THE FOUR METHODS OF NARRATION AND OTHER TECHNIQUES

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THE FOUR METHODS OF NARRATION

First Person Narrator

...Because Homer interjects himself just once into the *Iliad*, we may say that it is a First Person Narrative: we are at that instant made aware of a person telling the story. Thus the Omniscient Method may be combined with the First Person, though the combination has been seldom used since the time of primitive saga. The more conscious the writer, the most skeptically will he deal with the critical question: How could one person, this man telling the story, get around the earth and the Olympian heaven fast enough to see all that happens in the *Iliad*? The authority of the First Person Narrator is limited: he may tell you only what he sees, or if he exceeds his own observation, he may do so only through surmise and inference about other events which he has not actually witnessed; but he cannot convincingly present those distant events *scenically*, as if he had seen them.

If his authority is limited, it is nevertheless immediate and compelling as far as it goes. I know what I am talking about--he seems to say--because I saw it happen to these people. His authority is that of the eye-witness. Because he is the eye-witness, he can give you the close-up, the scenic effect, when it is necessary, without committing you to the strain of attention which a consistent use of the scenic technique creates. He can, in other words, back off from the immediate scene and meditate upon its significance, for he is always telling a story that happened in the past: he is not telling it at the moment of occurrence. He thus has some of the advantages of the Omniscient Narrator, since he can summarize less important events, develop the more important, and reflect upon the fortunes of his characters.

The First Person Narrative solves the problem of authority by making the narrator a part of the action which he is depicting. But it is not without justice that Henry James calls it the most "barbarous" of all methods, even though one of his great masterpieces, *The Turn of the Screw*, is a First Person Narrative. The authority of the First Person Narrator is immediate, as we have said, but it is severely qualified; that is to say, if his own part in the situation is deeply enough involved to make it credible, so that he is an actor as well as an observer, we cannot expect to get from him an unbiased report on the other characters: he will be putting himself in a favorable light. He must necessarily do this or lose our sympathy, for if he is an ignoble person he will be an improper narrator of a serious action. If he remains outside the action, though present at its different stages, we shall question the reasons for his presence; unless he is present as a human being, and personally involved, we shall not believe that he has any reason for being there.

As we shall see when we come to the fourth method, that of the Central Intelligence, the problem of the artist in fiction is to decide which method has the fewest limitations in view of the nature of his subject; for no method is perfect. In other words, the great artist will contrive to use the disadvantages of his chosen method in a positive manner. In the case of the First Person Narrator, he must manage to use for positive effect the biased report. This is what James does in *The Turn of the Screw*: we see only what the hypersensitive and dominating Governess sees, but the essence of the story consists in having our view restricted to hers. What she fails to take account of becomes a positive element of drama; it creates the irony of the situation and eventually produces the tragic outcome. Likewise in Ring Lardner's "Haircut," the barber-narrator sees the action at a low level, and in the discrepancy between the way he sees it and the reader's sense if what it must actually have been lies the central dramatic interest. In long works like *Moll Flanders* the method is hard to sustain. Defoe asks us to take a little too seriously the point of view of a

female rake and adventuress. We tend to judge the First Person Narrator as we judge his characters. We may agree that she is telling us what happened, but knowing her as we inevitably do, we may question the range and depth of her understanding.

THE OMNISCIENT NARRATOR

The author as Narrator is most clearly apparent in the Omniscient Method.... In this method the Narrator often stops and, as it were, backs off to view what is going on from some distance or from some height above it. He, like the First Person Narrator, can move about freely...and he has an advantage which the First Person Narrator does not have: he sees and knows everything that goes on... This includes a knowledge of what goes on inside each of the [characters]. That is, he knows everything there is to know about all of his characters, but he cannot or at least he never does lead the reader inside [them]....

All fiction writers are omniscient; that is, they must assume that they know all about their characters and the action in which they are involved; or at any rate they have confidence in their ability to discover all the implications of the subject through the use of certain technical resources. The author has got to decide to what extent he, in his own person, is necessary to this discovery and necessary also to the understanding of the action on the part of the reader.

The method of the Omniscient Narrator is the oldest way of telling a story and one which will probably never be out-moded. Its great virtue is the sense it gives us of the broad scope of human life. This effect, in the hands of a great master, is achieved through a continual shifting of focus from the large, over-all picture to the close view. This repeated juxtaposition gives us a feeling of the complexity of human life which can hardly be secured in any other way. But such a shifting of focus requires an agility which is rare among authors. In short, this method seems to require the greatest genius to be wholly successful. Too often it results in formlessness and lack of focus.

In "The Story of a Farm Girl," for example, Maupassant does not wholly identify his point of view with that of any one person. His range is thus large and loose; the farmer who marries Rose has emotions as violent as hers. This method permits Maupassant to get a great deal of life into his story, but we wonder at the end how deeply he has explored the lives he has chosen to place before us.

This is always the temptation of the Omniscient Narrator. Since he knows everything, he is tempted (particularly if he has an engaging style) to tell the reader what happened and to leave the actual happening vague. He depends upon the sweep, the panorama, the large summary, and he often leaves one group of characters in the air while he loftily turns his gaze to another group miles away, with a transitional sentence like this: "Meanwhile at So-and-So...."

The fiction writer must decide whether he can manage the broad sweep without collapsing into vagueness and carelessness. His difficulty here is to establish a sufficient authority in relation to the action. Without placing somewhere near the center of the action a Central Intelligence can he convince us that he *knows* what is happening, and thus transform his report into a reality which we must acknowledge as true within the frame of the action?

THE CONCEALED NARRATOR

The third method, that of the Concealed Narrator, obviates some of the difficulties of the first two methods. Here we find the Narrator leading the reader *inside* the...individual consciousnesses of the characters. The Concealed Narrator stops [outside the consciousnesses of characters], as the Omniscient Narrator sometimes does, or ranges freely within... The Narrator as Concealed Intelligence [may lead] the reader to a vantage point inside the character's consciousness from which he, the reader, can see with the character's eyes, hear with his ears, register the beating of his heart.... The Concealed Narrator...[may shift] from one character to another, either backing off at varying distances or moving into their point of view.

The achievement of form in literature, whether the work be a novel, a poem or a play is the result of the greatest possible interrelation of the parts, so that they seem to make up an organic whole. The Omniscient Narrator, as we have seen, has trouble creating this illusion unless he is a writer of great imaginative ability. The Omniscient Method does not, in its very nature, provide for this dynamic effect but must achieve it by a kind of *tour de force.*

With the appearance of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1859), we get for the first time a conscious method which consistently makes for the maximum of fictional activity. The dead lumps of description, the mere *telling* what happened, the summaries and the inert reports of information about persons and places disappear, or rather, they are actively *rendered* (James' word) in relation to what the characters are feeling and doing.

Flaubert's method of the Concealed Narrator was evolved, like most technical inventions, out of his immediate necessity; in order to convince us that Emma Bovary acted in a certain way he had to show us what went on in her consciousness, but in order to give the whole drama of Emma Bovary's life he needed an intelligence superior to hers playing on the scene. The reader has to know a good deal more about Emma Bovary than she knew about herself if he is to understand her story.

The Omniscient Method could not serve him here. The Omniscient Narrator has a "center of vision" which may be compared to that of a bird--preferably an eagle! He is capable of surveying his whole scene of action at any moment. He an also swoop down until the recording eye is on the same level as that of the character he portrays and, as in the First Person method, he can come as close to that character as one human being can come to another. He can, like a bird, hover immediately above the "walled" consciousness of his character and peer into its depths, but the Omniscient Narrator *does not descend into those depths*.

Flaubert, as it were, takes the reader by the hand and induces him to plunge into the consciousness of the character so that the reader seems to see with the eyes of that character, hear with his ears, experience the tactile or gustatory sensations which he experiences.

In Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" we see the method of the Concealed Narrator used by a writer who is himself as great a master as Flaubert was. It is hardly possible to render sensations more faithfully than Crane renders them in the first paragraph of this master-piece. Throughout the story he maintains the same faithfulness in rendition coupled with an almost incredible agility. He is constantly changing his point of view, borrowing the eyes, ears, tactile senses of any of the four men in the boat for the sake of intensity, but he is always mindful of another responsibility: the over-all pattern. It is as if he were a photographer who ranges freely, trying to find the best vantage point from which to "shoot" a scene. If the correspondent has the last word in the story it is because the Concealed Narrator finds that at this juncture the correspondent is the best person to say what the over-all pattern requires. In other words, the Concealed Narrator may be anywhere at any given moment but never shows his hand.

THE METHOD OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

In the fourth method, that of the Central Intelligence, the Narrator is transformed into the leading actor. A single Central Intelligence is used throughout the action; the hero (Narrator) registers and evaluates everything that happens, including what happens *to* and *in* himself.... The hero's psyche is the stage for the drama. The other characters are important only for the impact their words and deeds have on his consciousness.

This fourth method gains most of the immediacy of the First Person Narrative, yet allows the Narrator to evade our natural impulse to judge his capacities. In fact, this method combines the advantages of the three others and involves the artist in fewer of their disadvantages. But it

requires the greatest possible maturity of judgment, the greatest master of life, and the highest technical skill to control it.

We call it the method of the Central Intelligence after Henry James, who insisted that all the action of a novel should be evaluated by a single superior mind and placed in the center of the main dramatic situation. But having established this single evaluating mind, the artist may range over the whole cast of characters and give you their view upon the action. Thus the placing of the Central Intelligence gives the immediacy of the eye-witness account without committing us to the consistently narrow and biased view of the First Person Narrator.

As Percy Lubbock puts it in his *The Craft of Fiction*, the "real actors' in a story told by this method are the "thoughts, emotions and sensations" of the hero. The hero is never off the stage and everything that happens is, in the end, referred to him and evaluated by him. The First Person Narrator may not understand what is going on and may not even report what he sees accurately. The Central Intelligence may not understand what is going at the time and may also report it mistakenly; yet the truth will come to him in the end.

Let us briefly apply these observations to two great stories. In James' "The Beast in the Jungle," the Central Intelligence is that of John Marcher: we *see* with his physical eyes, and we see at that level nothing that he does not see. If James had chose the First Person Narrator method we would have been limited to what Marcher can see and hear. If James had used the method of the Concealed Narrator the reader might have "sounded the void" of John Marcher's life but Marcher himself might have never known what his great secret was; Tabusse in "Tabusse and His Dogs" probably never realized what impelled the sudden change in his attitude towards his fellow men.

But the problem for James was to keep the dramatic immediacy of Marcher's sense impressions and at the same time exceed his *moral insight*: otherwise we should not have got this particular story at all. We should not have got May Bartram's side of the story, which is the immense sacrifice of her life to a completely selfish man who has no *insight* into his selfishness. Only at the end is there a fusion of the character's moral insight with his creator's. Here we see how in the hands of a master, a serious disadvantage can be turned into actual advantage. Lubbock has pointed out that the Central Intelligence often registers events most dramatically when it does not realize what it is registering. Marcher's blindness towards the nature of his relationship to May Bartram up to the time of her death makes his final understanding all the more terrible.

In Joyce's "The Dead" we have an even more complex and thorough use of the Central Intelligence. We see nothing that Gabriel Conroy does not see but he sees himself as a very different fellow at the end of the story from the fellow he fancied himself at the beginning. He has identified himself in sympathy with all the men who are not living or have ever lived and, as a result, his own personality has been shattered and a new man emerges. In each of these stories the subtle and powerful effects are made possible by the face that the actual drama is not the story of what happened to the central character but rather a dramatization of his growth in moral awareness.

THE PANORAMA AND THE SCENE

Every piece of fiction, no matter what its length or its subject matter, will be found to consist in a combination of "panoramas" and "scenes." The fiction writer, after he has solved the initial problem of Authority, is at once confronted with another technical problem. How can he most effectively combine panoramas and scenes to produce the illusion of reality for which he is striving?

In attempting to arrive at the distinction between panorama and scene it is well to hold in mind the root meaning of the words. Panorama means literally "all that which is to be seen." The Greek word from which we derive our word "scene" meant originally a tent or covered place and, finally, the stage on which a spectacle or play is exhibited.

Henry James has said that the fiction writer's chief concern is "the vivid image and the very"--that is to say, the *true*--"scene." It would appear, then, that the fiction writer, in the last analysis, is chiefly concerned with what goes on "under the tent" or on the stage that he has chosen. In other words, his task is to *show* us *what happened*.

In his effort to approximate the authority of the dramatist the fiction writer, however, must not forget that he has at his command resources or techniques which the dramatist cannot easily avail himself of. Foremost of these is the skillful use of panorama. The panorama, like the Greek chorus, affords the author the opportunity and the means for commenting on the individual happening and, again, like the Greek chorus, lends the characters dignity by relating them to humanity in general.

In ancient times this principle was so widely observed that an Omniscient Narrator often invoked divine aid--called upon his Muse--before setting out to tell his story. Homer begins the *Odyssey*: "The hero of the tale which I beg the Muse to help me tell is that resourceful man who roamed the wide world after he had sacked the holy citadel of Troy...."

One contemporary writer, William Faulkner, has made a brilliant adaptation of the convention to his own use, extending it to add a dimension to the action of the story. His own inclination is to the Ciceronian period, but the elevation of his style, his rhetorical flights are made to serve the structural purpose. In "Spotted Horses," Ratliff, the sewing machine agent and Mrs. Littlejohn function as a sort of Greek chorus, commenting on the madness of their fellow humans. Ratliff sits on the porch in the moonlight with three or four men of the neighborhood. Their country talk sets forth the question which is uppermost in all their minds: whether or not the spotted ponies brought in by the Texan belong to Flem Snopes: "He ain't said they was his yet." "He ain't said they ain't neither." That is the way Mississippi "red-necks" talk. But the narrator sees these men in terms of their relation to humanity in general and records what he sees in language that befits the immensity of his vision:

> They sat on the steps, their backs against the veranda posts, or on the railing itself. Only Ratliff and Quick sat in chairs, so that to them the others were black silhouettes against the dreaming lambence of the moonlight beyond the veranda. The pear tree across the road opposite was now in full and frosty bloom, the twigs and branches springing not outward from the limbs but standing motionless and perpendicular above the horizontal boughs like the separate and upstreaming hair of a drowned woman sleeping upon the uttermost floor of the windless and tideless sea.

But the panorama does not serve the author only as a means of relating the particular to the universal. It is also a way of "getting over the ground." No author has ever succeeded in telling the reader everything that happened in his hero's life. Over and over, in the telling of any story, incidents must be selected which are not only striking enough in themselves to hold the reader's interest but which represent other incidents. Stretches of time must be compressed. Hours must stand for days, days for months, months for years. It is in the *uniqueness* of the individual moment that we find the ultimate distinction between panorama and scene. The panorama, no matter which of its uses it is put to, stands always for the general. The scene represents the individual moment--a moment in time which can never be repeated.

Let us say that a man commutes from the same town to New York City every day of every week for twenty-five years on the same train. A statement to that effect is panorama. But suppose that on the eighteenth of June, 1959, he meets on the train which he is accustomed to take every morning a comrade with whom he served in the navy in the South Pacific. Their meeting and the ensuing conversation will constitute a "scene"; this moment cannot be repeated. The two men may actually meet again and even on the same train and, even, conceivably, on the eighteenth of June, but the meeting cannot take place on the eighteenth of June, 1959. In other words, it is not possible for *all* the "particularities" which go to make up any given moment to be repeated--which is one

reason why the portrayal of any given moment in time is so exciting in the hands of a skillful fiction writer.

In..."A Simple Heart," the author uses panorama entirely in the first section of his story: "Madame Aubain's servant Felicite was the envy of the ladies of Pont-l'Eveque for half a century...." Flaubert's technique contrasts sharply with Maupassant's om "The Story of a Farm Girl." In Flaubert's work panoramas are usually presented with almost as much vividness of detail as his scenes. Felicite rose at day-break (every day of her adult life, we are given to understand) "to be in time for Mass, and worked till evening without stopping. Then, when dinner was over, the plates and dishes in order, and the door shut fast, she thrust the log under the ashes and went to sleep in front of the hearth with her rosary in her hand..." Maupassant begins his story with a scene:

"As the weather was very fine, the people on the farm had dined m ore quickly than usual, and had returned to the fields. The female servant, Rose, remained alone in the large kitchen, where the fire on the hearth was dying out, under the large boiler of hot ware. From time to time she took some water out of it and slowly washed her plates and dishes...." The details with which Maupassant builds up his scene are actually not as vivid, as sharply observed, as the details in Flaubert's panorama. In addition, Maupassant mixes panorama and scene in the same paragraph: "She wanted to sew, as usual, but she did not feel strong enough for it..." The effects are somewhat blurred as a result; the story lacks the clarity, the brilliance--in short, the "feel" of life which one finds in the other masterpiece.

Hawthorne...has alternated panorama and scene to serve not only the ambiguity in which he delighted but what T. S. Eliot has called his "deeper psychology." The story begins with a scene: "Young Goodman Brown came forth at sunset into the street at Salem village; but put his head back after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife..." Goodman Brown may come out into the street of Salem village every day of his youth and pause on the threshold to exchange a kiss with his wife, but his wife will not ever again whisper in his ear what she whispered on that particular evening for Young Goodman Brown went only once in his life to a Witches' Sabbath.

The state of mind which resulted from that visit, or, as Hawthorne ambiguously puts it, "wild dream," is represented by his emotions on all the ensuing Sabbaths of his life: "...when the congregation were singing a holy psalm, he could not listen because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear and drowned all the blessed strain.... Often, awaking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith; and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled and muttered to himself...."

The terms panorama and scene are also applied to what is sometimes called "psychic distance." There is perhaps an ideal distance at which the view, in terms of the work as a whole and of its parts, must be established. Every writer must perceive the distances which are right for his subject: they cannot be taught; and this is why nobody in the long run can be taught to write masterpieces. Let us look at this problem in terms of a simile. The writer is in the position of a photographer who wants to record a public event. He is photographing a procession. He may post himself at a window of a tall building in order to get a bird's-eye view of the procession as it winds through the streets. But if he wants us to feel that we have *seen* the procession he will descend from the window and focus his lens upon the faces of individuals or small groups which can be taken in at a glance. He will alternate the panoramas and scenes, or the long and the short views, as his main purpose directs.

A good example of "psychic distance" is to be found in J. F. Powers' "Lions, Harts, Leaping Does." At the beginning of the story the author affirms the universal humanity of his two chief characters by withdrawing far enough from them for us to see them as "two old men grown grey in the brown robes of the Order" instead of Titus and Didymus. He is fully as expert with the short

view: "There was a soft flutter, the canary flew to the window sill, paused, and tilted into the snow."

Whether scenes or panoramas predominate in the work of an author is usually determined by his own temperament. Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers" is perhaps as scenic in its technique as any story one can find. It is made up of short views. There are no summings-up, no general statements, no panoramas to be found in it anywhere. Ivan Turgenev, in "Byezhin Meadow," uses a very different technique. He begins with the general--"one of those days which come only when the weather has been fair for a long time..." and narrows the action down to "precisely such a day, I was hunting partridges in the Tchyornoye district of the Tula government," and it is the narrator's impressions that are vivid, not those of the boys who figure in his story.

The dramatic alternation of panoramas and scenes is one of the distinguishing marks of a master. The student of the craft of fiction will find it of great benefit to analyze the stories in this collection, with a view to determining how the author has handled these problems.

DISCOVERY, COMPLICATION, RESOLUTION AND PERIPETY

Fiction differs from all other arts in that it concerns the conduct of life itself, which is, perhaps, one reason why we are all instinctively suspicious of any arbitrary pronouncement about the craft; there are no "rules" for the writing of fiction any more than there are rules for the living of a successful life; there is, in every work of art, as in every life, an irreducible minimum which defies analysis. A serious study of masterpieces of literature discloses, however, that, along with an infinite variety of subject matter, there is a remarkable uniformity in the practice of the masters in every country and in every age. Every masterpiece can be resolved into its component parts, just as the human body, whose animating principle remains a mystery, will, on dissection, reveal a skeleton whose bones can be "articulated' and labeled.

The most detailed and practical analysis of the scheme which seems to underlie every masterpiece of fiction was given us by the first critic of the western world. In his *Poetics*, which R. G. Collingwood has aptly described as a 'set of hints for amateur playwrights," Aristotle has apprehended a basic pattern in which the human imagination works. His definition of a play as an imitation of an action of a certain magnitude will serve as well for the short story or novel.

Aristotle did not generalize in thin air. His principles are derived from a careful analysis of what he called "the perfect plot," Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex.* The action of the play is Oedipus' gradual and agonizing discovery that in running away from his (supposed) home (Corinth) in early youth in order to escape the fate foretold for him by an oracle and revealed to him by a drunken man at a feast, that he would kill his father, marry his mother and bring disaster upon his native city, he has all along only been carrying out the fate prophesied for him.

In his analysis Aristotle uses four technical terms: Discovery, Complication, Resolution and Peripety, which will be found to apply to every story in this collection.... In *Oedipus Rex*, Discovery is a transition from ignorance to knowledge, from love to hate... Oedipus' discovery of his true parentage necessarily turns his love to hate.... Aristotle says: "By Complication I mean all from the beginning of the story to the point just before the change in the hero's fortunes. By Resolution (I mean) the beginning of the change to the end."

Every work of fiction embodies a conflict of some kind, an inner conflict, or a conflict between persons, or between man and nature. (Oedipus may be thought of as in conflict with nature, since he is in conflict with the gods, who, the Greeks held, ordered nature.) In *Oedipus Rex* the Resolution begins when Jocasta, who is at once his wife and mother, comes on the stage, for it is from this point onwards that the hero's fortunes begin to change.

In a well-constructed work of fiction, Complication and Resolution interlock so closely that the casual reader is not conscious of them separately, but in a true masterpiece more than that is

accomplished. The Resolution is foreshadowed in the Complication. In *Oedipus Rex,* Sophocles foreshadows his Resolution by stating it in reverse. When Oedipus comes on the stage the chorus (in Dudley Fitts' and Robert Fitzgerald's translation) says: "Ah, when your days of kingship are remembered / Let them not say, *He rose, but later fell*...." which is what everybody will say at the close of the action.

We come now to the fourth term: Peripety. Aristotle has defined it as "...the change from one state of things in the play to its opposite of the kind described, and that too in the way we are saying, in the probably or necessary sequence of events; as it is for instance in Oedipus: here the opposite state of things is produced by the Messenger, who, coming to gladden Oedipus and to remove his fears as to his mother, reveals the secret of his birth."

The student will find it extremely helpful to read and analyze *Oedipus Rex* with the view of observing the workings of Aristotle's scheme. But we do not have to go back to a play written hundreds of years ago for examples of Discovery, Complication, Resolution and Peripety.

In Faulkner's "Spotted Horses," for instance, the Complication is the arrival in the community of the crazed horses. The author foreshadows the Resolution by telling us that the crazed horses resemble "tatters torn at random from circus posters" and then underlining it by having one of the characters say, "What in hell is that?"--a preliminary, as it were, for having "hell break loose." But the horses only effect the release of the madness which is already in the hearts of the men. The action moves towards Resolution when the men desert reality and, moon-struck themselves, pursue the moon-eyed horses. The Discovery is the revelation that justice is not to be found on this earth. The Judge holds up his hands and appeals to Heaven, thus acknowledging his impotence against the forces of evil, represented by Flem Snopes.

In this story the appearance of Henry Armstid and his wife constitute the Peripety. Armstid's insistence on buying one of the horses plumbs moral depths in the Texan's nature of which he himself had hitherto been unaware; he is willing to cheat any of the men present but he finds himself unable to take advantage of a half-crazy man and a woman. If Henry Armstid had stayed at home, ploughing, that afternoon the story might have ended differently. The technical device of the Peripety reflects the mystery inherent in the creation of any fiction. As in life, it is the event which is at once perfectly probable and yet unforeseeable which precipitates or gives its final direction to the action.

ENVELOPING ACTION

The Enveloping Action is usually referred to by historians an sociologists as the "social background" and by some critics as the *milieu* which the action of the story takes place. These terms are useful for general understanding but they are not practical for the purposes of technical insight. In a broad way we might describe the Enveloping Action as the life that would conceivably continue beyond the frame of the story, just as it preceded it, and out of which the particular drama develops.

The classic example of Enveloping Action is the plot of *Antigone* of Sophocles, in which Creon, representing the continuity of order in the Theban state, forbids Antigone to perform the rites of burial for her dead brothers. The State is the *milieu* that envelops Antigone, frustrating her "higher morality".... In the past generation sociological fiction has shown us the Individual opposed to Society, or the reverse, i.e., a "class" or the "people" frustrated by powerful individuals of another class or people. This school tends to personify the Enveloping Action as if it were a single mind. This kind of fiction has been one of the consequences of the Naturalistic school as represented originally by Zola, and later in the United States by Dreiser, Lewis, and Dos Passos. The technique of the school has been on the whole photographic and documentary. The other branch of Naturalism, which we emphasize in this book, comes down from Flaubert through Chekhov, James, and Joyce--four great masters who perfected the art of dramatizing the Enveloping Action without offering it to the reader in large chunks: the art of making the inert

detail move. The "social background" remains inert unless it can be brought into the story through the immediate situations of the leading characters.

The Enveloping Action in "The Dead" may be thought of as composed of two conflicting "backgrounds"--the urban, represented by Gabriel and his family, and the old-fashioned country ways: the singing of ballads, a girl's "walking out" with her lover. Gretta's early life is an important part of the Enveloping Action, which is here given us solely in terms of her boy lover, Michael Furey. A writer of ordinary ability might have introduced Gretta's "background" somewhat as follows:

> Gretta Conroy was brought up in a peasant village in Western Ireland, where her family were average examples of the small gentry of the region. Her circumstances were narrow. When she was a young girl a boy named Michael Furey fell in love with her, but before anything could come of this affair he died. Gretta romantically felt that he had died for her, and a consciousness of guilt conditioned her emotions so thoroughly that she could not completely give herself to her husband, Gabriel Conroy.

Compare this dead lump of information with the actual presentation by Joyce.

TONAL UNITY

In the simplest terms, Tonal Unity means a consistency of attitude toward the material of the story; and this consistency of attitude in turn means a consistent use of language out of a certain core of meaning appropriate to the scene and the characters. The tone will be almost entirely controlled by the point of view from which the story is told. If the First Person Narrator is used, the style throughout should be "in character"; if the narrator is telling a story of the sea, he must be able to command with ease a natural familiarity with the setting. Under First Person Narrator we have referred to the narrator of Ring Lardner's "Haircut," a story in which the control of tine is masterly; but here the author chooses as his narrator the one man perhaps least qualified by knowledge and insight to tell it, in order to underline the pathos of the tragedy through the insensitivity of the narrator.

An extreme, special use of Tonal Unity is that of "The Fall of the House of Usher." Here the tone is the personal tone of the narrator-visitor to the House, and it relies for its consistency of effect upon *sound*. The defect of this sort of Tonal Unity is perhaps in failure to "render" the subject; it is outside the subject to a high degree; and we are affected by the sound of the language rather than by the dramatic realization of the action. Sound as the basis of Tonal Unity cannot be sustained in a work of considerable length, and it is more appropriate to poetry.

Shifts of tone are possible in a short story, but very difficult because there is little time to prepare for them. For this reason contemporary masters of the craft achieve some of their finest tonal effects in the *novella* or long story. One might think of Joyce's "The Dead" as an exercise in tone or an ascent from the brisk opening sentence: "Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet" to the sonorous closing phrase: "all the living and the dead." But that phrase would not be so effective if it had not been prepared for throughout by subtle and dramatic shifts of tone.

Another fine example is Crane's "The Open Boat." Up to the last minute the presentation had been soberly naturalistic, without commentary or interpretation; then at the end we get this sentence: "When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on short, and they felt that they could then be interpreters." Here the *elevation* of the tone is not only unpredictable and in itself dramatic; it also effects the Resolution of the tensions in the story.

The exploration of the arts of tone which has accompanied the rise of the naturalistic-symbolic tradition of fiction emphasized in this book has developed from the increasing self-consciousness of the fiction writer concerning the dramatic center of his work. Katherine Anne Porter's "Old

Mortality" provides a fine example. The story begins as Omniscient narration, but throughout the action to tone is not that of the author but very subtly that of the heroine. The effect is accomplished by an adroit use of the method of the Concealed Narrator until the story ends with the Omniscient Narrator having the last word: "At least I know the truth about what happens to me, she assured herself silently, making a promise to herself, in her hopefulness, her ignorance."

SYMBOLISM

To discuss this subject properly one would have to go far beyond the range of the short story or even the larger arts of fiction and drama. It is the last and crowning problem in all critical discussion, for imaginative literature that endures must in some sense be symbolic: it must stand for something which is not special to the time in which it was written and which permits us to acknowledge what Melville has called the "shock of recognition."A symbol is "a sign by which one knows or infers a thing" and symbolism is "the practice or art" of using "visible or sensuous representations" to express "immaterial, ideal or otherwise intangible truth or states."

There are natural symbols like the sea and the sky. There are social, moral and historical symbols like the Home, the Cross, the Flag. There are also created symbols which are the result of individual imaginative power on the literal level. Hemingway's "The Killers" is, perhaps, as realistically and objectively rendered as is possible. The Omniscient Narrator records only what and audience might see it the diner were a stage and the door opened and two men came in. As the result of overhearing their conversation with the cook, Nick walks to the house where Ole Andreson lives, returns to the diner and reports to the cook the conversation he has had with Andreson, and then expresses the emotion he feels as a result of that conversation. Whereupon the cook advises him to forget he has heard it. A literal reading of this story would not convey to the reader any "immaterial, ideal or otherwise intangible truth or states." It is possible to read this masterpiece of Naturalism as a suspense story. Yet, without the reader's being conscious of the fact, symbols operate to lend it deeper significance.

In "the Killers" most of the action takes place indoors but when Nick walks up the street to Ole Andreson's rooming-house he sees lit "through the bare branches of a tree." A tree is a natural symbol of life. When Nick returns to the diner he walks "up the dark street to the corner." Darkness is a natural symbol of death. Ole Andreson's death is foreshadowed at the beginning of the story by the phrase "Outside it was getting dark..." The diner is a social symbol, a home for homeless men--Ole Andreson comes there to eat every evening at six o'clock. His room is also a social symbol--at once a symbol of his lonely life and of his lonely death; in the end he chooses to remain in the room rather than to go out and face his killers. The killers are socially symbolic of the irresponsibility of modern urban life. They come from another town and their contempt for the law and order of the town in which they find themselves is expressed not only in their willingness too kill Ole Andreson but in their cheap witticisms over the *menu* the diner offers. They are also symbolic in a moral sense. They represent death. Ole Andreson realizes this and recognizes the inevitability of his own death by a symbolic gesture, turning his face to the wall.

The story, certainly, does not abound in historical symbols. Nevertheless, it does contain a few. The f act that Henry's diner has been made over "from a saloon to a lunch counter" is an historical symbol of the time in which the action of this story takes place. The clothes and the conduct of the two gangsters are historically as well as socially symbolic. Men have always hired other men to do their killing for them, but these two murderers dress and behave differently from the way they would have dressed or behaved if they had been, say, assassins hired by the Borgias.

It is obvious that any story, no matter how realistic in execution, no matter how down to earth its conception, will, inevitably, contain some kind of symbolism. The practice of symbolism, then, includes the use of symbols that differ as widely as the symbols which we have just found in "The Killers" differ from the symbols found in Joyce's "The Dead" and Chekhov's "On the Road." Both of these stories are built on a symbol which not only operates on the natural level but also as a controlling image. The snow in "The Dead" and the snow in "On the Road" are the same natural

snow, but symbolically they stand for widely opposite meanings. In "The Dead" the snow is a palpable image which develops from the flakes on Gabriel Conroy's rubbers into the snow-filled sky, where it represents Gabriel's escape from his Narcissism. In "On the Road," it represents, because it blinds, Liharev's return to his inner self.

A medieval poet, Dante, has given us a practical explanation of the ways in which various symbols fuse to convey the author's meaning. In his *Convito*, or *Banquet*, the work of his mature years, he says:

> ...books can be understood, and ought to be explained, in four principal senses. One is called *literal*, and this it is which goes no further than the letter, such as the simple narration of the thing you treat...
>
> The second is called *allegorical*, and this is the meaning hidden under the cloak of fables, and is a truth concealed beneath a fair fiction; as when Ovid says that Orpheus with his lute tamed wild beasts and moved trees and rocks; which means that the wise man, with the instrument of his voice, softens and humbles cruel hearts, and move at his will those who live neither for science nor for art, and those who, having no rational life whatever, are almost like stones....
>
> The third sense is called *moral*; and this readers should carefully gather from all writings, for the benefit of themselves and their descendants; it is such as we may gather from the Gospel, when Christ went up into the mountains to be transfigured, and of the twelve apostles took with Him but three; which in the moral sense may be understood thus, that in most secret things we should have few companions.
>
> The fourth sense is called *analogical* (or mystical), that is beyond sense.

The analogical level is not ordinarily the concern of fiction writers, who write of events that take place in this world, not the next. But in any masterpiece of fiction--even masterpieces of realism--the action operates on the three other levels.

For instance, on a literal level, "The Killers" is a story of what happened one evening to Nick Adams, an adolescent boy who used to hang out around a diner. Nick's horror at the knowledge that Ole Andreson is going to be murdered embodies his moral conviction that it is wrong for one man to kill another. Allegorically, the story sets forth a boy's dawning realization that every man lives, for the most part, alone, and dies alone.

It is interesting to observe how, in some instances, the allegorical meaning actually seems to run counter to the literal level. Flaubert's "A Simple Heart" is a case in point. On the literal level it is the story of a peasant woman to whom nothing of any moment ever happened. We are convinced that Felicite is a good woman, a better woman that her mistress. Still, she dies ill, poor, and neglected. Nowadays we would be tempted to say that her life was a failure. On the allegorical level, however, she is eminently successful; the vision which she has as she is dying convinces us that she will go straight to heaven. We are not sure that anybody else in the story will.

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