Dept. of English

Introduction to Literary Criticism

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 **أنشطة ومهام.**

Contents

INTRODUCTION

This course is designed to educate students into the basics of literary theory with an introduction to a few schools of criticism. These different trends of literary criticism act as different lenses critics use to view and write about literature.

The different lenses also allow critics to focus on particular aspects of a work they consider important. For example, if a critic is working with the Marxist theory, s/he might focus on how the characters in a story interact based on their economic situation. If a critic is working with the Post-colonial theory s/he might consider the same story but look at the interaction between characters from colonial powers - such as Britain or France - and characters from previously-colonized countries such as Africa or the Caribbean.

Therefore, this course is an attempt to provide the student with the basic questions that each school of criticism addresses when dealing with any work of literature. This textbook also includes a few selected short stories and poems that would help the student apply what he/she has learned about the different literary theories.

Conventional Ways of Reading Literature:

A literary critic, a person who examines how a piece of writing works, what it says about the culture or author that produced it or about human nature in general, why it was written, and in what ways it is similar to other works. In short, to be a successful critic, you need to be a resourceful reader, one who can utilize the principles of more than a single school of literary analysis and who can write with insight, understanding, and clarity.

Taking a course in literary criticism is an exercise in discovering how many different ways you can read a single text. Some approaches will be familiar—so familiar that they may seem to be not so much special strategies for dealing with a work but simply the natural way to read. Others may seem more bizarre and complex, at least at first. You will likely recognize the perspectives discussed in this chapter, because they have probably served as the organizing bases for courses you have taken or

assignments you have been given. They include approaching a text from a social viewpoint, which involves history and biography; seeing it as representative of a particular genre; fitting it into the whole body of a writer's work; or applying particular ways of thinking to it, such as comparison and contrast or cause and effect. These "tried and true" methods continue to be helpful to understanding literature.

Conventional Ways of Writing About Literature:

Sometimes you will receive an assignment that is based less on specific subject matter than on a way of thinking about a text. It might be an approach that could be applied to many texts, not just the one assigned for study. For example, your instructor might assign an essay that compares and contrasts the character of Oliver Twist with the character of another boy depicted in a story about a boy who lived in similar circumstances. Such assignments ask you to

use a specific thinking technique, which has its own rules of governance, instead of looking for a body of information that may be ordered in numerous ways. Some of the more common assignments that take this form include making an explication, doing an analysis, comparing and contrasting, and studying the works of a single author. Each requires that you formulate a response, your own argument about the topic. The statement of that position is commonly referred to as your thesis statement.

1] Explication

An explication, sometimes called by its French name, *explication de texte*, usually examines a fairly brief work or sometimes a single passage from a larger one. In it, you are expected to present an interpretation of the work, explain its meaning, or show how the writer achieves a particular effect. To do so you make a close reading, noting all the nuances of the language and style and then assessing how they fit together to create the whole. It is important to

remember that an explication is not a summary. That is, it is not a brief recitation of plot, which can result from following the chronological sequence of events, nor is it a paraphrase of a poem, which comes from examining the poem line by line or stanza by stanza. Instead, you should think about the work or passage in terms of significant literary elements, such as symbols, motifs, or figurative language, and then point out the meanings and effects they have.

2] Analysis

An analysis of anything involves dividing it into its parts, then noting how they relate to or create the whole. Analysis is a traditional assignment popular with teachers of literature, because it can be applied to the study of characters, plot structure, or imagery—a wide variety of literary elements. For example, if you were asked to analyze the character of Oliver Twist you would think about various aspects of his being, such as his family background, societal pressures, education, and experiences.

3] Comparison and Contrast

Essay questions on examinations often take the form of comparison and contrast because the form allows an instructor to assess your knowledge about more than one topic in a single question. It also makes evident your ability to think critically, as it asks you to assess the similarities and differences of two persons or things, usually with a view to evaluating their worth relative to one another.

4] Study of a Single Author's Works

An analysis of several works by the same author takes the basic techniques of comparison and contrast one step further, for it continues to search for characteristics that recur from one work to another, albeit sometimes with variations and changes. You are trying to find the artist's creative fingerprints—what makes him or her unique and, thereby, recognizable. Regardless of how many works by a single author you choose to consider in your analysis, you should

prepare yourself by reading as many as possible. The more you have read of a single writer's work, the easier it will be for you to identify typical attitudes, concerns, and strategies. You will know that you are ready to discuss significant characteristics when you can recognize a poem or story as probably having been written by a particular person, even when the authorship was not disclosed. Topics that grow out of such studies are numerous. For example, you can focus your attention on a given theme or issue, the recurring treatment of certain social values, repeated stylistic characteristics, or reflections of the author's own experiences. In all cases, you will want to trace the appearance of whatever you are examining through several works of the same author.

Engaging the Text:

Regardless of the assignment you are given, practicing literary criticism requires more than a single effort or skill. Even answering a question in class requires that you think about your response

before speaking. Written criticism requires still more care. Whether you are dealing with a long research paper or an essay question on an exam, the job calls on you to carry out several complex tasks, and the process can be overwhelming if you try to think about the various steps all at once.

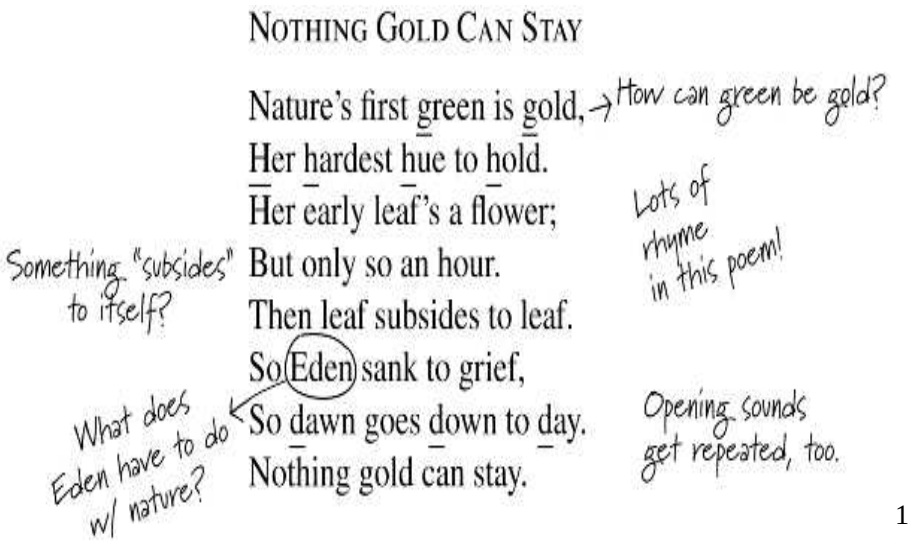
As a result, the hard part for many people is getting started, as where to begin isn't always obvious. To gain some control over the process, you can use several simple techniques to help make your initial approach. They take little time but can pay big dividends later. The techniques suggested as starting points here involve connecting reading and writing so that you can discover what you have to say. They include making marginal notations, keeping a reading log, and using prewriting strategies.

Adding Marginal Notations:

One reason that reading and writing seem to be two parts of a whole is that they sometimes take place at the same time. During the first reading of a work,

for example, you may find yourself underlining sentences, putting question marks or checks in the margins, highlighting passages, or circling words that you don't understand.

You may not think of such cryptic markings as writing at all, but they are, in fact, representations of what you think and feel as you go through a text. And because nobody completely takes in a work the first time through, these markings can serve as starting points for the next reading. They will help you find those passages and ideas that you wanted to think about some more or perhaps didn't understand at all. You will be glad when you return to a work to find that you left some footprints to follow. Look at how a first-time reader responded to Robert Frost's poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay."



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The advantage of marginal notations is that they don't interrupt your reading very much. They are, however, usually too terse and superficial to serve as the basis of a full-scale analysis. Several other techniques that will connect your reading with your writing in more substantive ways include keeping a reading log and using prewriting strategies.

(1) **Dobie, Ann.** ***Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*****. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2012, P.3.**

Keeping a Reading Log:

If you do make marginal and textual notes while you read, you will have the rough beginnings of a reading log. A log amplifies the process and thus requires a separate notebook for your comments. You may even want to skip the marginal markings and use the notebook from the beginning. Several kinds of information, depending in part on how familiar you are with a work, will be appropriate for your reading log. When you read something for the first time, you are likely to make notes about relatively basic information.

If you are reading a narrative, for example, you may want to answer such questions as the following:

■ Where is the action happening?

■ What are the relationships of the characters?

■ Which character(s) do I find to be the most interesting?

■ Which one(s) do I care for most?

■ Which one(s) do I dislike the most?

You might even want to pause in the middle of your reading to speculate about the following:

■ What do I want to happen?

■ What am I afraid will happen? What do I think will happen?

■ What have I read that prompted the answers to these questions?

If you are reading a poem, you may want to record answers to questions like these:

■ Who is the speaker of the poem? (Remember, the speaker is not necessarily the poet.)

■ What do I know about him or her?

■ What is his or her occasion for saying it?

■ Where does the poem take place?

■ Who is listening?

■ Which lines seem to be the most important?

■ Which words resonate powerfully with me?

■ Do they give me insight into the poem as a whole?[2]

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(2) Dobie, Ann. Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2012, Pp.4-5.

Another way of beginning to think about a work is to jot down questions, memories it has called up, arguments with the ideas, or speculations about how the author came to write it. These considerations will help you connect with what you have read, not simply focus your attention on the text itself. They will make it more meaningful to you as an individual.

It is often in personal interaction with a work that you begin to make meaning as a writer-critic. When you are more familiar with the work, you will want to address more complex issues in your reading log or journal. You have several different models to follow, including the following:

- **<u>Use it as a learning log</u>: Divide a page into vertical halves, noting page numbers, phrases, or words from the text on one side and your own response on the other. On your side of the page, you may express confusion, record definitions of words you don't know, question connotations, argue with the**

text, note the recurrence of an image—whatever you think you should return to later.

- **<u>Use it as a dialogue journal</u>: This uses the same format as a learning log, except you devote one side of the page to your comments and leave the other half for comments from another reader (student, friend, teacher, etc.).**
- **<u>Use it as a "what if" journal</u> in which you respond to hypothetical questions such as these: If you could talk to the author (or one of the characters or the narrator), what questions would you ask? What objections would you raise?**
- **<u>Use it as a vocabulary journal</u> in which you record all the words with which you are unfamiliar.**
- **<u>Use it as a personal writing journal:</u> Include informal free-writes on a passage or a scene; a descriptive paragraph, poem, or short narrative about an experience the text brings to mind; or an imagined conversation between two characters.**

When you have finished reading a text, recording a summary paragraph about your reactions on your log will help you pull together what you think about the work. A word of caution: Don't let too much time pass between reading a work and writing your summary paragraph. Responses fade quickly, and the longer you wait to set down your feelings and ideas, the less pointed and vibrant they will be[3].

(3) **Dobie, Ann.** ***Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism.*** **Boston: Cengage Learning, 2012, Pp.4-5.**

Chapter 2
Formalist Criticism

Formalist criticism is a theoretical approach that provides readers with a way to understand and enjoy a work for its own inherent value as a piece of literary art. Formalist critics are basically concerned with analyzing irony, paradox, imagery, and metaphor. They are also interested in a work's setting, characters, symbols, and point of view. Thus, formalist criticism is concerned exclusively with the text in isolation from the context, author, or reader.

Formalism is also known as the 'New Criticism'. This critical approach examines a literary text or art work through its aesthetic composition such as form, language, technique and style. Formalists believe that the art-object can be isolated from social, cultural and historical influences and examined as an autonomous whole. The formalist approach considers the form, structure or shape of the text, as well as technical

features, more important than the content and context. Today, however, a 'formalist' approach does not exist as a singular, 'pure' critical method. Across English departments students are taught to use concrete examples from the text to illustrate and validate their interpretations. The exercise of close reading or focusing on a text's composition and technique is widely accepted as the most valuable way of approaching the literary piece.

The focus of any formalist analysis will centre on grammatical, rhetorical, and logical connections within texts. A formalist approach will evoke technical vocabulary to examine a piece of work. The form, tone, language, characterization, figures of speech, point of view, setting and theme of a text constitute a universe of ideas within an internal order. Formalists will examine the sound and syntax of poetic language, rhyme, stanza forms, and repetitive imagery or word pictures. Formalists are conscious of the literary text as a construction manipulated to evoke particular responses, although reader response is beyond the

control of any artist. Formalists prioritize the medium over the content. As implicated in the term 'formalism', 'form' is considered synonymous to content.

Criticism of this approach tends to centre on formalism's exclusion of subject matter, context and social values. Formalists are also criticized for not observing the dangers of focusing on language and semiotics alone to the exclusion of the complex process of creation and publication, as well as reader response. Inevitably, critics of formalism contend that the text cannot exist in isolation from the audience for which it was written, nor can the text be constructed outside the social energies that indirectly shape form, or inspire the selection of one form, genre or medium over another.

Other names of formalist criticism:

1. **Russian Formalism**
2. **New Criticism**

3. **Aesthetic criticism**
4. **Textual criticism**
5. **Ontological criticism**
6. **Modernism**
7. **Formalism**
8. **Practical criticism**

Historical Background

Precursors:

- **Aristotle focused on the "elements" with which a work is composed.**
- **The Romantics stressed organic unity from imaginations' "esemplastic" power.**
- **Poe extolled the "singleness of effect" in poetry & fiction.**
- **James made the same case for fiction as "organic form."**

British practitioners:

- **I. A. Richards**
- **William Empson**
- **F.R. Leavis**

American practitioners:

- **W.K. Wimsatt**
- **Allen Tate**
- **Robert Penn Warren**
- **Richard Blackmur**
- **Cleanth Brooks**
- **John Crowe Ransom**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is an English poet, literary critic and philosopher. With his friend William Wordsworth, he founded the Romantic Movement in England. He is one of the three "Lake Poets." His most

celebrated work is the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

- **Form to him is not simply the visible, external shape of literature. It was something "*organic,*" "*innate.*"**
- **"*It shapes as it develops itself from within, the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such is life, such the form*!"**

NEW CRITICISM

- **New criticism is a form of formalist formed as a reaction to the prevalent attention that scholars and teachers in the early part of the 20th century who paid to the biographical and historical context of a work thereby diminishing the attention given to the literature itself.**
- **Informally began in 1920s at Vanderbilt University in discussions among John Crowe**

Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks.

- **They published a literary magazine called The Fugitive for three years.**
- **They influenced writers and theorists abroad such as T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, and William Empson.**
- **Practice of close-reading the text**
- **Practice of appreciation of order**
- **Asserts that understanding a work comes from looking at it as a self-sufficient object with formal elements**
- **To know how a work creates meaning became the quest**

T.S. Eliot:

T.S. Eliot's full name is Thomas Stearns Eliot. He is an essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic. He is one of the twentieth century's major poets. He penned famous poems such as "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men."

- **He proposed the idea called "objective correlative" which tells how emotion is expressed in art.**
- **"A set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion…"**
- **"When external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience; are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."**

RUSSIAN FORMALISM

- **Its practitioners were influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure (French linguist and literary critic).**
- **They believe that literature is a systematic set of linguistic and structural elements that can be analyzed.**
- **They saw literature as a self-enclosed system that can be studied not for its content but for its form.**
- **Form was more important than the content.**

A Formalist critic does:

1. **Examine all the elements of a text individually based on a very close reading of the text.**
2. **Question how these elements come together to create a work of art.**
3. **Achieve understanding of it by looking inside it, not outside or beyond.**
4. **Analyze:**
    a. **How the elements work together to form unity of form.**
    b. How the work is structured or organized (formed).
    c. How it begins / How it is advancing /transiting to the next lines / How it ends.
    d. How the plot is built.
    e. How the plot relates to its structure.
    f. How each part of the work relates to the work as a whole.
    g. How all the parts relate to one another.

h. How the narrator/speaker narrates the story (Point of view of the narrator).
i. The major and the minor characters.
j. How the characters are related to one another.
k. Actions of the characters.
l. The language of the literary work.
m. Style of the writing
n. Literary devices such as imageries, similes, metaphors, ironies, paradox, etc.
o. How the literary devices function to create meaning.

A Formalist critic DOES NOT:

1. **Look beyond the work by reading the author's biography, or literary style.**
2. **Examine the work's historical background and condition of society.**
3. **Compare the text's influences or prior similarity with other works.**

4. **Take the elements distinct and separate from each other.**
5. **Treat the text as an expression of social, religious, or political ideas; neither does it reduce the text to being a promotional effort for some cause or belief.**
6. **View works through the lens of feminism, psychology, Marxism, or any other philosophical standpoint.**
7. **Pay attention to the work's effect on the reader.**

THEREFORE: the following doesn't appear in Formalist criticism:

1. **Paraphrasing: Any change to a text – whether in form, diction, or unifying devices – makes the work no longer itself.**
   A. **To restate a poem or summarize or summarize a story is to lose it.**
   B. **Its uniqueness disappears.**

C. **Any alteration of wording or structure or point of view changes the meaning of the original and cannot, therefore, be valid.**

2. **<u>Intention</u>: The author's intention in writing the piece is not important, but what the author did is the main concern.**

   A. **To indulge concern about what he (author) had planned to do is to commit Intentional fallacy.**

   B. **Intentional fallacy refers to the belief that the meaning of a work may be determined by the author's intention.**

   C. **Even if the intention of the author is obvious, it may not have been carried out.**

3. **<u>Biography</u>: Biography is the study of author's life, and by extension, social and historical conditions in which the work was written, does little to reveal how a work creates meaning.**

   A. **The work is not the writer, nor is the writer the work.**

4. **Affect:** **As readers digress by paying attention to other things, they can also go astray by paying attention to their own reaction to the work.**
   A. **By asking the work's effect on the reader or audience, they shift their attention to results rather than the work itself.**
   B. **Such activity will lead to affective fallacy, which refers to the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by its affect on the reader.**

Writing a Formalist Criticism:

Prewriting:

1. **Revisit your reading log or marginal notation.**
2. **See how the keywords are woven together.**
3. **Revisit the text and look for:**
   A. **patterns,**
   B. **recurrences,**
   C. **visual motifs,**

D. repeated words and phrases for meaning;

E. unity – meaningful coherence of the elements

F. tension – identify the effects produced by paradox and irony.

4. Start free writing about what you have read and begin with:

A. a symbol

B. a strong image

C. a particular element

D. a reaction or

E. an observation

Drafting and Revising:

1. Introduction. Present a summary statement about how various elements work together to make a whole. Continue with the draft of your introduction. Alternately, begin by directly referencing the text itself by:

A. Recount a meaningful incident from a story or

B. Quote a few lines from the poem

C. Then explain why such incident or lines are important to understanding the text as a whole.

2. Body. The body of your work hows how your paper will be devoted to showing how the various elements of the text work together to create meaning. You must:

A. Cite examples on how the form, diction, and unity operate together to develop a theme

B. Observe unity, emphasis and coherence in detailing your examples

C. Focus on the literary elements rather than the plot or sequence of the story or the stanza of the poem.

3. Conclusion. State or reiterate the connection between form and content. Generalize about the over-all relationship of form and content. End your composition with a lasting impression by:

A. Giving a generalization or conclusion

B. Rhetorical question

C. **Strong conviction**

Important Guidelines:

1. **Form.**
   A. ***Look for motifs* – rhyme scheme, recurrences, repetitions, relationships, patterns, images, parallelism**
   B. ***Examine the Point of View* – (prosody) the narrator: personality, understanding, presentation, attitude**
   C. ***Scrutinize the structure* – plot (chronological), conflict (surface-subsurface)**
   D. ***Development of form* – similarities and differences**
2. **Diction.**
   A. ***Look for denotation/connotation* – allusions, etymology, synonyms**
   B. ***Examine the symbols* – objects, artifacts, events, actions, images**

C. ***Follow the work's unity*** **– how do elements conspire?**

3. **Unity.**

A. ***Follow the work's unity*** **– how do elements conspire?**

B. ***Watch out for tensions*** **– the conflict of these elements**

C. ***Analyze the figures of speech*** **– ambiguity, irony, paradox, etc.**

CHAPTER 3

Understanding the Basics of Literary Analysis

1] PLOT[4]:

The plot is the series of events and actions that occur in a story. A well-structured plot has to have the following components:

A. CONFLICT: in fiction is the opposition of forces or characters. A conflict is what fuels the action. Complications in the plot fuel the rising action and may incite later events. Longer works may have several "complications." The following are the most common types of conflicts:

1. **Man versus Man**
2. **Man versus Nature**
3. **Man versus Social conventions**
4. **Man versus self (human nature).**

B. DIVISIONS OF THE PLOT:

[4] **Ansen Dibell. *Plot*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1988. Print.**

1. Exposition: how readers learn details previous to the story's beginning; for instance, details that introduce the setting or the characters in the story.

2. Rising Action: significant actions that lead toward the climax of the story.

3. Diversion: any episode prior to the climax that does not contribute directly to the rising action or add to the suspense (example: comic relief in tragedy).

4. Climax: the moment in the story at which a crisis reaches its highest intensity; for instance, a confrontation between two conflicting characters.

4. Dénouement: or the Falling Action.

C. FLASHBACK: a scene inserted into the story to show events that occurred at an earlier time; this technique is used to complement the events in the "present" of the story.

D. FORESHADOWING: a literary device in which the outcome of the struggle or conflict is anticipated by such elements as speeches or actions of characters or by symbols in the story.

E. RESOLUTION: Type of Conclusion/Ending:

1. **Happy ending – everything ends well and all is resolved.**
2. **Tragic or Unhappy ending – things do not end pleasantly, forcing the reader to contemplate the complexities of life.**
3. **Open-ended: no definitive ending or resolution occurs, leaving the reader to reflect upon the issues raised by the story.**

F. SUSPENSE: is what makes the reader asks what is going to happen next? Suspense is most often produced either by mystery or by dilemma.

G. ARTISTIC UNITY: is essential to a good, effective, successful story. Nothing in the story is irrelevant,

superfluous; that is, the story contains no detail or element that does not contribute to the meaning.

2] CHARACTERS/ CHARACTERIZATION[5]

Characterization is the process by which writers present and develop their fictional characters. Reading for character is more difficult than reading for plot, because character is much more complex and variable. Anyone can repeat what happens in a story, but considerable skill may be needed to describe the personality of a character. Immature readers demand that the characters be easily identifiable and clearly labeled as good or bad. They also demand that the main character always be an attractive one, whether he/she is good or evil. To discover and understand the people in the stories, students need to examine the following aspects[6]:

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[5] **James Scott Bell. *Elements of Fiction Writing*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2011. Print**

[6] **Kimberly Hill Campbell: *Less Is More: Teaching Literature with Short Texts*. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers 2007, P.44.**

METHODS OF CHARACTERIZATION: *[“Show and Tell”; or Telling versus Showing]*

1. **Direct Presentation: The writer states directly what the character is like. Example: "*Adam is a tall, dark-skinned 18-year old boy*."**
2. **Indirect Presentation: The writer shows the characters through actions, behavior, speech, and thoughts.**

TYPES OF CHARACTERS:

1. **Flat: a one-dimensional character, typically not central to the story.**
2. **Round: a complex, fully-developed character, usually prone to change.**
3. **Stock: “borrowed” personage or archetype (ex. old, longed-nosed, as evil witch). Closely related to stereotype.**
4. **Stereotype: a character so little individualized as to show only qualities of an occupation, or national, ethnic, or other group to which s/he belongs.**

FUNCTION OF CHARACTER:

1. **Protagonist: the principle figure in the story, the central character. The protagonist does not have to be a hero or an angel, since we have vampires and murderers as central characters in stories. But protagonists here refer to the central character whether it is a good or bad character.**
2. **Antagonist: the character with whom the protagonist is engaged in a struggle. Again here the antagonist does not need to be a villain.**

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD CHARACTER:

When the writer creates his/her fictional characters he pays considerable effort to present to the reader a convincing character. There are three aspects through which we judge if the writer managed to present successful characters to the reader:

- **Consistent**

- **Life-like**
- **Motivated**

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT:

It is the change that a character undergoes from the beginning of a story to the end. The importance of a character to the story determines how fully the character is developed:

1. Static: these can be either round or flat characters, but they do not change during the story. Folktales, fairytales, and other types use static and flat characters whose actions are predictable, so the reader is free to concentrate on the action and theme.

2. Dynamic: a developing character, usually at the center of the action, who changes or grows to a new awareness of life.

3] Point of View[7]

Who is telling the story? Does our narrator have direct knowledge of the story because he or she is a participant? What are the limitations of the narrator's point of view? Writers realize that there are many ways of telling a story. They decide upon a method before they begin, or discover one while in the act of writing. Instead of telling the story themselves, writers may let one of the characters tell it; they may tell it by means of letters or diaries[8].

To determine the point of view of a story we ask, "Who tells the story?" and "How much is he allowed to know?" and, "To what extent does the author look inside his characters and report their thoughts and feelings?" There are many possible variations and combinations for the point of view of any story, but the basic points of view are four:

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[7] **http://jbennettenglish.webly.com/uploads/4/6/6/46464821/pov_instruct_grasshoper.pdf**

[8] **Kimberly Hill Campbell:** ***Less Is More: Teaching Literature with Short Texts*****. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers, 2007, P.62.**

1. **Omniscient**
2. **Limited Omniscient**
3. **First person**
4. **Objective (Dramatic)**

1. The omniscient point of view

In the omniscient point of view the story is told by the author, using the third person, and his knowledge is unlimited. He is free to go wherever he wishes, to look inside the minds and hearts of his characters and tell us what they are thinking or feeling. He can interpret their behavior; and he can comment on the significance of the story he/she is telling.

The following version of Aesop's fable "*The Ant and the Grasshopper*" is told from the omniscient point of view. In this version we are told not only what the characters do and say, but also what they think and feel. At the end of the story the author comments on the significance of his story.

(The phrases in which the author enters into the thoughts or feelings of the ant and the grasshopper have been italicized; the comments by the author are printed in capitals:

> ***Weary in every limb,*** **the ant tugged over the snow a piece of corn he had stored up last summer.** ***It would taste mighty good at dinner tonight.***
>
> **A grasshopper,** ***cold and hungry,*** **looked on.** ***Finally he could bear it no longer.*** **Please, friend ant, may I have a bite of corn?"**
>
> **"What were you doing all last summer?" asked the ant. He looked the grasshopper up and down.** ***He knew its kind.***
>
> **"I sang from dawn till dark," replied the grasshopper,** ***happily unaware of what was coming next.***

"Well," said the ant, *hardly bothering to conceal his contempt,* "since you sang all summer, you can dance all winter."

HE WHO IDLES WHEN HE'S YOUNG

WILL HAVE NOTHING WHEN HE'S OLD

The omniscient is the most flexible point of view, and allows for the widest scope. Yet, it is also the most subject to abuse by the writer. It presents constant danger that the author may come between the reader and the story, or that the continual shifting of viewpoint from character to character may cause a breakdown in coherence or unity. If the writer uses the omniscient viewpoint skillfully it enables the author to achieve concurring breadth and depth. If used unskillfully, it can destroy the illusion of reality that the story attempts to create.

2. The limited omniscient point of view:

In the limited omniscient point of view the author tells the story in the third person, but he tells it from the viewpoint of one character in the story. He moves both inside and outside this character, but never leaves his side. The author looks at the events of the story through his eyes and through his mind. He tells us what this character sees and hears, and what he/she thinks and feels. He/she knows everything about this character – more than the character knows about him/herself; but he/she shows no knowledge of what other characters are thinking or feeling or doing. The chosen character may be either a major or a minor character.

Here is "The Ant and the Grasshopper" told in the third person, from the point of view of the *ant*. Notice that this time we are told nothing of what the grasshopper thinks or feels. We see and hear and know of him only from what the ant sees and hears and knows:

Weary in every limb, **the ant tugged over the snow a piece of corn he had stored up last summer.** ***It would taste mighty good at dinner tonight. It was then that he noticed the grasshopper, looking cold and pinched.***

"Please, friend ant, may I have a bite of your corn?" asked the grasshopper

He looked the grasshopper up and down. "What were you doing all last summer?" he asked. ***He knew its kind.***

"I sang from dawn till dark," replied the grasshopper.

"Well," said the ant, ***hardly bothering to conceal his contempt,*** **since you sang all summer, you can dance all winter."**

The limited omniscient point of view, since it introduces the world to the reader through the mind and senses of only one person, approximates more closely, than the omniscient, the conditions of real life;

it also offers a ready-made unifying element, since all details of the story are the experience of one person. At the same time it offers a limited field of observation, for the reader can go nowhere except where the chosen character goes. An unskillful writer will constantly have his focal character listening at keyholes, accidentally overhearing important conversations, or coincidentally being present when important events occur.

3. First Person point of view:

In the first person point of view the author disappears into one of the characters, who tells the story in the first person. This character, again, may be either a major or a minor character, protagonist or observer, and it will make considerable difference whether the protagonist tells his own story or someone else tells it.

The story below is told in the first person from the point of view of the grasshopper. (The whole story

is italicized, because it all comes out of the grasshopper's mind:

> ***Cold and hungry, I watched the ant tugging over the snow a piece of corn he had stored up last summer. My feelers twitched, and I was conscious of a tic in my left hind leg. Finally I could bear it no longer. "Please, friend ant," I asked, "may I have a bite of your corn?"***
>
> **He looked me up and down. "What were you doing all last summer?" he asked, rather too smugly it seemed to me.**
>
> **"I sang from dawn till dark," I said innocently, remembering the happy times.**
>
> **"Well," he said, with a priggish sneer, "since you sang all summer, you can dance all winter."**

The first person point of view shares the virtues and limitations of the limited omniscient. It offers, sometimes, a gain in immediacy and reality, since we get the story directly from a participant. It offers no opportunity, however, for direct interpretation by the author, and there is constant danger that the narrator may be made to transcend his sensitivity, his knowledge, or his powers of language in telling the story.

4. The objective point of view:

In the objective point of view the author disappears into a kind of roving sound camera. This camera can go anywhere, but can record only what is seen and heard. It cannot comment, interpret, or enter a character's mind. With this point of view (sometimes also called the dramatic point of view) the reader is placed in the position of a spectator at a movie or play. He sees what the characters do, and hears what they say, but can only infer what they think or feel and what they are like. The author is not there to explain.

The purest example of a story told from the objective point of view would be one written entirely in dialogue, for as soon as the author adds words of his own, he begins to interpret through his very choice of words. Actually, a few stories using this point of view are antiseptically pure, for the limitations it imposes on the author are severe.

(Since we are nowhere taken into the thoughts or feelings of the characters, none of this version is printed in italics:

> **The ant tugged over the snow a piece of corn he had stored up last summer, perspiring in spite of the cold.**
> **A grasshopper, its feelers twitching and with a tic in its left hind leg, looked on for some time. Finally he asked, "Please, friend ant, may I have a bite of your corn?"**

The ant looked the grasshopper up and down. "What were you doing all last summer?" he snapped.

"I sang from dawn till dark," replied the grasshopper, not changing his tone.

"Well," said the ant, and a faint smile crept into his face, "since you sang all summer, you can dance all winter."

The objective point of view has the most speed and the most action; also, it forces the reader to make his own interpretations. On the other hand, it must rely heavily on external action and dialogue, and it offers no opportunities for interpretation by the author.

Compare the different points of view?

Each of the points of view has its advantages, its limitations, and its peculiar uses. The author should choose the point of view that enables him to present his particular materials most effectively in terms of his purpose. If he is writing a murder mystery, he will

ordinarily avoid using the point of view of the murderer or the brilliant detective; otherwise he would have to reveal at the beginning the secrets which he wishes to conceal till the end.

For the reader the examination of point of view may be important both for understanding and for evaluating the story. First, he/she should know whether the events of the story are being interpreted by the author or by one of the characters. If the latter, he must ask how this character's mind and personality affect his interpretation, and whether his interpretation can be accepted at face value or must be discounted because of ignorance, stupidity, or self-deception.

4] SETTING:

Where, when, and under what circumstances? Special features of some settings include:

A. Where (place): The "physical" environment where the story takes place.

B. When (time): Time includes all of its dimensions. What was going on at that time? What is the period (century, decade, year) during which the action occurs? Over how many hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, etc. does the action take place?

5] STYLE[9]

Style refers to the qualities that distinguish the works of one author from another's, including:

A. *Diction:* word choice: formal/informal

B. *Sentence Structure* (simple or complex)

C. *Syntax:* sentence patterns of language - grammatical and ungrammatical arrangements of words

D. *Dialogue*: can be either more dialogue than description, or dialogue limited to certain characters, or simply lacking dialogue altogether.

E. *Imagery*: sensory details such as similes or metaphors.

F. *Allegory*: a literary work in which the symbols, characters, and events come to represent, in a somewhat point-to-point fashion, a different metaphysical, political, or social situation.

[9] **Lecture Series on University of New Mexico website: https://www.unm.edu/~hookster/Element%20of%20Fiction.pdf**

G. *Symbols*: symbols are concrete objects/images that stand for abstract subjects. The objects and images have meanings of their own but may be ascribed subjective connotations such as heart = love, skull & crossbones = poison, color green = envy; light bulb = idea[10].

The ability to recognize and to interpret symbols requires experience in literary readings, perception, and tact. However, sometimes a bird is just a bird, a cigar is just a smoke, and water is simply water. The ability to interpret symbols is essential to the full understanding and enjoyment of literature.

H. Motifs: recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the major themes (points) of the story.

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[10] **Lecture Series on University of New Mexico website: https://www.unm.edu/~hookster/Element%20of%20Fiction.pdf**

6] THEME[11]

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. The following are the defining features of a theme:

- ✓ **Theme is the central or dominating concept in a literary work, may be several, particularly in longer, complex fiction.**
- ✓ **The theme must be expressible in the form of a statement - not "motherhood" but "Motherhood sometimes has more frustrations than reward."**
- ✓ **A theme must be stated as a generalization about life. Names of characters or specific situations in the plot are not to be used when stating a theme.**
- ✓ **A theme must not be a generalization larger than is justified by the terms of the story.**
- ✓ **There is no single way of stating the theme of a story.**

[11] **Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York: Rosetta Books LLC 2002.**

- ✓ **Any statement that reduces a theme to some familiar saying, aphorism, or cliché should be avoided. Do not use "A stitch in time saves nine," "You can't judge a book by its cover, " "Fish and guests smell in three days," and so on.**

7] IRONY[12]

Irony **is a term with a range of meanings, all of them involving some sort of discrepancy. It should not be confused with sarcasm which is simply language designed to insult or to cause emotional pain. Irony is used to suggest the difference between appearance and reality, between expectation and fulfillment, the complexity of experience, to furnish indirectly an evaluation of the author's material, and at the same time to achieve compression.**

[12] **Lecture Series on University of New Mexico website: https://www.unm.edu/~hookster/Element%20of%20Fiction.pdf**

Three kinds of irony:

1. Verbal irony – what is said is actually the opposite of what is meant/intended. Verbal irony occurs when a narrator or character says one thing and means something else.

2. Dramatic irony occurs when a reader perceives something that a character or narrator in a work of literature does not know. It is also the contrast between what a character or narrator says and what a reader knows to be true.

3. Situational irony is the discrepancy between appearance and reality, or between expectation and fulfillment, or between what is and what would seem appropriate.

Selected Short Stories

Aunty Misery

This is a story about an old, very old woman who lived alone in her little hut with no other company than a beautiful pear tree that grew at her door. She spent all her time taking care of her pear tree. But the neighborhood children drove the old woman crazy by stealing her fruit. They would climb her tree, shake its delicate limbs, and run away with armloads of golden pears, yelling insults at "*Aunty Misery*," as they called her.

One day, a pilgrim stopped at the old woman's hut and asked her permission to spend the night under her roof. Aunty Misery saw that he had an honest face and bade the traveler come in. She fed him and made a bed for him in front of her hearth. In the morning while he was getting ready to leave, the stranger told her that he would show his gratitude for her hospitality by granting her one wish.

"*There is only one thing that I desire*," said Aunty Misery.

"*Ask, and it shall be yours*," replied the stranger, who was a sorcerer in disguise.

"*I wish that anyone who climbs up my pear tree should not be able to come back down until I permit it*."

"*Your wish is granted*," said the stranger, touching the pear tree as he left Aunty Misery's house.

And so it happened that when the children came back to taunt the old woman and to steal her fruit, she stood at her window watching them. Several of them shimmied up the trunk of the pear tree and immediately got stuck to it as if with glue. She let them cry and beg her for a long time before she gave the tree permission to let them go, on the condition that they never again steal her fruit or bother her.

Time passed and both Aunty Misery and her tree grew bent and gnarled with age. One day another traveler stopped at her door. This one looked suffocated and exhausted, so the old woman asked him what he wanted in her village. He answered her in a voice that was dry and hoarse, as if he had swallowed

a desert: "*I am Death, and I have come to take you with me*."

Thinking fast, Aunty Misery said, "*All right, but before I go I would like to pluck some pears from my beloved pear tree to remember how much pleasure it brought me in this life. But, I am a very old woman and cannot climb to the tallest branches where the best fruit is; will you be so kind as to do it for me*?"

With a heavy sigh like wind through a catacomb, Death climbed the pear tree. Immediately he became stuck to it as if with glue. And no matter how much he cursed and threatened, Aunty Misery would not give the tree permission to release Death.

Many years passed and there were no deaths in the world. The people who made their living from death began to protest loudly. The doctors claimed no one bothered to come in for examinations or treatments anymore, because they did not fear dying; the pharmacists' business suffered too because medicines are, like magic potions, bought to prevent or postpone the inevitable; the priests and undertakers

were unhappy with the situation also, for obvious reasons. There were also many old folks tired of life who wanted to pass on to the next world to rest from the miseries of this one.

Aunty Misery realized all this, and not wishing to be unfair, she made a deal with her prisoner, Death: if he promised not ever to come for her again, she would give him his freedom. He agreed. And that is why so long as the world is the world, Aunty Misery will always live.

Hilary's Aunt

By Cyril Hare

Cyril Hare is the pen-name of His Honor Judge Alfred Alexander Gordon Clark (1900-1958).

HILARY SMITH belonged to a good family, and his father never hesitated to mention this fact. The actual age of the family was doubtful, but Mr. Smith behaved like a man of the past. His ideas and manners were those of the Victorian age.

Unfortunately, Hilary himself had some unimportant trouble with the bank about a few cheques. It seemed a very slight matter to the young man, but not so to his father. Hilary was sent off to Australia without delay. Mr. Smith knew little about that place, but he understood one thing. It was a convenient country for those who did not like the customs of old England.

Hilary did not like Australia, and Australia did not like Hilary. He therefore took the earliest opportunity

of returning to England. He could not, of course, earn enough money to buy a ticket. So he had to wait until his father and his brother died. They fortunately did this at the same time. After that he received all the money which belonged to the good old family.

There was not a great deal of money, and Hilary soon spent it. (The old family had not been able to get much in recent years). when all the money had been spent, Hilary could do one of two things. He could die or work. The thought of neither of these gave him any pleasure. Then he remembered that he was not alone in the world. He possessed an aunt.

She was his father's only sister, and he knew little about her. His father's ancient ideas were responsible for this unfortunate fact. When her name was mentioned, he never looked very pleased. "Your aunt Mary brought no honor to the family," he said. Hilary, of course, tried to discover what she had done. It seemed that she had failed to marry a nobleman. Instead, she had chosen a husband who was connected

to “trade”. No old family could bear that sort of thing, of course. As soon as she became “Mrs. Prothero”, her brother considered her dead. Later on, Mr. Prothero died and left her a lot of money; but that didn't bring her back to life in her brother's opinion.

Hilary discovered his aunt's address by talking to the family lawyer. So, Hilary's sun shone again, and the old lady seemed to like him. When he was feeling honest, he could talk attractively. He frequently visited his aunt's house; and soon he was living comfortably in the building which the profits of trade had provided.

Hilary was very relieved when he was able to move into the house. He felt like a sailor who had just reached harbor. He had only about sixpence in his pocket.

One thing was immediately clear; his aunt was seriously ill. She acted bravely, but she was slowly dying. He had a private talk with her doctor which alarmed him greatly. The doctor told him that nothing

could cure the old woman. She might perhaps live for some time, but the end was certain.

“Her condition may become worse at any moment,” the doctor said. “When it has passed a certain stage, she won't want to live. No kind person will want her to live either.”

Hilary was very annoyed. Fate had found a home for him, and was now going to throw him out of it. Once again he would have to live in the hard world alone. There was only one thing that he could do. He chose an evening when his aunt was feeling better than usual. Then, very gently, he asked for details of her will.

When she heard the word “will”, his aunt laughed loudly. “Have I made a will?” she said. “Yes, of course I have. I left all my money to -----now, what was it? To whom did I leave it? Some religious people in China, I think. Or were they in Polynesia? I can't remember. Blenkinsop, the lawyer, will tell you about it. He still

has the will, I suppose. I was very religious when I was a girl."

"Did you make this will when you were a girl, Aunt Mary?"

"Yes, when I was twenty-one. Your grandfather told me to make a will. He believed that everyone ought to do that. I had no money then, of course, and so my will wasn't very useful."

Hilary had been filled with sorrow when he heard the first details; but now his eyes were happier again.

"Didn't you make another will when you were married?" he asked.

His aunt shook her head, "No," she said. "There was no need. I had nothing and John had everything. Then, after John died, I had a lot of money but no relations. What could I do with the money?" She looked at Hilary with steady eyes.

"Perhaps I ought to talk to Mr. Blenkinsop again," she suggested.

Hilary said that there was no need to hurry. Then he changed the subject.

On the next day he went to the public library and examined a certain book. It told him what he already believed. When a woman marries, an earlier will loses its value. A new will must be made. If no new will is made, the money goes to the nearest relation. Hilary knew that he was his aunt's only relation. His future was safe.

After a few months had passed, Hilary's problems became serious. The change in his aunt's condition showed that the doctor had been right. She went to bed and stayed there. It seemed certain that she would never get up again. At the same time Hilary badly needed money. He had expensive tastes, and owed a lot of money to shopkeepers. They trusted him because his aunt was rich; but their bills were terrible.

Unfortunately his aunt was now so ill that he could not easily talk to her. She did not want to discuss money matters at all. She was in great pain and could

hardly sleep; so she became angry when money was mentioned. In the end they had a quarrel about the small amount of ten pounds. She accused him of trying to get her money.

Hilary was not very angry. He understood that Aunt Mary was a sick woman. She was behaving strangely because she was ill. He remembered the doctor's words, and began to wonder about a new problem. Was it kind to want his aunt to live any longer? Was it not better for her to die now? He thought about this for a long time. When he went to bed, he was still thinking.

His aunt gave him some news in the morning. She told him that she was going to send for Mr. Blenkinsop.

So she was going to make a new will! Hilary was not sure that a new will would help him. She might leave all her money to someone else. What could he do then? He reached a clear decision. He must do a great kindness to the poor old woman.

Every night she took some medicine to make her sleep. Hilary decided to double the amount. He did not need to say anything to her about it. He could just put her to sleep for ever.

He found that it was a very easy thing to do. His aunt even seemed to help his plans. An old servant had been nursing her, and she told this woman to go out. So the servant went off to attend to her own affairs. She was told to prepare the medicine before she went out. Then Hilary could give it to his aunt at the proper time.

It was easy for Hilary. He had only to put some more medicine into the glass. If anything awkward happened, he could easily explain. He could say that he had not understood the plan. He had not known that the servant had put the medicine in. So he had put the proper amount into the glass. It was unfortunate, of course. The total amount was too great. But who would suspect dear Hilary?

His aunt took the glass from his hand with a grateful look. “Thank you, Hilary,” she said. “I want, more than anything, to sleep, and never to wake up again. That is my greatest wish.” She looked at him steadily. “Is that what you wish, Hilary? I have given you your chance. Forgive me if I am suspecting you wrongly. Sick people get these ideas, you know. If I am alive tomorrow, I shall do better for you. Mr. Blenkinsop is coming here, and I shall make a will in your favor. If I die tonight, you'll get nothing. Some people in China will get all the money. I ought, perhaps, to explain. John Prothero never married me. He already had a wife and couldn't marry again. That made your foolish father very angry with me .... No, Hilary, don't try to take the glass away. If you do that, I shall know; and I don't want to know. Good night, Hilary.”

Then, very carefully, she raised the glass to her lips and drank.

The Landlady

Roald Dahl

Billy Weaver had traveled down from London on the slow afternoon train, with a change at Reading on the way, and by the time he got to Bath, it was about nine o'clock in the evening, and the moon was coming up out of a clear starry sky over the houses opposite the station entrance. But the air was deadly cold and the wind was like a flat blade of ice on his cheeks.

"Excuse me," he said, "but is there a fairly cheap hotel not too far away from here?"

"Try The Bell and Dragon," the porter answered, pointing down the road. "They might take you in. It's about a quarter of a mile along on the other side." Billy thanked him and picked up his suitcase and set out to walk the quarter-mile to The Bell and Dragon. He had never been to Bath before. He didn't know anyone who lived there. But Mr. Greenslade at the

head office in London had told him it was a splendid town. "Find your own lodgings," he had said, "and then go along and report to the branch manager as soon as you've got yourself settled."

Billy was seventeen years old. He was wearing a new navy-blue overcoat, a new brown trilby hat, and a new brown suit, and he was feeling fine. He walked briskly down the street. He was trying to do everything briskly these days. Briskness, he had decided, was *the* one common characteristic of all successful businessmen. The big shots up at the head office were absolutely fantastically brisk all the time. They were amazing. There were no shops on this wide street that he was walking along, only a line of tall houses on each side, all of them identical. They had porches and pillars and four or five steps going up to their front doors, and it was obvious that once upon a time they had been very swanky residences. But now, even in the darkness, he could see that the paint was peeling from the woodwork on their doors and

windows and that the handsome white facades were cracked and blotchy from neglect.

Suddenly, in a downstairs window that was brilliantly illuminated by a street lamp not six yards away, Billy caught sight of a printed notice propped up against the glass in one of the upper panes. It said BED AND BREAKFAST. There was a vase of yellow chrysanthemums, tall and beautiful, standing just underneath the notice.

He stopped walking. He moved a bit closer. Green curtains (some sort of velvety material) were hanging down on either side of the window. The chrysanthemums looked wonderful beside them. He went right up and peered through the glass into the room, and the first thing he saw was a bright fire burning in the hearth. On the carpet in front of the fire, a pretty little dachshund was curled up asleep with its nose tucked into its belly. The room itself, so far as he could see in the half darkness, was filled with pleasant furniture. There was a baby grand piano and

a big sofa and several plump armchairs, and in one corner he spotted a large parrot in a cage. Animals were usually a good sign in a place like this, Billy told himself; and all in all, it looked to him as though it would be a pretty decent house to stay in. Certainly it would be more comfortable than The Bell and Dragon.

On the other hand, a pub would be more congenial than a boardinghouse. There would be beer and darts in the evenings, and lots of people to talk to, and it would probably be a good bit cheaper, too. He had stayed a couple of nights in a pub once before and he had liked it. He had never stayed in any boardinghouses, and, to be perfectly honest, he was a tiny bit frightened of them. The name itself conjured up images of watery cabbage, rapacious landladies, and a powerful smell of kippers in the living room.

After dithering about like this in the cold for two or three minutes, Billy decided that he would walk on

and take a look at The Bell and Dragon before making up his mind. He turned to go.

And now a queer thing happened to him. He was in the act of stepping back and turning away from the window when all at once his eye was caught and held in the most peculiar manner by the small notice that was there. BED AND BREAKFAST, it said. BED AND BREAKFAST, BED AND BREAKFAST, BED AND BREAKFAST. Each word was like a large black eye staring at him through the glass, holding him, compelling him, forcing him to stay where he was and not to walk away from that house, and the next thing he knew, he was actually moving across from the window to the front door of the house, climbing the steps that led up to it, and reaching for the bell.

He pressed the bell. Far away in a back room he heard it ringing, and then at once —it must have been at once because he hadn't even had time to take his finger from the bell button—the door swung open and a woman was standing there.

Normally you ring the bell and you have at least a half-minute's wait before the door opens. But this dame was like a jack-in-the-box. He pressed the bell—and out she popped! It made him jump.

She was about forty-five or fifty years old, and the moment she saw him, she gave him a warm, welcoming smile. "Please come in," she said pleasantly. She stepped aside, holding the door wide open, and Billy found himself automatically starting forward. The compulsion or, more accurately, the desire to follow after her into that house was extraordinarily strong.

"I saw the notice in the window," he said, holding himself back.

"Yes, I know."

"I was wondering about a room."

"It's all ready for you, my dear," she said. She had a round pink face and very gentle blue eyes.

“I was on my way to The Bell and Dragon,” Billy told her. “But the notice in your window just happened to catch my eye.”

“My dear boy,” she said, “why don’t you come in out of the cold?”

“How much do you charge?”

“Five and sixpence a night, including breakfast.”

It was fantastically cheap. It was less than half of what he had been willing to pay.

“If that is too much,” she added, “then perhaps I can reduce it just a tiny bit. Do you desire an egg for breakfast? Eggs are expensive at the moment. It would be sixpence less without the egg.”

“Five and sixpence is fine,” he answered. “I should like very much to stay here.”

“I knew you would. Do come in.”

She seemed terribly nice. She looked exactly like the mother of one's best school friend welcoming one into the house to stay for the Christmas holidays. Billy took off his hat and stepped over the threshold.

"Just hang it there," she said, "and let me help you with your coat."

There were no other hats or coats in the hall. There were no umbrellas, no walking sticks—nothing.

"We have it all to ourselves," she said, smiling at him over her shoulder as she led the way upstairs. "You see, it isn't very often I have the pleasure of taking a visitor into my little nest."

The old girl is slightly dotty, Billy told himself. But at five and sixpence a night, who cares about that? "I should've thought you'd be simply swamped with applicants," he said politely.

"Oh, I am, my dear, I am, of course I am. But the trouble is that I'm inclined to be just a teeny-weeny bit choosy and particular—if you see what I mean."

“Ah, yes.”

“But I’m always ready. Everything is always ready day and night in this house just on the off chance that an acceptable young gentleman will come along. And it is such a pleasure, my dear, such a very great pleasure when now and again I open the door and I see someone standing there who is just exactly right.” She was halfway up the stairs, and she paused with one hand on the stair rail, turning her head and smiling down at him with pale lips. “Like you,” she added, and her blue eyes traveled slowly all the way down the length of Billy’s body, to his feet, and then up again.

On the second-floor landing she said to him, “This floor is mine.”

They climbed up another flight. “And this one is all yours,” she said. “Here’s your room. I do hope you’ll like it.” She took him into a small but charming front bedroom, switching on the light as she went in.

“The morning sun comes right in the window, Mr. Perkins. It is Mr. Perkins, isn’t it?”

“No,” he said. “It’s Weaver.”

“Mr. Weaver. How nice. I’ve put a water bottle between the sheets to air them out, Mr. Weaver. It’s such a comfort to have a hot-water bottle in a strange bed with clean sheets, don’t you agree? And you may light the gas fire at any time if you feel chilly.”

“Thank you,” Billy said. “Thank you ever so much.” He noticed that the bedspread had been taken off the bed and that the bedclothes had been neatly turned back on one side, all ready for someone to get in.

“I’m so glad you appeared,” she said, looking earnestly into his face. “I was beginning to get worried.”

“That’s all right,” Billy answered brightly. “You mustn’t worry about me.” He put his suitcase on the chair and started to open it.

“And what about supper, my dear? Did you manage to get anything to eat before you came here?”

“I’m not a bit hungry, thank you,” he said. “I think I’ll just go to bed as soon as possible because tomorrow I’ve got to get up rather early and report to the office.”

“Very well, then. I’ll leave you now so that you can unpack. But before you go to bed, would you be kind enough to pop into the sitting room on the ground floor and sign the book? Everyone has to do that because it’s the law of the land, and we don’t want to go breaking any laws at this stage in the proceedings, do we?” She gave him a little wave of the hand and went quickly out of the room and closed the door.

Now, the fact that his landlady appeared to be slightly off her rocker didn’t worry Billy in the least. After all, she not only was harmless—there was no question about that—but she was also quite obviously a kind and generous soul. He guessed that she had

probably lost a son in the war, or something like that, and had never gotten over it.

So a few minutes later, after unpacking his suitcase and washing his hands, he trotted downstairs to the ground floor and entered the living room. His landlady wasn't there, but the fire was glowing in the hearth, and the little dachshund was still sleeping soundly in front of it. The room was wonderfully warm and cozy. I'm a lucky fellow, he thought, rubbing his hands. This is a bit of all right.

He found the guest book lying open on the piano, so he took out his pen and wrote down his name and address. There were only two other entries above his on the page, and as one always does with guest books, he started to read them. One was a Christopher Mulholland from Cardiff. The other was Gregory W. Temple from Bristol.

That's funny, he thought suddenly. Christopher Mulholland. It rings a bell.

Now where on earth had he heard that rather unusual name before? Was it a boy at school? No. Was it one of his sister's numerous young men, perhaps, or a friend of his father's? No, no, it wasn't any of those.

He glanced down again at the book.

Christopher Mulholland
231 Cathedral Road, Cardiff

Gregory W. Temple
27 Sycamore Drive, Bristol

As a matter of fact, now he came to think of it, he wasn't at all sure that the second name didn't have almost as much of a familiar ring about it as the first.

"Gregory Temple?" he said aloud, searching his memory. "Christopher Mulholland? . . ."

"Such charming boys," a voice behind him answered, and he turned and saw his landlady sailing into the room with a large silver tea tray in her hands. She was holding it well out in front of her, and rather high up,

as though the tray were a pair of reins on a frisky horse.

“They sound somehow familiar,” he said.

“They do? How interesting.”

“I’m almost positive I’ve heard those names before somewhere. Isn’t that odd? Maybe it was in the newspapers. They weren’t famous in any way, were they? I mean famous cricketers or footballers or something like that?”

“Famous,” she said, setting the tea tray down on the low table in front of the sofa. “Oh no, I don’t think they were famous. But they were incredibly handsome, both of them, I can promise you that. They were tall and young and handsome, my dear, just exactly like you.”

The Umbrella Man

Roald Dahl

I'm going to tell you about a funny thing that happened to my mother and me yesterday evening. I am twelve years old and I'm a girl. My mother is thirty-four but I am nearly as tall as her already.

Yesterday afternoon, my mother took me up to London to see the dentist. He found one hole. It was in a back tooth and he filled it without hurting me too much. After that, we went to a café. I had a banana split and my mother had a cup of coffee. By the time we got up to leave it was about six o'clock.

When we came out of the café it had started to rain. "We must get a taxi," my mother said. We were wearing ordinary hats and coats, and it was raining quite hard.

"Why don't we go back into the café and wait for it to stop?" I said. I wanted another of those banana splits. They were gorgeous.

“It isn’t going to stop,” my mother said. “We must get home.”

We stood on the pavement in the rain, looking for a taxi. Lots of them came by but they all had passengers inside them. “I wish we had a car with a chauffeur,” my mother said.

Just then a man came up to us. He was a small man and he was pretty old, probably seventy or more. He raised his hat politely and said to my mother, “Excuse me, I do hope you will excuse me… “ He had a fine white moustache and bushy white eyebrows and a wrinkly pink face. He was sheltering under an umbrella which he held high over his head.

“Yes?” my mother said, very cool and distant.

“I wonder if I could ask a small favour of you,” he said. “It is only a very small favour.”

I saw my mother looking at him suspiciously. She is a suspicious person, my mother. She is especially suspicious of two things—strange men and boiled

eggs. When she cuts the top off a boiled egg, she pokes around inside it with her spoon as though expecting to find a mouse or something. With strange men, she has a golden rule which says, 'The nicer the man seems to be, the more suspicious you must become.' This little old man was particularly nice. He was polite. He was well-spoken. He was well-dressed. He was a real gentleman. The reason I knew he was a gentleman was because of his shoes. 'You can always spot a gentleman by the shoes he wears,' was another of my mother's favourite sayings. This man had beautiful brown shoes.

"The truth of the matter is," the little man was saying, "I've got myself into a bit of a scrape. I need some help. Not much I assure you. It's almost nothing, in fact, but I do need it. You see, madam, old people like me often become terribly forgetful…

My mother's chin was up and she was staring down at him along the full length of her nose. It was a fearsome thing, this frosty-nosed stare of my mother's.

Most people go to pieces completely when she gives it to them. I once saw my own headmistress begin to stammer and simper like an idiot when my mother gave her a really foul frosty-noser. But the little man on the pavement with the umbrella over his head didn't bat an eyelid. He gave a gentle smile and said, "I beg you to believe, madam, that I am not in the habit of stopping ladies in the street and telling them my troubles."

"I should hope not," my mother said.

I felt quite embarrassed by my mother's sharpness. I wanted to say to her, 'Oh, mummy, for heaven's sake, he's a very very old man, and he's sweet and polite, and he's in some sort of trouble, so don't be so beastly to him.' But I didn't say anything.

The little man shifted his umbrella from one hand to the other. "I've never forgotten it before," he said.

"You've never forgotten what?" my mother asked sternly.

“My wallet,” he said. “I must have left it in my other jacket. Isn’t that the silliest thing to do?”

“Are you asking me to give you money?” my mother said.

“Oh, good gracious me, no!” he cried. “Heaven forbid I should ever do that!”

“Then what are you asking?” my mother said. “Do hurry up. We’re getting soaked to the skin here.”

“I know you are,” he said. “And that is why I’m offering you this umbrella of mine to protect you, and to keep forever, if… if only… “If only what?” my mother said.

“If only you would give me in return a pound for my taxi-fare just to get me home.”

My mother was still suspicious. “If you had no money in the first place,” she said, “then how did you get here?”

“I walked,” he answered. “Every day I go for a lovely long walk and then I summon a taxi to take me home. I do it every day of the year.”

“Why don’t you walk home now?” my mother asked.

“Oh, I wish I could,” he said. “I do wish I could. But I don’t think I could manage it on these silly old legs of mine. I’ve gone too far already.”

My mother stood there chewing her lower lip. She was beginning to melt a bit, I could see that. And the idea of getting an umbrella to shelter under must have tempted her a good deal.

“It’s a lovely umbrella,” the little man said.

“So I’ve noticed,” my mother said.

“It’s silk,” he said.

“I can see that.”

“Then why don’t you take it, madam,” he said. “It cost me over twenty pounds, I promise you. But that’s

of no importance so long as I can get home and rest these old legs of mine."

I saw my mother's hand feeling for the clasp of her purse. She saw me watching her. I was giving her one of my own frosty-nosed looks this time and she knew exactly what I was telling her. Now listen, mummy, I was telling her, you simply mustn't take advantage of a tired old man in this way. It's a rotten thing to do. My mother paused and looked back at me. Then she said to the little man, "I don't think it's quite right that I should take an umbrella from you worth twenty pounds. I think I'd better just give you the taxi-fare and be done with it."

"No, no no!" he cried. "It's out of the question! I wouldn't dream of it! Not in a million years! I would never accept money from you like that! Take the umbrella, dear lady, and keep the rain off your shoulders!"

My mother gave me a triumphant sideways look. There you are, she was telling me. You're wrong. He wants me to have it.

She fished into her purse and took out a pound note. She held it out to the little man. He took it and handed her the umbrella. He pocketed the pound, raised his hat, gave a quick bow from the waist, and said, "Thank you, madam, thank you." Then he was gone.

"Come under here and keep dry, darling," my mother said. "Aren't we lucky. I've never had a silk umbrella before. I couldn't afford it."

"Why were you so horrid to him in the beginning?" I asked.

"I wanted to satisfy myself he wasn't a trickster," she said. "And I did. He was a gentleman. I'm very pleased I was able to help him."

"Yes, mummy," I said.

"A real gentleman," she went on. "Wealthy, too, otherwise he wouldn't have had a silk umbrella. I

shouldn't be surprised if he isn't a titled person. Sir Harry Goldsworthy or something like that."

"Yes, mummy."

"This will be a good lesson to you," she went on. "Never rush things. Always take your time when you are summing someone up. Then you'll never make mistakes."

"There he goes," I said. "Look."

"Where?"

"Over there. He's crossing the street. Goodness, mummy, what a hurry he's in."

We watched the little man as he dodged nimbly in and out of the traffic. When he reached the other side of the street, he turned left, walking very fast.

"He doesn't look very tired to me, does he to you, mummy?"

My mother didn't answer.

“He doesn’t look as though he’s trying to get a taxi, either,” I said.

My mother was standing very still and stiff, staring across the street at the little man. We could see him clearly. He was in a terrific hurry. He was bustling along the pavement, sidestepping the other pedestrians and swinging his arms like a soldier on the march.

“He’s up to something,” my mother said, stony-faced.

“But what?”

“I don’t know,” my mother snapped. “But I’m going to find out. Come with me.” She took my arm and we crossed the street together. Then we turned left.

“Can you see him?” my mother asked.

“Yes. There he is. He’s turning right down the next street.” We came to the corner and turned right. The little man was about twenty yards ahead of us. He was scuttling along like a rabbit and we had to walk very fast to keep up with him. The rain was pelting down

harder than ever now and I could see it dripping from the brim of his hat on to his shoulders. But we were snug and dry under our lovely big silk umbrella.

“What is he up to?” my mother said.

“What if he turns round and sees us?” I asked.

“I don’t care if he does,” my mother said. “He lied to us. He said he was too tired to walk any further and he’s practically running us off our feet! He’s a barefaced liar! He’s a crook!”

“You mean he’s not a titled gentleman?” I asked.

“Be quiet,” she said.

At the next crossing, the little man turned right again.

Then he turned left.

Then right.

“I’m not giving up now,” my mother said.

“He’s disappeared!” I cried. “Where’s he gone?”

“He went in that door!” my mother said. “I saw him! Into that house! Great heavens, it’s a pub!”

It was a pub. In big letters right across the front it said THE RED LION.

“You’re not going in are you, mummy?”

“No,” she said. “We’ll watch from outside.”

There was a big plate-glass window along the front of the pub, and although it was a bit steamy on the inside, we could see through it very well if we went close.

We stood huddled together outside the pub window. I was clutching my mother’s arm. The big raindrops were making a loud noise on our umbrella. “There he is,” I said. “Over there.”

The room we were looking into was full of people and cigarette smoke, and our little man was in the middle of it all. He was now without his hat and coat, and he was edging his way through the crowd towards the bar. When he reached it, he placed both hands on

the bar itself and spoke to the barman. I saw his lips moving as he gave his order. The barman turned away from him for a few seconds and came back with a smallish tumbler filled to the brim with light brown liquid. The little man placed a pound note on the counter.

"That's my pound!" my mother hissed. "By golly, he's got a nerve!"

"What's in the glass?" I asked.

"Whisky," my mother said. "Neat whisky."

The barman didn't give him any change from the pound.

"That must be a treble whisky," my mummy said.

"What's a treble?" I asked.

"Three times the normal measure," she answered.

The little man picked up the glass and put it to his lips. He tilted it gently. Then he tilted it higher… and higher… and higher… and very soon all the whisky

had disappeared down his throat in one long pour. "That's a jolly expensive drink," I said.

"It's ridiculous!" my mummy said. "Fancy paying a pound for something to swallow in one go!"

"It cost him more than a pound," I said. "It cost him a twenty-pound silk umbrella."

"So it did," my mother said. "He must be mad."

The little man was standing by the bar with the empty glass in his hand. He was smiling now, and a sort of golden glow of pleasure was spreading over his round pink face. I saw his tongue come out to lick the white moustache, as though searching for one last drop of that precious whisky.

Slowly, he turned away from the bar and edged his way back through the crowd to where his hat and coat were hanging. He put on his hat. He put on his coat. Then, in a manner so superbly cool and casual that you hardly noticed anything at all, he lifted from the

coat-rack one of the many wet umbrellas hanging there, and off he went.

"Did you see that!" my mother shrieked. "Did you see what he did!"

"Ssshh!" I whispered. "He's coming out!"

We lowered our umbrella to hide our faces, and peered out from under it.

Out he came. But he never looked in our direction. He opened his new umbrella over his head and scurried off down the road the way he had come.

"So that's his little game!" my mother said.

"Neat," I said. "Super." We followed him back to the main street where we had first met him, and we watched him as he proceeded, with no trouble at all, to exchange his new umbrella for another pound note. This time it was with a tall thin fellow who didn't even have a coat or hat. And as soon as the transaction was completed, our little man trotted off down the street

and was lost in the crowd. But this time he went in the opposite direction.

“You see how clever he is!” my mother said. “He never goes to the same pub twice!”

“He could go on doing this all night,” I said.

“Yes,” my mother said. “Of course. But I’ll bet he prays like mad for rainy days.

The Story of an Hour

Kate Chopin (1894)

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild

abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came

up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will--as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.

When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial.

She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no

powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him--sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

"Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg, open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing Louise? For heaven's sake open the door."

"Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood

amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease-- of joy that kills.

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