn of the century, with its monstrous griffins and mechanical concert band; the roller coaster rumored since 1916 to have been condemned; the mechanical shooting gallery in which only the image of our enemies changed. His own son laughs with Fat May and wants to know what a funhouse is Ambrose hugs the sturdy lad close and smiles around his pipestem at his wife.

The family's gone home. Mother sits between Father and Uncle Karl, who teases him good-naturedly who chuckles over the fact that the comrade with whom he'd fought his way shoulder to shoulder through the funhouse had turned out to be a blind negro girl – to their mutual discomfort, as they'd opened their souls. But such are the walls of custom, which even. Whose arm is where? How must it feel. He dreams of a funhouse vaster by far than any yet constructed; but by then they may be out of fashion, like steamboats and excursions trains. Already quaint and seedy: the draperied ladies on the frieze of the carrousel are his father's father's mooncheeked dreams; if he thinks of it more he will vomit his apple-on-a-stick.

He wonders: will he become a regular person? Something has gone wrong; his vaccination didn't take; at the Boy-Scout initiation campfire he only pretended to be deeply moved, as he pretends to this hour that it is not so bad after all in the funhouse, and that he has a little limp. How long will it last? He envisions a truly astonishing funhouse, incredibly complex yet utterly controlled from a great central switchboard like the console of a pipe organ. Nobody had enough

imagination. He could design such a place himself, wiring and all, and he's only thirteen years old. He would be its operator: panel lights would show what was up in every cranny of its cunning of its multifarious vastness; a switch-flick would ease this fellow's way, complicate that's, to balance things out; if anyone seemed lost or frightened, all the operator had to do was.

He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator – though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed.

ABSTRACT: The opposite of *concrete;* used to describe a word or group of words representing attitudes, generalities, ideas, or qualities that cannot be apprehended directly through the senses. The language of philosophy and science tends to be abstract.

ALLEGORY: A type of narrative that attempts to reinforce its thesis by making its characters (and sometimes its events and setting, as well) represent specific abstract ideas or qualities; see also *Fable, Parable,* and *Symbol.*

ALLITERATION: The repetition in two or more nearby words of initial consonant sounds. See also *Assonance* and *Consonance.*

ALLUSION: A reference, generally brief, to a person, place, thing, or event with which the reader is presumably familiar.

AMBIGUITY: A word, phrase, event, or situation that may be understood or interpreted in two or more ways, each valid in the immediate context.

ANTAGONIST: The rival or opponent against whom the major charter (the *protagonist* or *hero*) is contending.

ASSONANCE: The repetition in two or more nearby words of similar vowel sounds; see also *consonance* and *alliteration.*

ATMOSPHERE: The mood or feeling pervading a literary work.

CHANCE AND COINCIDENCE: Chance refers to events or "happenings" within a plot that occur without sufficient prepara-

tion; coincidence to the accidental occurance of two (or more) events that have a certain correspondence.

CHARACTER: An individual within a literary work.

CHARACTERIZATION: The process by which an author creates, develops, and presents a character.

CLIMAX: See *crisis.*

COMPLICATION: That part of the plot in which the conflict is developed and intensified; sometimes reffered to as the *rising action.*

CONCLUSION: See *resolution.*

CONCRETE: Opposite of *abstract.* Language reffering directly to what we see, hear, touch, taste, or smell is concrete. Most literature uses concrete language and expresses even abstract concepts concretely through images and metaphors.

CONFIDANT: The individual, often a minor character, to whom a major character reveals, or "confesses," his or her most private thoughts and feelings. authors and playwrights use the confidant as a device to communicate necessary information to the reader and audience.

CONFLICT: The struggle or encounter within the plot of two opposing forces that serves to create reader or audience interest and suspense.

CONNOTATION: The meaning suggested or implied by a given word or phrase, as opposed to its literal meaning; see *denotation.*

CONSONANCE: The repetition in two or more nearby words of similar consonant sounds preceded by different accented vowels. When it occurs at the end of lines, consonance often serves as a substitute for *end rhyme*; see *alliteration*.

CRISIS: That point during the plot when the action reaches its turning point; also called the climax.

DENOTATION: The literal, dictionary meaning of a given word or phrase; see *connotation*.

DENOUMENT: A term sometimes used for the final *resolution* of the conflict or complications of the plot.

DICTION: The author's choice or selection of words (vocabulary). The artistic arrangement of those words constitutes *style*.

EPISODE: A single unified incident within a narrative that may or may not advance the plot.

EXPOSITION: The part of a work that provides necessary background information.

FABLE: A story with a moral lesson, often employing animals who talk and act like human beings: see *allegory*.

FALLING ACTION: The part of a dramatic plot that follows the *crisis* (or *climax*) and precedes the *resolution* (or *denouement*).

FICTION: A prose narrative that is the product of the imagination.

GENRE: A *form*, class, or type of literary work – e.g., the short

story, novel, poem, play, or essay; often used to denote such literary subclassifications as the detective story, the gothic novel, the pastoral elegy, or the revenge tragedy.

HERO/HEROINE: The central character in a literary work; also often referred to as the *protagonist*.

INITIATION STORY: Commonly used to describe a narrative focusing on a young person's movement from innocence toward maturity as a result of experience.

IRONY: Refers to some contrast or discrepency between appearance and reality.

METAPHOR: A figure of speech in which two unlike objects are implicitly compared without the use of *like* or *as*; see also *simile*.

MOTIVE: The cause that moves a character to act.

NARRATIVE: A series of unified events: see *plot* .

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE: The author's method of presenting or telling a story.

NARRATOR: The character or voice that tells the story; see *point of view*.

NOVEL: The name generally applied to any long fictional prose narative.

ONOMATOPOEIA: A word (or a group of words) whose sound has the effect of suggesting or reinforcing its denotative meaning.

PARABLE: A story designed to convey or illustrate a moral lesson; see *allegory* and *fable*.

PARADOX: A self-contradictory and absurd statement that turns out to be, in some sense at least, actually true and valid.

PARODY: A form of humour that ridicules a particular literary work or style.

PERSONIFICATION: A figure of speech in which an idea or thing is given human attributes or feelings or is spoken of as if it were alive.

PLOT: The patterned arrangement of the events in a narrative or play. See also *exposition, complication, crisis, falling action*, and *resolution*.

POINT OF VIEW: The angle or perspective from which a story is told.

PREFACE: The author's or editor's introduction, in which the writer states his or her purposes and assumptions and makes any acknowledgments.

PROTAGONIST: The chief character of a literary work. Also commonly referred to as the *hero* or *heroine*; see *antagonist*.

PUN: A play of words, involving words with similar or identical sounds but with different meanings.

RESOLUTION: The final section of the plot in which the major conflict, issue, or problem is resolved; also referred to as the *conclusion* or *denouement*.

RISING ACTION: See *complication.*

SETTING: The time and place in which the action of a story, poem, or play occurs; physical setting alone is often referred to as the *locale.*

SHORT STORY: A short work of narrative prose fiction. The distinction between the short story and novel is mainly one of length.

SIMILE: A figure of speech in which two essentially dissimilar objects are expressly compared with one another by the use of *like* or *as;* see *metaphor.*

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: The narrative method of capturing and representing the inner workings of a character's mind.

STRUCTURE: The overall pattern, design, or organization of a literary work.

STYLE: The author's characteristic manner of expression; style includes the author's diction, syntax, sentence patterns, punctuation, and spelling, as well as the use made of such devices as sound, rhythm, imagery, and figurative language.

SUBPLOT: The subplot (also called the minor plot or underplot) is a secondary action or complication within a fictional or dramatic work that often serves to reinforce or contrast the main plot.

SUSPENCE: The psychological tension or anxiety resulting from the reader's or audience's uncertainty of just how a situation or conflict is likely to end.

SYMBOL: Literally, something that stands for something else. In

literature, any word, object, action, or character that embodies and evokes a range of additional meaning and significance; see *allegory*.

THEME: The controlling idea or meaning of a work of art.

TONE: The author's attitude towards the subject or audience.

UNRELIABLE NARRATIVE: A narrator whose knowledge and judgements about characters or events is sufficiently incomplete or flawed to render him an unreliable guide to the author's intentions.

VERISIMILITUDE: The quality of being lifelike or true to actuality.

გამომცემლობის რედაქტორი მ. ჩიკვილაძე
ტექ. რედაქტორი ი. ნავროზაშვილი
კორექტორი მ. კილაძე

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