

DEATH SITUATIONS  
IN THE SHORT STORY.  
A STUDY IN STRUCTURE

by

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## INTRODUCTION

In an article on Ernst Cassirer, Konstantin Reichardt says,

since form is the only rational factor of every art, and the form of each art manifests a specific order, the order and form of the arts are to be investigated, if we want to examine the artist's imagination at work and the architecture of the world of art.<sup>1</sup>

It is the aim of this thesis to cast some light on a small, yet beautiful building within the complex architecture of this world of art, the genre of the short story. To isolate its structural and generic characteristics in general, however, would entail an analytical investigation into a huge number of short stories, a task too great to be tackled in a thesis. Some critics have restricted their study to the achievements of an individual writer as is the case with Gogol As a Short Story Writer by Frederick C. Driessen<sup>2</sup>, to the idiosyncrasies of a certain national literature as in The Modern Short Story in Peru by Earl M. Aldrich<sup>3</sup>, or to a limited span of time within the development of the short story as a national art form as in Austin M. Wright's The American Short Story in the Twenties.<sup>4</sup> None of these restrictive methods have been used here. The study of an individual writer, however illuminating and valuable, very rarely admits valid inferences as to the question of generic appearance. A national restriction has been rejected, as it seems that the modern short story is more an

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<sup>1</sup>Konstantin Reichardt, "Ernst Cassirer's Contribution to Literary Criticism," in The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer, ed. P. A. Schilpp (Evanston, Illinois: The Library of Living Philosophers, Inc., 1949), pp. 661-688.

<sup>2</sup>Trans. Ian F. Finlay (The Hague: Mouton, 1965).

<sup>3</sup>(Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

<sup>4</sup>(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

international genre than a specifically national one. Although national idiosyncrasies can be found, e.g. Irish humour, a country's writers, like James Joyce for example bring forth stories which are certainly not more Irish than they are international. Finally the confinement to a narrow span of time has been avoided, as some stories of the late 19th century, e.g. Crane's The Upturned Face<sup>1</sup>, display structural features which are prominent enough for them to pass as true relations of those stories written after the Second World War, e.g. Wolfgang Borchert's Mein bleicher Bruder (My Pale Brother).

However, a certain restriction has been made in the present thesis by the concentration on death situations in a representative number of short stories. But even then, the number of stories employing significant death incidents is too vast to be exhausted even approximately in this inquiry. Nor has an historical survey of the death motif within the genre of the short story been attempted. Death has been chosen above all other reasons, because it is man's most concentrated and poignant experience in reality and in art.

It will be shown how this thematic power of the death incident appears also as a dominating structural force. The common basis of death situations makes it relatively easy to compare different narrative techniques in the manner in which they present such a pointed situation or in which the death incidents exert a structuring influence upon them. Important questions concerning the structure of the short story such as those of brevity and density will be tackled under the aspect of the function of death situations. Norman Friedman, in his article What Makes a Short Story Short?<sup>3</sup> makes a brilliant

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<sup>1</sup>(1900), in Robert W. Stallman (ed.), Stephen Crane: An Omnibus (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), pp. 389-393.

<sup>2</sup>(1947), in Wolfgang Borchert, Das Gesamtwerk (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958), pp. 188-190.

<sup>3</sup>Norman Friedman, "What Makes a Short Story Short?," Modern Fiction Studies, IV (1958), pp. 103-117.

and successful attempt at finding some answers.

Summing up he says,

a story may be short because its action is intrinsically small; or because its action, being large, is reduced in length by means of devices of selection, scale, and/or point of view.<sup>1</sup>

According to Friedman a limited number of words, or relative unity, or emphasis on a climax, are not enough to assess the reason for a story's brevity. "All we can do," he concludes,

upon recognizing its shortness, is to ask how and why, keeping balanced simultaneously in our minds the alternative ways of answering these questions and their possible combinations. And then we may win increased understanding and hence appreciation of the specific artistic qualities of this curious and splendid but vastly underrated art.<sup>2</sup>

The thesis asks how and why the empirical material is what it is, i.e. short and, if artistically successful, also dense. If the present study finally corresponds to what the author intended it to be, it will be an attempt at specifying some of Friedman's main questions and answers. What he calls the story's action will be split up into its major structural elements and analysed independently. It may appear at first that the concentration on death situations will detract from the general quality of the structural results gained. The development of the argument, however, has been directed in such a way that the 'death' story's individual and general validity within the genre of the short story appears to be evident.

At the beginning of Part I an historical survey will be made of theoretical statements by writers and critics of the short story from the first half of the last century up to the present day. It will lead to a preliminary definitive description of the genre. A short chapter will follow in which general possible relations between theme and structure will be discussed. The emphasis will be on the distinction between 'long' and 'short'

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

themes and on their relation to death incidents in fiction. To give an idea of the different role death can play in different fictional structures a few rudimentary narrative genres will be discussed and their relation to death demonstrated in the next section. This chapter is also meant to display some valid generic differences between such older forms and the modern short story by concentrating on one marked structural unit, the death situation. The following chapter adds to the many plausible explanations of the birth of the typically modern short story yet one more in attempting to show how two significant literary phenomena in the evolution of the short story merge towards the end of the last century: the phenomenon of brevity of external form in the tradition of Poe, Bierce, O. Henry, and the trend towards presenting an existential problem within a more or less short piece of prose fiction as represented by Melville, Flaubert, or Tolstoi. Again the concentration on death situations will serve as a frame to which the argument will be restricted. The isolation of existential problems within short pieces of fiction will demand a short discussion of existentialist death concepts in the last chapter of Part I.

Part II should be understood as an attempt to adapt certain parts of Nicolai Hartmann's general aesthetic theory<sup>1</sup> for the interpretation of individual stories and the theory of the genre. His concept of the phenomenological order of structural layers in art appears to be particularly fruitful if applied to this short form of prose. In the process of adapting his ideas for the purposes of this thesis modifications have been made which, at times, tend to deviate considerably from the original. There may well be inconsistencies resulting from such alterations. These, however, are unintentional. The two major sections of this part deal with the function

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<sup>1</sup>Nicolai Hartmann, Ästhetik (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Co., 1953).

of death situations in what is presented in the "middle layers," to use Hartmann's terminology<sup>1</sup>, and what appears in the "final layer" of ideas.<sup>2</sup> In the concluding chapter of Part II it will be shown how the 'death' story can be regarded as representative of the short story in general.

Part III is an attempt at arranging short stories in a meaningful typological order. Meaningful, it is hoped, because the typology has two main aims. It is intended as a classification which may help the critic, teacher, and student to see thematical and structural differences and similarities between certain stories and thus encourage comparative interpretation as well as discussion on narrative techniques. However, the typology has not only a descriptive, but also a persuasive character in that it suggests criteria of high art. It has to be emphasized and will be stressed occasionally in the course of this study that one has always to be aware that there is a fundamental difference between the ideality of types which are purely conjectural models and the individuality of the piece of art. The types are thought of as abstract centres which appear to be approached, more or less closely, by individual short stories.

Finally a few remarks on the terminology employed in the present study seem appropriate. All interpretations in this inquiry are based on the assumption that there is a difference, however difficult to define, between 'objective' and 'subjective' criticism, a difference which is not the same as that between analysis and interpretation. A subjective interpretation may use analysis to support its more personal appraisal as honestly as can objective criticism. It would help, perhaps, to describe the difference by means of a spatial analogy. Suppose a number of lamps or reflectors orbiting in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., e.g. p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., e.g. p. 182.

concentric spheres about a centre which they illuminate and which illuminates them in turn. These lamps are then interpretative centres of reading and response. The more of the main centre they actually illuminate, the more completely shared their sphere of orbit must be. This sharing is, then, what is meant by an objective area of agreement. Subjectivity, on the other hand, is characterized by the illuminating centres sharing only segments of a sphere of orbit. Furthermore, the fewer segments they share, the more subjective will be the reading and response. This spatial analogy, being an extra-literary model, may appear to be of as little use as a linear concept. It seems, however, that if flexibly understood the analogy can, without doubt, be of considerable conceptual value not only for clarifying the dispute about objective and subjective criticism, but also as a pointer to the understanding of the structure of an artistic object.

The term action will be used in its fullest possible meaning to embrace outer, external or physical action as well as inner or mind action. Where the difference between the two extremes, which of course overlap in reality, is significant the more specified term will be employed.

The term theme, though generally used in literary criticism, will appear to be too vague for certain arguments in this inquiry. It will be employed only when the strict distinction between its concrete and ideal qualities is not important. Its ideal quality will be referred to as universal or general idea. The concrete element of theme will have to be suggested by phrases such as "meaning in the immediate fictional reality of the middle layers."

The terms content, form, and structure, although widely used, appear to demand a clear definition for the purposes of the present thesis. Content here is not understood as having any priority to form except in time, as it is always a content which demands to be articulated by form. Form is understood

as the all-embracing manner in which a piece of art, in this case a short story, appears. Structure also comprises the total artistic object. The difference between form and structure is that the critic thinking in terms of form looks at the story as a whole shape, whereas the critic interested in structure looks at the multiple structural details out of which the artistic object consists and tries to assess their functionality with respect to the whole of its form. None of the three terms, then, is restricted to certain parts of a piece of art, but each purports to deal with the total work. They do not derive their validity so much from the piece of art as from the critic who looks upon an artistic object with one of these three major concepts in mind. A final and full appraisal, thus, will always demand a complex synoptic view.

PART I

THE EVOLUTION OF A FORM

## CHAPTER I

### THEORY OF THE SHORT STORY

#### 1. Problems of Defining the Short Story

Although there is no generally accepted all-embracing definition of the short story as a distinct literary form, most people interested in literature 'understand' this term. Yet it is a large number of stories rather than a clear lexical definition which seems to convey the general idea of what the short story is. For the evolution of the short story as a literary form literary theories have been almost as significant as individual works of art. In this chapter an attempt will be made to give a short historical survey of significant theoretical remarks concerning the short story as a distinct literary genre from its beginnings in the early 19th century up to the present day.

The literary critic today faces, more or less, the same dilemma that faced Poe; he made use of the term 'short story' discriminatingly, yet he was not able to give a rigorous definition of this literary type. The main reasons for this dilemma are the immense scope which the term embraces structurally, and the too infrequently acknowledged fact that theme plays an important part in characterizing the genre. It has to be distinguished as an independent genre from other types of short prose fiction (e.g. the fairy-tale, legend, anecdote, riddle), a problem which the critic of the novel does not face so urgently. These difficulties are obviously too complex to be solved in this thesis. So an attempt will be made to isolate one part of the problem of definition by a significant thematic limitation. One thematic unit and its characteristic structural presentations will be separated from its surroundings and dealt with individually. This rather 'chemical' approach has two

advantages. First, the immense range of short stories can be thematically restricted. Second, the distinctions between the short story and other forms of prose fiction become valid on the ground of a common theme. It remains to be proved, however, that the restrictions in the first case do not entail analysing merely one small special group of the short story and thus defining only this subgroup. In the second case it has to be shown that the distinctions between the short story and other forms of prose fiction are generally valid and that they are not merely distinctions between particular, thematically determined, subgroups.

2. The Special Place of the Theory of the Short Story within the Theory of Literature

It seems that works of art originally were deeply rooted in religion and metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> This fact apparently determined the whole theory of art from Greek antiquity till the Renaissance. Art was never considered as an end in itself, but as a reflection of a higher reality.<sup>2</sup> This is even true for the time when representatives of the Apologetics and Patristics rejected art as a creation of the devil.<sup>3</sup> With the ideas of the Enlightenment the first important change in the theory of art took place. Art became more and more an independent discipline. This process of gaining self-sufficiency reached its culminating point in Victor Cousin's postulation of 'L'art pour l'art' in 1836.

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<sup>1</sup>the thesis has to rely here on authorities such as Professor Dr. Ernesto Grassi and, in particular, on his study Kunst und Mythos (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>cf. e.g. Plato, Resp., II, III, X; Menon; Hippias Minor; Alcibiadis Major; Ion; Apology; Phaidros; Aristotle, Poetics; Physics II. Plotinus, Enneade, I, 6; III, 5, 8. Tertullian, De idol., XXVIII; Isidor of Seville, VIII, 7, De poetis. Dante, Epist., XI, 7. Boccaccio, Gen. deor., p. 250. quoted in Ernesto Grassi, op. cit., pp. 144-148.

<sup>3</sup>e.g. Origines, Minucius Felix, and Lactantius who were supported by Tertullian.

A second significant change in the development of the theory of art and particularly in the theory of literature is visible in the late 18th century. Goethe's Novelle, written 1826 as a prototype for a whole genre, may give an idea of the new, more sophisticated attitude. By the early 19th century the change he proposed was complete. Whereas in former times there was a comparatively small body of literary theory accompanying the great volume of texts, we realize that now theoretical works approach closely in quantity the literary output they discuss and sometimes surpass, in quality, the works on which they reflect. Another very significant element of the new theory of literature is the fact that whereas up to the 19th century the literary critic usually commented objectively on works of art, now the artist himself observes his own process of creation and renders his observations subjectively.

Poe, in his two most pointed theoretical essays, The Philosophy of Composition (1846) and The Poetic Principle (1848), gave the first distinct expression of this new spirit. Baudelaire translated Poe's theoretical works and made them available to the European reading public. His Curiosité esthétiques<sup>1</sup> and L'Art romantique<sup>2</sup> basically reflect Poe's principles.

These essays show one of the main symptoms of the modern spirit, the simultaneity of art and the reflection on art. They are monuments of an artistic intelligence that tries to gain valuable insights into art from the observation of its own process of artistic creation. The two main innovations Poe's theory and art reflect, the absolute independence and self-sufficiency of art, and the idea of art as a product created by artistic intelligence<sup>3</sup>, are both effective to the present day. Mallarmé's Divagations<sup>4</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>written between 1845 and 1855; published posthumously 1868; quoted in Hugo Friedrich, Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958), p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>written between 1846 and 1862; published posthumously 1868; quoted in H.Friedrich, op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>3</sup>cf. his comparing the artist's task to a mathematical problem

<sup>4</sup>(1897); he had been working on them since 1864; quoted in H.Friedrich, op. cit., p. 202.

Ortega y Gasset's La deshumanización del arte<sup>1</sup>, and the two surrealistic manifestos<sup>2</sup> are only logical consequences of what found a first clear expression in Poe's theoretical and artistic work.

The short story thus grew under unique conditions. Unlike all the other literary genres its development was accompanied from the very beginning by a flood of theories that tried to define the form of what had been written as well as to determine what form future stories should take. Comments about the short story as a literary type range from the statement that the "short story is a smaller, simpler, easier and less important form of the novel"<sup>3</sup> to the remark that "the short story seems to ... [be] the most difficult and disciplining form of prose writing extant."<sup>4</sup> Despite the often contradictory comments on the short story some ideas expressed at the beginning of its development are still valid. For example, Poe's postulation of the "unity of effect"<sup>5</sup> would, perhaps, be expressed in this way today: a greatest possible number of structural details has to fulfil the function of adding to the work's homogeneity. This, of course, can be applied to any form of art. But for it to have the character of a definition or definitive description of the short story it must be specific. Between Poe's early theoretical statements and contemporary criticism of the short story lies the history of the theory of the short story. After

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<sup>1</sup>(1925); quoted in H.Friedrich, op. cit., p. 203.

<sup>2</sup>by A.Breton (1924, 1934); quoted in H. Friedrich, op. cit., pp. 202f.

<sup>3</sup>from an anonymous article published in the London Academy, LX (March 30, 1901), p. 288; quoted in Eugene Current-García and Walter R. Patrick, What is the Short Story? Case Studies in the Development of a Literary Form (Chicago: Scott, Foresman Co., 1961), p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Truman Capote in the Paris Review, Spring-Summer 1957 and in Writers at Work, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: The Viking Press, 1958), pp. 287-288; quoted in Current-García and Patrick, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>5</sup>The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1902), XI, 106.

Poe had given it its general direction the concept of the short story, having passed through stages of more or less clear consciousness of form, seems to have reached a status that differs from Poe's ideas in two main ways: first, Poe's thematic horizon has been immensely enlarged, and second, his definatory statements have been considerably circumscribed.

3. A Short Historical Survey of the Theory of the Short Story in the 19th and 20th Centuries

a. Irving and Poe: Brevity and Unity

About 20 years before Poe's epoch-making theories were published, Washington Irving, in a letter to Henry Brevoort passed a few remarks on the short prose tale that are worth considering. A story here is regarded "merely as a frame on which to stretch ... [one's] materials."<sup>1</sup> The materials he refers to are "the play of thought, and sentiment, and language; the weaving in of characters, lightly, yet expressively delineated; the familiar and faithful exhibition of scenes in common life; and a half-concealed vein of humor."<sup>2</sup> These statements are obviously based on a definite concept of the term 'story'. A story to Irving is not a complete and artistically arranged piece of fiction, it is rather a more or less loose connection of incidents capable of being moulded into a short tale with the help of some artistic means such as those mentioned above. In the same letter Irving also comments on brevity and length in fiction - still one of the major problems in morphological studies of fiction today. His first statement, that he "preferred adopting the mode of sketches and short tales rather

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<sup>1</sup>From a letter to Henry Brevoort, December 11, 1824, in The Life and Letters of Washington Irving, condensed editions, ed. Pierre B. Irving (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1869), II, 64; quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

than long works, because" he chose "to take a line of writing peculiar to himself ... , rather than fall into the manner or school of any other writer,"<sup>1</sup> is not very helpful. But then Irving passes a remark that seems to anticipate Poe's idea of unity: "there is a constant activity of thought and a nicety of execution required in writings of the kind, more than the world appears to imagine."<sup>2</sup> The modern idea is revealed here that the constant intellectual control over a piece of art may result in a tendency towards perfect artistic execution. Irving's statement has an awareness that is well ahead of its time. To bring home his point even more impressively he tries to prove a certain inferiority in longer prose fiction compared to the art of short tales. "It is comparatively easy," he says, "to swell a story to any size when you have once the scheme and the characters in your mind."<sup>3</sup> However, Irving is making a mistake one encounters throughout the whole history of short story theory: contrasting bad writing in longer prose fiction with the demands of good writing in the short form. Nevertheless, in describing some of the formal requirements of short tale writing Irving sounds surprisingly modern. "In these shorter writings, every page must have its merit. The author must be continually piquant; woe to him if he makes an awkward sentence<sup>4</sup> or writes a stupid page; ... yet if he succeed, the very variety and piquancy of his writings - nay, their very brevity<sup>5</sup>, make them frequently recurred to."<sup>6</sup> The two basic ideas, artistic intellectual control and the tendency towards perfection, are clearly expressed in these statements. Not only

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. Irving's use of the term 'sketch' underlies an understatement; 'sketch' here means short piece of prose fiction or short tale. Irving's 'sketches' lack the main characteristics of the sketch, a loose and fragmentary structure and the fact that it is rarely an end in itself.

<sup>2</sup>Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., p. 2

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>My underlining

<sup>5</sup>My underlining

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

must every single page be without a flaw, every single sentence has to be aesthetically satisfying. If these strict demands are met by an artist, its very brevity will make his piece of writing attractive and convincing.

Washington Irving's theoretical statements about short prose fiction cannot be regarded as a proper theory of the short story. His idea of "weaving in characters" for example belongs more to the realm of novel writing. Nevertheless, his remarks display a clear recognition of the demands of the structure of the short tale: brevity, a constant intellectual and artistic control, and, as a result of this control, a characteristic artistic perfection.

With the advent of Poe the short story as a literary genre in the making received its first significant theoretical foundations. Poe introduced two important criteria, that of time - the time it takes to read a piece of literature - and that of unity of impression or, as he more often referred to it, the unity of effect. The first criterion is Poe's own. The second is an adaptation and specification of older ideas, mainly Irving's, and an expression of his reaction to Hawthorne's efforts. In his discussion of the element of time<sup>1</sup> Poe transfers his requirements for writing poetry onto prose fiction. A piece of literature should "not exceed in length what might be perused in an hour;"<sup>2</sup> or its reading should "be completed at one sitting"<sup>3</sup>. Later Poe says, "we allude to the short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal."<sup>4</sup> This new emphasis on brevity in literature, particularly in prose fiction, was revolutionary.

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<sup>1</sup>It would perhaps be useful to introduce the term 'reading-time' for the time it takes to read a story and the term 'narrated time' for the span of time covered by the action presented. Cf. the German terms 'Erzählzeit' and 'erzählte Zeit'.

<sup>2</sup>The Complete Works, XI, p. 106

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

Before and after Poe's dicta shorter stories were often considered as inferior to the novel. We need not follow Poe's extreme argument that long epics are "the offspring of an imperfect sense of Art" or that "the sin of extreme length is ... unpardonable."<sup>1</sup> Here, he is obviously pushing his defence of the short form too far. His more moderate reasoning in support of brevity, however, is quite acceptable. "During the hour of perusal," Poe argues, "the soul of the reader is at the writer's control."<sup>2</sup> He maintains that the "exaltation of the soul ... cannot be long sustained" and that the "immense force" of "totality" can be fully experienced only when we are able to read a piece of literature "at one sitting."<sup>3</sup> Attacking extreme length in literature Poe admits, however, that "extreme brevity will degenerate into epigrammatism."<sup>4</sup> In his criticism of long fiction Poe unfortunately compounds Irving's mistake by devaluating the art of long epic writing instead of giving proper objectively testable differences between short and long forms of prose fiction. Such differences certainly exist and attempts will be made in the course of this thesis to analyse some essential structural differences between shorter and longer forms of prose writing.

Having established his more general ideas of time and brevity Poe goes on to reveal just how he himself proceeds when constructing short prose fiction. Readers are often put off by technical terms such as 'construction' and 'intellectual control' in a literary discussion. But Poe's art and theories seem to prove that this dislike of conscious technique in literature is irrelevant. Nobody can justly maintain that Poe's art lacks imagination or intuition. On the contrary, it shows, even within its narrow thematic scope, an amazing and sometimes frightening

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 108

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 107

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

imaginative power. And yet, it is Poe who emphasizes in the writing of literature the idea of the relationship between the task of an artist and the strict logic of a mathematical problem.<sup>1</sup> It is Poe himself who rejects the "intoxication of the heart" and introduces the term "calculation" in his poetic theories.<sup>2</sup>

In rendering his observations of himself as a short-story writer Poe notes that "a certain unique or single effect"<sup>3</sup> has to be preconceived. Then certain incidents can be invented that are combined in such a way "as may best aid him [the writer] in establishing his preconceived effect."<sup>4</sup> Poe specifies Irving's idea of "nicety of execution"<sup>5</sup> when he postulates: "If his [the writer's] very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written<sup>6</sup>, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design."<sup>7</sup> These two elements, functional detail and unity of the whole are enlarged upon as well in Poe's famous Philosophy of Composition (1846). To achieve his unity Poe prefers "commencing with the consideration of an effect."<sup>8</sup> Then he constructs a plot and fills in all the necessary details. "Every plot ... must be elaborated to its dénouement before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. H. Friedrich, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26. The German Novalis had used this term in his Fragmente (1798); quoted in H. Friedrich, op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>3</sup>The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, XI, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. above, p. 14

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Irving's "awkward sentence," above, p. 14

<sup>7</sup>The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, XI, p. 108.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., XIV, p. 194

especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention."<sup>1</sup> By stressing incident and tone as vital for reaching a preconceived effect Poe introduces a new aspect of the writing of short fiction. At the same time, however, he reveals one of the limitations of his concept of the short story. "Having chosen," Poe writes, "a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone."<sup>2</sup> Although treatment of tone, atmosphere, and action are major structural devices for the writer as well as for the critic, Poe apparently disregarded elements such as handling of character, time, space, and universals. Any of these elements may become the pivot of a story; for the writer, who makes his other structural details lead up to it and give emphasis to it, or for the critic, who, in an analysis, starts with this pivot and gradually reveals the function of all the other elements related to it. Nevertheless, Poe is the first critic of the short story as a unique form of literature who distinguishes clearly between structural elements that may - depending on the writer's preconceived effect - gain greater or less significance.

Poe's postulate that every single part in a short story must have a certain function, namely that of serving significantly the idea of the whole, is still valid today.<sup>3</sup> His knowledge of and emphasis on artistic control could have allowed him to produce superb pieces in the field of short prose fiction, not only in the narrow scope of theme he dealt with, but in general. His 'neurotic' concentration on the presentation of the atmosphere of occultism, death and horror prevented him from a fuller interpretation of life. Though technically perfect, Poe's stories prove to be only a partial exploitation of his inspired theoretical insights. It was left to a later generation of short-story writers and critics to fulfil and expand Poe's theories.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 193

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 194

<sup>3</sup>The need for total relevance in art has, of course, been realized before Poe. His achievement is a reformulation of this idea with respect to the short story.

b. Hawthorne: The Allegorical Story

In his comments on his own short stories Hawthorne, contrary to Irving and Poe, shows little interest in the formal aspects of short prose fiction. Four main elements characteristic of the form of his stories can, however, be clearly recognized in his theoretical remarks as well as in his stories. Hawthorne emphasizes theme more than do his predecessors; he employs allegory to present his themes; and he makes use of 'romance' as a vehicle for his moral point. Hawthorne is obviously aware of the fact that it is this love of allegory that prevents his stories from winning him "greater reputation."<sup>1</sup> The stories are mostly too heavily didactic to attract the modern reader. Hawthorne uses romance to veil his fictional material with an "evanescent flavor" of the "Marvelous."<sup>2</sup> This he finds difficult in "a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong."<sup>3</sup>

Hawthorne's strong emphasis on a moral often makes his stories appear old-fashioned compared to Poe's. The reader is always told what to make of the story, and little is left for his imagination to discover. There is a clear authorial attitude underlying his stories that often spoils the subtlety of presentation.

In spite of these shortcomings Hawthorne must be regarded as an important contributor to the theory of the short story. He sticks closely to the idea of unity of impression and, at the same time, stresses the need for theme. While Poe restricts the world which his stories present through his narrow choice

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<sup>1</sup>The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George Parsons Lathrop (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1883). II, 107; quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Preface to The House of the Seven Gables, quoted in Danforth Ross, The American Short Story (Pamphlets on American Writers, Number 14; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

of theme<sup>1</sup>, Hawthorne introduces into the short story serious themes such as human conflicts resulting from guilt, intellectual and moral pride, sin and remorse. In The Minister's Black Veil<sup>2</sup> the theme of consciousness of sin is given literary form, Roger Malvin's Burial<sup>3</sup> presents the theme of remorse, in Dr. Heidigger's Experiment<sup>4</sup> Hawthorne explores the theme of people rejuvenated while their vices remain the same, The Birthmark<sup>5</sup> and Rappaccini's Daughter<sup>6</sup> portray the scientist who sacrifices his greatest good in order to reach scientific perfection. In attempting to reveal some truth by the artistic presentation not of an external but of a moral world Hawthorne shows his close relationship with Transcendentalism and religious thinking. A moral world appears most convincingly incorporated in art through allegory. By projecting our everyday world into the realm of allegory Hawthorne tries to convey the higher truth of his moral world. He succeeds most convincingly in achieving this aim where he disguises his didactic intention by means of dramatic presentation, as is the case in Young Goodman Brown.<sup>7</sup>

c. Frederick B. Perkins on Poe's Ideas

When Poe devaluated long epic works in order to prove the short story's superiority he had done so by transferring his criticism of the long poem to the level of prose writing. By saying, however, that

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<sup>1</sup>Poe's main themes are: 1. mystery or detective; 2. science fiction; 3. Gothic horror.

<sup>2</sup>(1836)

<sup>3</sup>(1832)

<sup>4</sup>(1837)

<sup>5</sup>(1843)

<sup>6</sup>(1844)

<sup>7</sup>(1835)

there cannot be any aesthetically satisfying long poem, as emotional tension cannot be sustained over a long period, he was begging the question. Frederick B. Perkins, in his preface to Devil-Puzzlers and Other Studies<sup>1</sup>, points out the mistake in Poe's preliminary assumption "that the only poems are those where a single pang of high and passionate emotion is their efficient cause, as it is their object and effect - that is, that lyrics are the only poems."<sup>2</sup> Likewise Perkins corrects Poe's extreme statements about the superiority of short prose fiction over long novels. "Now the prose tale, or short story, is not the highest order of prose composition, any more than the lyric of poetical; but it is entitled, like the lyric, to a high rank. It compares with other prose compositions as the lyric does with the epic, or narrative, or dramatic poem; as a melody with an opera or a sonata."<sup>3</sup> However valuable Perkins's statements are as a corrective of Poe's somewhat extreme assumptions, the comparison of the short story with a melody and the long piece of prose fiction with an opera or sonata appears to be rash. For Perkins's comparison implies that a short story may be embedded in any longer form of prose fiction as a melody may become part of an opera. At the time when Perkins wrote these comments the short story had, however, passed the stage where it could still be used as an anecdote dovetailed into the structure of a novel. Once it forms an interweaving element of a longer piece of prose the short story loses its completeness and self-sufficiency as a created organic unity, and thus ceases to exist.

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<sup>1</sup>(New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), pp. XV-XIX; quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 18f.

<sup>2</sup>Perkins's preface to Devil-Puzzlers and Other Studies, p. XVIII.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

- d. Chekhov: Objectivity, Realistic Detail, Indirect Characterization, Framework, and the Story without Beginning and End

The biggest step forward since Poe in the development of the theory of the short story and in the short-story art itself was certainly made by Anton Chekhov. From his Letters on the Short Story, the Drama, and Other Literary Topics<sup>1</sup> we gain a vivid impression of how much aware Chekhov was of all the technical problems he and contemporary writers had to face. By giving technical advice to other writers he reveals to us in brilliantly clear analyses their faults and his artistic convictions. And again, as was the case with Poe, it is a clear-sighted, piercing intellect that appears before us, taking poor pieces of literature apart and showing their basic weaknesses. In one letter Chekhov warns a friend who is a writer that the flaws he is going to point out to him "have a technical rather than a critico-literary interest."<sup>2</sup> We have to reject, however, the possible reproach that Chekhov's art is intellectual rather than imaginative, for like Poe, Chekhov regards imagination and intuition as basic requirements to be moulded in the hands of a technically-conscious artist.

One of the main weaknesses Chekhov finds in contemporary writing is an indulgence in subjectivity. He condemns the writer who is not capable of gaining a detached attitude that would enable him to distinguish between trifles and significant details in writing. "Subjectivity is a terrible thing. It is bad in this alone, that it reveals the author's hands and feet."<sup>3</sup> It is particularly the traditional authorial comment that Chekhov attacks here, the author's officious interference with the world of

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<sup>1</sup>Ed. Louis S. Friedland, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1924); quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., pp. 20-24.

<sup>2</sup>A. Chekhov, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 69.

his story. To acquire, instead, objectivity, Chekhov suggests: "One needs /sic/ only to be more honest, to throw oneself overboard everywhere, not to obtrude oneself into the hero . . . ." <sup>1</sup> Chekhov's emphasis is clearly on objectivity in writing, and all the other technical aspects of prose writing that he mentions suggest objectivity as an underlying basic trait.

In his statements about the presentation of Nature Chekhov rejects commonplaces and sentimentality as two main evils. For an adequate description of Nature he demands brevity and realistic detail. "In my opinion a true description of Nature should be very brief and have a character of relevance." <sup>2</sup> "Commonplaces one ought to abandon." <sup>3</sup> As to the importance of realistic detail Chekhov says, "in descriptions of Nature one ought to seize upon the little particulars, grouping them in such a way that, in reading, when you shut your eyes, you get a picture." <sup>4</sup> A more general demand that Chekhov makes besides the requirement of seizing "little particulars" is absolute honesty and sincerity in art. One could as well use the term 'originality' in its total meaning. By originally adopting one realistic detail, a writer, Chekhov argues, is able to animate Nature more than by making use of elaborate cliché-pictures which he finds in the light fiction of the day.

Chekhov wishes to see what applies to the description of Nature transferred onto the level of characterization. "In the sphere of psychology, details are also the thing. God preserve us from commonplaces." <sup>5</sup> His basic tendency to present a section of reality objectively rather than subjectively leads Chekhov to the idea that character should not be presented authorially. "Best of all is it to avoid depicting the hero's state of mind; you ought to try to make it clear from the hero's actions." <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 70

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Referring to a story which presents two main characters Chekhov comments: "It is not necessary to portray many characters. The centre of gravity should be in two persons: him and her."<sup>1</sup> With this remark Chekhov has hit on a significant difference between short and long pieces of prose fiction. The "centre of gravity" can be much more closely determined in short fiction - it is much more conspicuous and exerts a far more powerful influence on its surrounding structural elements than does the "centre of gravity", if there is a clearly visible one, in the novel. In the novel, as in short fiction, there may be one predominant or two main characters about whom the whole structure is built. Yet, side-characters, sub-plots, description of customs and the presentation of society or the stress on different kinds of development usually distract from the force which the "centre of gravity" in the novel can exert. Chekhov, with fascinating insight into the architectural laws of fiction, was the first to depict that basic difference.

The question of central forces in a story is closely related to the problem of selection. Chekhov's comment on this issue reads: "From a crowd of leading or subordinate characters one selects one person only - wife or husband; one puts him on the canvas and paints him alone, making him prominent, while the others one scatters over the canvas like small coin."<sup>2</sup> The novel and novel-like forms have as a characteristic element an accumulation of 'novelistic amplifications' such as description of habits and customs, portrayals of societies, or the presentation of development of character. The short story, says Chekhov, is not able to use any of these techniques without ceasing to belong to this particular genre. The short story has to be strictly selective. Poe had already implied the idea of selection in his concept of "unity of effect."<sup>3</sup> Chekhov explicitly demands it. And as he

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11f.

<sup>3</sup> The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, XI, p. 106.

stresses in particular the structural element of characterization, it seems only natural that the term 'selection' should be mentioned in connection with the portrayal of character. Chekhov's idea of selecting one important detail out of a crowd of more or less significant things is clearly meant to apply to an artist's task in general terms. By means of selection and rearrangement he forms a new artistic reality out of a given though random world. However, whereas absolutely strict selection in the longer forms of prose fiction is not essential, it is vital for the short story. An author in a novel may allow his narrator to be carried away by the mere joy of narrating and still be able to give these amplifications a proper function within the looser narrative structure. In the type of the short story which Chekhov has in mind the artist has to "slough off at one stroke all that is useless"<sup>1</sup> to give his story strict homogeneity.

Another structural element which is particularly significant within the short story, Chekhov says, is that of narrative density. "You must give the reader no chance to recover: he must always be kept in suspense."<sup>2</sup> Chekhov, here, underlines his idea that a writer should put down only what appears to be absolutely necessary. Scenes and descriptions must not be "dragged out unduly."<sup>3</sup> The reader must not be allowed to lean back and, after having grasped the main point of a section, skim through the passages which only paraphrase that main idea before a new important item catches his imagination. This same idea of narrative density in the short story underlies Chekhov's criticism of a contemporary writer of short prose fiction: "Your works lack the compactness that makes short things alive. There is skill in your stories; there is talent,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

literary sense, but very slight art."<sup>1</sup> Chekhov, like other modern artists, is so concerned with the conscious process of arranging the structural elements of a piece of fiction artistically that he gives art this clear, though somewhat narrow, definition. In doing so he apparently had in mind the original meaning of the word.<sup>2</sup> To illustrate his point more lucidly he enlarges upon his concept of compactness: "You are either too lazy," he writes in the same letter, "or you do not wish to slough off at one stroke all that is useless. To make a face from marble means to remove from the slab everything that is not the face."<sup>3</sup> Talent, taste, imagination, all these gifts a short story writer must have as basic constituents. Yet, despite all these endowments the same writer, Chekhov implies, would still not be able to produce anything but light fiction unless he were prepared to acquire that necessary artistic and intellectual control which achieves "the compactness that makes short things alive."<sup>4</sup>

This last brilliantly formulated statement suggests that compactness or density is a trait more typical of good short prose fiction than of long forms. Unfortunately Chekhov does not go into greater detail on this particular point. We have to be content with the remark that "long detailed works have their own peculiar aims, which require a most careful execution regardless of the total impression."<sup>5</sup> The first part of Chekhov's statement is valuable as a formal finding: length in fiction, regardless of the theme which is treated, demands its own structural laws and aims. The second part could be strongly criticised by defenders of the long form. Chekhov would, however, have restricted his generalization in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. e.g. the Latin "artifex"

<sup>3</sup>A. Chekhov, op. cit., pp. 82f.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

in some way, if he had known such a long and at the same time dense work as James Joyce's Ulysses. However he goes on to say, "in short stories it is better to say not enough than to say too much."<sup>1</sup> A whole generation of short story writers<sup>2</sup> was not able to give the development of this new literary genre more momentum than did this statement and its practice in Chekhov's art. Suddenly we have both as a demand and as a literary criterion in the art of the short story the technique of suggestion. How wide a gap there is between this insight and Irving's or Hawthorne's ideas! It would not surprise a 20th century reader if Chekhov's statement had been a reflection of the general Zeitgeist. But Chekhov apparently had to defend his artistic position and postulation of an objective art within the short story against contemporary writers who thought his art showed an "indifference to good and evil, lack of ideals and ideas."<sup>3</sup> In his defence of his method of portraying horse-thieves Chekhov writes: "You would have me, when I describe horse-thieves, say: 'Stealing horses is an evil.' But that has been known for ages without my saying so. Let the jury judge them; it's my job simply to show what sort of people they are."<sup>4</sup> Chekhov believes that moralizing should be eliminated from art and from the short story in particular as a foreign body. "Of course it would be pleasant," he explains, "to combine art with a sermon, but for me personally it is extremely difficult and almost impossible, owing to the conditions of technique."<sup>5</sup> If a writer is to portray horse-thieves in the limited narrative space of a short story he "must all the time speak and think in their tone and feel in their spirit, otherwise ... the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. the school of O. Henry

<sup>3</sup> A. Chekhov, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

image becomes blurred and the story will not be as compact as all short stories ought to be."<sup>1</sup> Chekhov wishes to leave it completely to the "reader to add for himself the subjective elements that are lacking in the story."<sup>2</sup> Subjectivity, here, is understood as an illegal breach of tone and technique that spoils the impression of immediacy and homogeneous effect a story should have on the reader.

Strict selection, suggestion and the demands of consistent objectivity appear to lead Chekhov to the drastic notion that the writer of the conventional story should strike out both beginning and end to make it a proper short story. Chekhov obviously believes that any detailed introduction to or conclusion of a significant situation properly belongs to the realm of the novel and novel-like structures. He regards these parts as 'novelistic amplifications' and as such wishes to eliminate them from the 'pure' short-story structure. Most modern short stories have the 'open beginning' and 'open end' as one of their most prominent characteristics. At the beginning of Chekhov's stories the reader finds himself abruptly confronted with a world that seems to have been hidden from his eyes by a curtain which has suddenly been removed. Then, after he has gained a certain security as an observer within this world of fictional reality, the reader is shocked out of it again by an unexpected and abrupt ending leaving him to form his own conclusions and explanations.

In a way this device implies a new type of reader. The author accepts him, from the very beginning, as mature enough to decide for himself. He allows him to mix the objectively presented fictional reality freely with his own subjective ingredients. Both the old type of story, though conclusive, and the new type with its abrupt ending step out of their frame in some way. But, whereas the old story does so

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

by handing moral guidance to its reader, the type Chekhov demands steps out of its frame only by inspiring the mature reader's imagination to make autonomous decisions.

Chekhov's influence is immense and has, in fact, seldom been questioned. It would, however, have been even more revolutionary, had Chekhov's theories and stories been known to a wider Western reading public than was the case at the time of his writing. It was only in 1909, with the famous translations of Chekhov's art and letters by Constance Garnett, that the full impact of Chekhov's revolutionary literary techniques became effective in the West.

e. Henry James: Psychological Realism

In the art of observing and rendering one's own process of creation Henry James is a true successor of Poe. The Art of the Novel<sup>1</sup> cannot be called a "philosophy of composition", as it is chronologically arranged, not systematically. It is more concerned with representation of the "growth of his [James's] whole operative consciousness"<sup>2</sup> than with a systematic presentation of technical aspects of fiction. However subjective the Prefaces may appear to be, they reveal their author's deep interest in the making of art the recording of which has become an extremely subtle and fascinating art itself. James's theoretical remarks on the technique of fiction-writing, as far as we know from the Prefaces and Notebooks<sup>3</sup>, are

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<sup>1</sup>The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James, introduction by Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., introduction, p. vii

<sup>3</sup>The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947).

all the more important within the theory of prose writing and of short prose writing because his art can be regarded as a turning point from the 19th to the 20th century. And although he cannot be called a short-story writer par excellence, his influence on the development of what is generally and in this thesis called the 'modern short story'<sup>1</sup> is invaluable.

In 20th century literature the short story adopts more and more as a general underlying theme the sceptical, questioning, psychologically analysing attitude of modern man. This basic attitude is given clear expression in James's art through the technique generally known as psychological realism. Traditional narrative techniques with a stress on a succession of external events are replaced by presentation of the most subtle psychic nuances and reactions. This new handling of a given reality is based on the honest attempt to gain valid insights into our precarious human existence. This attempt is the common ground on which one can compare James's art within the field of the short form with the modern short story. It is fairly obvious that the method of psychological realism is neither typical of the short story form nor of the long types of prose fiction. Only if it is combined with certain other devices will it become an element of the one or the other. The different forms result from an emphasis either on themes and techniques that require expansive treatment or on ones that demand extreme compression.<sup>2</sup>

James's emphasis is clearly on the development of complex psychological structures that demand great detail and would suffer under too strict a formal compression. "Shades and differences," James writes, "varieties and styles, the value above all of the idea happily developed, languished, to extinction, under the hard-and-fast rule of the 'from

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. below, the preliminary definitive description of the modern short story, Part I, Chapter I, 4. See also Part I, Chapter IV, 3.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Part I, Chapter II.

six to eight thousand words."<sup>1</sup> Henry James kept either to the novel or "delighted in the shapely nouvelle."<sup>2</sup> In the longer forms he could allow his themes to take shape gradually. The themes which James especially cherishes can all be called 'long-themes'<sup>3</sup>, as they all rely heavily on development. His international theme, for example, in order to be aesthetically satisfying requires the careful presentation of characters with different cultural backgrounds and the portrayal of whole social groups. The psychic conflict of seeking experience or avoiding illumination, the juxtaposition of conventions, growing love or decay demand the more detailed treatment of which James is an unquestionable master. If such a 'long-theme' is depicted within too narrow a fictional space the result cannot be aesthetically satisfying. "Roderick Hudson falls to pieces too quickly," says Richard P. Blackmur summarizing James's own criticism on the book.<sup>4</sup> "Even though he [Roderick Hudson] is special and eminent, still he must not live, change, and disintegrate too rapidly; he loses verisimilitude by so doing. His great capacity for ruin is projected on too small a field."<sup>5</sup>

The emphasis displayed in the form of the modern short story on the other hand is evidently on the subjection of the technique of psychological revelation to the unity of a significant situation, character trait and incident. Psychological realism is used in the short form to present one revealing human situation, a splinter of human reality, not a full-scale picture of a complex world.

James's preference for the nouvelle and novel must not, however, lead us to assume that his art shows

<sup>1</sup>H. James, Prefaces, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. below, Part I, Chapter II.

<sup>4</sup>H. James, Prefaces, Introduction, pp. xxii.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

any signs of lacking artistic control. On the contrary. He refers to The Turn of the Screw as a "piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation,"<sup>1</sup> a term that reminds us of Novalis, Poe, and Baudelaire.<sup>2</sup> Quite obviously James hated "looseness ... of conception or execution ... contemptuously."<sup>3</sup> He calls the artist a "modern alchemist"<sup>4</sup> whom art burdens with the "supreme labour of intelligence."<sup>5</sup>

The two opposing forces of imaginative and intellectual artistic control are always present in his mind. Recollecting the making of The Turn of the Screw, James says, "the thing was to aim at absolute singleness, clearness and roundness, and yet to depend on an imagination working freely, working (call it) with extravagance; by which law it wouldn't be thinkable except as free and wouldn't be amusing except as controlled."<sup>6</sup>

Out of the great number of technical devices James mentions in his Prefaces and Notebooks only a few can be discussed here; preferably those that, although to be found in the novels as well, add essentially to the form which the nouvelles and short stories display.

One of the important technical innovations James introduces is his "central intelligence" and, combined with it, his particular method of indirect presentation. Using an abstraction or a concrete incident "he meditates upon it, lets it develop ... compresses and pares the development until he has found the method by which he can dramatise it, give it a central intelligence whose fortune will be his theme,

<sup>1</sup>H. James, Prefaces, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>H. James, Prefaces, Introduction, p. xvi.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 172

and shape it in a ... story as a consistent and self-sufficient organism."<sup>1</sup>

Everything within the story is unified by and dependent on this device of the central intelligence. It is a centre of consciousness that sees, conceives, interprets, and discusses what the reader can only assume to happen behind an invisible curtain. The reader is offered a reality which has been filtered through the consciousness of James's created intelligent centre. The subject is no longer what happened but what a specially eminent character feels and thinks about what happened. Consequently, action in the traditional sense is replaced by a series of reflections on reality given by the central character.

James's method justly deserves the term 'psychological realism', for, as in real life, our knowledge of somebody's personality is not gained by means of description, but by grasping more and more tiny and subtle indications, splinters and fragments of his psyche. This does not necessarily mean that James portrays real people. His characters are real in the sense that they behave according to what we know about the laws of psychology and in that they are individual enough to pass as human.

His intermediate intelligence allows James to eliminate traditional barriers between the world of his story and the reader. A major effect of this indirect presentation is objectivity. "Objectivity," James remembers, "came from the imposed absence of that 'going behind,' to compass explanations and amplifications, to drag out odds and ends from the 'mere' storyteller's great property-shop of aids to illustration."<sup>2</sup> Once the writer of prose tears himself away from subjectivity,<sup>3</sup> James argues, "something in the very nature, in the fine rigour, of this special sacrifice (which is capable of affecting the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., introduction, p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Chekhov's comments on this problem, above, pp. 22-29.

formlover, I think, as really more of a projected form than any other) lends it moreover a coercive charm."<sup>1</sup>

In rendering most subtle shades and nuances James develops and stresses a new type of characterization. Meanings and feelings are presented in a refined way that was unknown in literature before. His preoccupation with character seems to reach a point where any incident worth literary treatment suggests a story through which a portrait can be revealed. The carefully presented process of the revelation of a character is what interests James infinitely more than incidents. "A character is interesting," he writes, "as it comes out, and by the process and duration of that emergence."<sup>2</sup> Necessarily the stress on process and duration must lead away from the concepts of short treatment of fiction and towards those of longer fictional forms.

The tendency towards narrative length is heightened by the fact that James, while following the slow emergence of a character, is carried away by his gift of filling in a multitude of psychological details. This has a distinct influence on the relation between 'reading-time' and 'narrated time.' The minute depiction of emotions and thoughts tends towards a slowing down of the flux of the 'narrated time' so that, in certain passages, it takes the reader a long time to peruse what would have taken the fictional person practically no time to think and feel. James usually prefers directing a stream of thought towards moments of recognition, and thus giving a full portrait of an individual, to grasping one significant human situation and giving it artistic weight and value through his perfect craftsmanship.

Another technical device connected with indirect presentation is James's use of dramatization. He regards scenic presentation as his "absolute," his

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<sup>1</sup> H. James, Prefaces, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 127f.

"imperative," his "only salvation."<sup>1</sup> From his plays James had learned how to design scenarios for his fictional works. Dialogue has so dominating a position in his art that some structures appear to be successions of scenes and acts rather than narrative pieces in the traditional sense.

All these technical aspects seem to have little to do with the short-story form. James himself invented them for and used them preferably in his longer fictional works. But all these devices have within them the potential for use in short fiction as well, if the stress on development is replaced by an emphasis on the presentation of singleness in situation and character.

Later generations of short story writers make extensive use of James's innovations<sup>2</sup> and he himself, at times, strives for rigorous foreshortening in his narratives. James is well aware of the effect on density in art which this foreshortening, the "excision of the irrelevant"<sup>3</sup> can have. He writes, "therein lies the secret of the appeal ... of the successfully foreshortened thing, where representation is arrived at ... not by the addition of items ... but by the art of figuring synthetically, a compactness into which the imagination may cut thick, as into the rich density of wedding-cake."<sup>4</sup> Or he comments on the writing of Europe<sup>5</sup> that he "undertook the brevity ... and again arrived at it by the innumerably repeated chemical reductions and condensations that tend to make of the very short story ... one of the costliest ... forms of composition."<sup>6</sup>

Once James is able to tear himself away from giving minute psychic developments and concentrates

<sup>1</sup>H. James, Notebooks, p. xviii.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. e.g. the use of a central intelligence in James Joyce's The Dead (1914), or the illumination of character in Edith Wharton's The Mission of Jane (1904).

<sup>3</sup>H. James, Prefaces, p. 278.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 87f.

<sup>5</sup>(1900)

<sup>6</sup>H. James, Prefaces, pp. 239f.

more on what he calls the "very short story"<sup>1</sup> he is well aware of the fact that he must firmly stress compactness and "simplicity" in order to be able to "produce the rich effect."<sup>2</sup> James is conscious of the danger his psychological interest has for the shorter forms. The "space hunger" of his themes has to be mastered without killing the valuable "explosive principle in one's material."<sup>3</sup> Conspicuously James never goes as far as subduing this explosive quality in his material, except, perhaps, as he says, in Frederick Hudson<sup>4</sup>.

Despite his preference for developments James is able to produce perfect examples within the short form as well. The reason for this may be seen in the fact that he always consciously distinguishes between what he terms "anecdotic" and "developmental" themes.<sup>5</sup>

A story is regarded as anecdotic if it can be treated as a single incident, and as developmental if it requires detailed accretions. The two types obviously overlap and, as is the case with Greville Fane<sup>6</sup>, have been deliberately mixed by James. "The subject, in this little composition, is 'developmental' enough, while the form has to make the anecdotic concession; and yet who shall say that for the right effect of a small harmony the fusion has failed?"<sup>7</sup>

The modern reader feels that James apparently does not need much of an incident to see an element of possible development in it. He is never able to keep himself down to the limit he has in mind at the beginning. "Short stories became nouvelles and nouvelles became novels," F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. above, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> H. James, Prefaces, p. 234.

<sup>6</sup> (1892)

<sup>7</sup> H. James, Prefaces, p. 234.

B. Murdock comment on this problem in James's art.<sup>1</sup> James is always afraid that brevity is achieved at the expense of some other literary value. The result of this struggle between trying to achieve brevity and, at the same time, not wasting any valuable material is the nouvelle, James's favourite shorter form. Commenting on The Coxon Fund<sup>2</sup> he expresses his fascination with the "effort to do the complicated thing with a strong brevity and lucidity - to arrive, on behalf of the multiplicity, at a certain science of control. Infinitely attractive ... [is] the question of how to exert this control in accepted conditions and how yet to sacrifice no real value."<sup>3</sup>

It has often been said that James's major weakness is his limited subject matter, that he lacks masculinity and that his style is too esoteric. This is partly true. On the other hand it is within this limited scope that he achieves perfection. Through this perfection James exerts a great technical and thematic influence that is still alive in the literature of today.

His direct and indirect influence on the modern short story through his theoretical statements and his artistic achievements manifests itself mainly in the following five items:

James anticipates the attitude of sceptical questioning and psychological illumination which form the basic patterns of the modern short story. Yet contrary to the modern short story which in presenting a significant human situation reveals only a splinter of reality, Henry James still offers continuity and a certain totality.

His use of indirect presentation exerts as great an influence on the technical development of the modern short story as does Chekhov's requirement of objectivity. James's emphasis is, however, more on demand for psychological revelation.

<sup>1</sup>H. James, Notebooks, p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup>(1895).

<sup>3</sup>H. James, Prefaces, p. 231.

His new approach to character-treatment with its use of most subtle psychic nuances and shades, the portrayal of a single prominent character by means of having a central fictional person gradually reveal his peculiarities, must basically be regarded as modern. Apart from James's long-winded language this new approach can be found, in various modifications, in the vast majority of modern short stories.

James's concentration within the story on one central intelligence can provide an excellent device for achieving brevity and density in the modern short story, if it is combined with a denser language and a more rigorous concentration on a single situation than James is interested in. The emphasis on a more static, single point of view which is preferred in the modern short story to the more complicated forms of the shifting point of view, seems to find in the central intelligence of Henry James an early and clear objectification.

Finally, James's demand for and exertion of an absolute artistic control cannot be estimated too highly. Within the general levelling of taste and commercialization of the short story in the America of the late 19th and early 20th centuries James keeps up the high standard of honest and absolute art.

#### f. Bret Harte: The American Short Story

Besides the tradition of short-story writing in America's East there developed at the campfires of the Western frontiers a new type of story called the 'tall tale.' Owing to the frontier conditions this form of story was technically clumsy and, at first, appeared to be absolutely incompatible with its elegant Eastern relation. Orally transmitted, in the beginning, these stories owe their existence to that inborn desire of human beings to conquer nature by the power of the spoken word and to grasp and render their own reactions to the new environment. It is the very process of rudimentary art coming

into existence. Having no connection with centuries of literary theory this 'tall tale' had to rely, in its technique, on a peculiar and simple realism. It is the realism of the basic materials which the storyteller encountered: the vernacular language and the rough humour of the American pioneer. These two main characteristics the 'tall tale' of the West maintained even after professional writers had begun to adopt it and to give it the literary qualities it lacked.

In addition to Mark Twain's art it is in particular the short stories of Bret Harte that show this combination of Western characteristics and Eastern professionalism. Although inferior to Mark Twain as an artist, Bret Harte from the point of view of form is more important for the development of the genre of the short story. In The Rise of the "Short Story"<sup>1</sup>, he is the first writer and critic of short prose fiction who is concerned with a typically American form of the short story. He understands it as a characteristic expression of the American way of life: "Perhaps the proverbial haste of American life was some inducement to its brevity," Harte suggests.<sup>2</sup> Although in his critical writing he shows great respect for Poe's and Hawthorne's polished art, he emphasizes very strongly that what they write is not genuinely American. "It [their type of story] was not the American short story of to-day. It was not characteristic of American life, American habits, nor American thought."<sup>3</sup> Their art, Harte argues, is basically English. "What was called American literature was still limited to English methods and [based] upon English models."<sup>4</sup> Bret Harte does not wish to imitate the polished literature of the American East. It is the characteristic qualities of those crude stories of the frontier camps by which he is fascinated. Harte praises their humour, their

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<sup>1</sup>Bret Harte, "The Rise of the 'Short Story,'" Cornhill Magazine, VII (July 1899), pp. 1-8; quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., pp. 29-33.

<sup>2</sup>Bret Harte, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

distinct originality and individuality, their "concise ... yet suggestive" presentation. It is these qualities, their use of humorous "understatement" together with their "interest in slang," Harte says, that make them "at once known and appreciated abroad as 'an American story.'"<sup>1</sup>

In order to put these ideas into practice Bret Harte wrote and published The Luck of Roaring Camp.<sup>2</sup> The story reveals many of the flaws which Harte criticizes in Eastern imitators of an English literary tradition.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it also exhibits that rough American humour, a living vernacular language and a new stress on local colour which is typical of the new type. In the light of its later fame the rejection of the story in 1868 is ironically commented on by its author: "The publication of the story was objected to by both printer and publisher, virtually for not being in the conventional line of subject, treatment, and morals!"<sup>4</sup>

Not always convincingly successful as an artist, Harte remains significant for the theory of the short story because of his pertinent critical comments on the new and particularly American form of this genre.

g. Brander Matthews: Novel and Short Story

Obviously fascinated by Poe's radical postulations concerning the form of the short story, Professor Brander Matthews, in The Philosophy of the Short-Story,<sup>5</sup> asserts that the "Short-story differs from the Novel essentially, - and not merely in the

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>(1868)

<sup>3</sup>Sentimentality and use of clichés

<sup>4</sup>Bret Harte, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Brander Matthews, The Philosophy of the Short-Story (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901); quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., pp. 36-41.

matter of length," and claims that the "Short-story is in reality a genre, a separate kind, a genus by itself."<sup>1</sup> To the reader interested in literary structures and systematization Matthews's statements seem very promising.

Brander Matthews begins his 'philosophy' with Poe's insight that the short story displays an effect of totality which the novel can never have. His reason for this is that the "Short-story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the Novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes."<sup>2</sup> This is certainly true. One must, however, bear in mind that the novel, too, is a self-defining organism with a specific unity. Matthews continues his argument, stating that one cannot regard as a short story what has been extracted from a longer prose work. The good short story, Matthews says, "impresses the reader with the belief that it would be spoiled if it were ... incorporated into a more elaborate work."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately we must be contented here with the reader's "belief" as a proof, as Matthews does not support this valuable insight by means of testable evidence. His next logical step starts with the incomplete assumption that "another great difference between the Short-story and the Novel lies in the fact that the Novel, nowadays at least, must be a love-tale, while the Short-story need not deal with love at all."<sup>4</sup> The Red Badge of Courage<sup>5</sup> or the earlier Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,<sup>6</sup> to mention only two great novels of the time before the close of the century, seem to prove the contrary. Neither the novel nor the short story need by necessity of their structures deal with love. The mere fact that in the period

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<sup>1</sup>B. Matthews. op. cit., p. 77

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>(1895).

<sup>6</sup>(1885).

when Matthews wrote his article most novels dealt with love-affairs does not allow him to transfer the special term 'love-tale' onto the general term 'novel' in a definitive way.

Commenting on the rich multiplicity of the novel's structural elements Matthews says, "the novelist may take his time; he has abundant room to turn about. The writer of Short-stories must be concise, and compression, a vigorous compression, is essential."<sup>1</sup> The novelist, it is true, may take his time but he has to have in mind the fact that he, too, needs an integral structure if his novel is to meet the demands of high art. Matthews's remark that "if he [the novelist] show us a cross-section of real life we are content; but the writer of Short-stories must have originality and ingenuity"<sup>2</sup> cannot be accepted as giving a proper distinction between the task of the novelist and that of the short-story writer. Originality and ingenuity are basic requirements in any art, and even the loosely related amplifications of a novel, if they are to be aesthetically satisfying, must have these qualities.

On the level of narrative or plot structure Matthews claims that a plan is essential to the short story whereas it is not to the novel. "A plan a Short-story must have, while it would be easy to cite novels of eminence which are wholly amorphous - for example, 'Tristram Shandy.'"<sup>3</sup> Quite obviously Professor Matthews is again pushing his argument too far. What he calls "amorphous" is in fact the conscious artistic playing with the fictional devices developed up to 1760. True, the author seems to allow himself to be carried away with his joy of narrating. Yet the whole novel is still one complex pattern in which all the significant traits are subject to a meaningful structure. One need only recall

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<sup>1</sup> B. Matthews, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

that it is in the 20th century, with its thorough investigations of the problems of time-handling within the novel, that Tristram Shandy has regained prominent interest.

Unfortunately Professor Matthews does not penetrate beyond the surface of his general and preliminary statements. When he says that "the Short-story seeks one set of effects in its own way, and the Novel seeks a wholly distinct set of effects in a wholly distinct way,"<sup>1</sup> one has to agree, but one would still like to come to know the details which prove this assumption. The conclusions he draws from these comments, namely that the "Short-story ... is one of the few sharply defined literary forms"<sup>2</sup> is still not acceptable. In the end one realizes that Matthews believes that the "Short-story was developed long before the Novel"<sup>3</sup> and that Chaucer and Boccaccio were masters in this literary genre.

However, as Matthews does not give any concrete examples of "Short-stories" one is completely at a loss. Apparently Professor Matthews has too vague a concept of the short story as a literary form to be capable of tackling properly the question of the structural differences between novel and short story. His general assumptions are valuable, but they lack proof by means of structural details and are at best hypothetical.

h. J. Berg Esenwein: An Attempt to Give  
a Clear Definition

Although the aim of the thesis is not to provide practical advice for the writing of short stories, it has to take into account Esenwein's Writing the Short-Story: A Practical Handbook on the Rise, Structure, Writ-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

ing, and Sale of the Modern Short-Story.<sup>1</sup> Despite the commercial aspect of his theories Esenwein's comments reveal a thorough investigation into the structural problems of the short story as a distinct art. He is well aware of the danger a definition may have. He readily admits that "the more vital and growing and resilient a thing is, the more difficult to fence it about, to fix its limitations by statute."<sup>2</sup> Esenwein furthermore states that the short story continuously changes its shape through the influence, which experimental writers exert upon it. Yet, starting from the assumption that "certain things, clearly, the short-story cannot be,"<sup>3</sup> he makes an attempt to give clear distinctions between a few other short types of prose fiction and the short story. Having thus fenced in the short story as a separate literary form he tries to formulate a definition.

In order to provide significant distinctions between the condensed novel and the short story Esenwein cites Poe's insight that the short story's "singleness of effect [is] denied to the novel."<sup>4</sup> Owing to this totality the short story "must differ from the novel in scope and in structure."<sup>5</sup> "Expansive" presentation in the novel is contrasted with "intensive" artistic arrangement in the short story; the "'all-embracing view' of life" with the one particular character, incident, or experience.<sup>6</sup> Esenwein emphasizes the fact that the narrative structures of the novel and the short story differ mainly in that the "plot of the novel is often complicated by episodes and contributory sub-plots," whereas the short story displays a linear development towards the end and exploits a "single predominating incident."<sup>7</sup> The "details of life, character and

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<sup>1</sup> (New York: Hinds, Noble and Eldredge, 1909); quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, loc. cit., pp. 51-57.

<sup>2</sup> J. Berg Esenwein, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

setting" the novelist employs are replaced, in the short story, by "a few swift strokes - which must be all the more deft because they are so few."<sup>1</sup> Where Brander Matthews fails to make his assumptions plausible by acceptable reasons, Esenwein, by going into greater detail, reaches conclusions that are valid today.

The ancient literary form of the episode,<sup>2</sup> which is still used in dramatic and narrative art, is often compared with the short story. But beside the fact that it is a brief piece of prose fiction it has not much in common with the short story. The main difference is clearly pointed out by Esenwein, when he writes, "while the episode fits in with the rest of the novel, into which it was parenthetically inserted to illustrate some phase of character or of conduct, the short-story is not meant to dovetail into a novel."<sup>3</sup> One could, perhaps, add that the prose episode serves in an indirect way, by contrast or parallelism, to underscore the main theme of a novel. Basically Esenwein's distinction is sufficient.

Another valuable distinction Esenwein makes is that between the short story and biography. Obviously, a biography is not a literary type which belongs in the same category as the novel, nouvelle, tale, and episode. Esenwein's distinction is, however, of considerable value, as it shows that certain thematically-determined forms are not capable of being treated within the short-story form in an aesthetically satisfying manner. The fictional biography, in order to allow the necessary detailed development of a character from birth to death, demands the space of a novel, at least of a short one. A biography either renders an impressive life-story with full detail or it summarizes, leaping from incident to incident. In the first case it would be much too long for the short-story size, in the second it would lack the single meaningful situation as the centre of gravity a good short story displays.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Original meaning: something that has been inserted

<sup>3</sup> J. Berg Esenwein, op. cit., p. 23.

The most fragmentary of the short prose forms is the sketch. Esenwein uses this main characteristic, its loose structure with "neither essential beginning nor necessary ending"<sup>1</sup> to help define the conspicuous difference between the sketch and the short story. As the sketch is usually designed for some more important piece of art it shows relatively little artistic control and leaves "no single complete impression;" it lacks the "effect of totality."<sup>2</sup>

Having carefully developed his argument by showing how the short story differs in structure from other types of prose fiction, Esenwein finally undertakes to formulate a definition of the short story as an independent genre: "A Short-Story is a brief, imaginative narrative, unfolding a single predominating incident and a single chief character, it contains a plot, the details of which are so compressed, and the whole treatment so organized, as to produce a single impression."<sup>3</sup>

The strictness of this definition is diminished somewhat by the following remarks. "In proportion as the short-story embodies and combines its seven parts artistically ... it is great. Not all great short-stories are great in all points."<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately the school of formalists was, at the time of Esenwein's writing, brought into ill repute by a movement producing criticism and writing of which 'O. Henryism' is only a minor evil. With Esenwein's restrictions recognised that, despite attempts at definitions, the idea of the short story should be kept flexible and critical statements unprejudiced, the formal approach could not have deteriorated as it in fact has. The main reason for this is that academic criticism of art towards the end of the 19th century became muddled up with journalistic advice for commercial writing

Criticism of works of art has a strongly historical aspect in that it analyses and interprets

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 30f.

what is existent as an historical fact. It leaves room for any changes that keep art alive. Handbooks for the writing of short stories are based on a completely different attitude: they do not accept the widest possible range of form, they tend to demand a certain shape.<sup>1</sup> In the light of tendency one can well understand the severe reaction by critics and writers of higher rank to the flood of commercial theories and writings of short stories particularly in the first decade of 20th century America.

- i. H. S. Canby: The Modern Short Story as the Result of a Long Historical Development in the Art of Short Fiction

Professor H.S. Canby's The Short Story in English<sup>2</sup> is the only serious attempt extant to give an historical survey of the development of short types of fiction from the Middle Ages to the end of the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> Whenever Canby uses the term 'short story' he understands it as embracing all types of short fiction presenting "those life-units that ... are simple, brief, and complete in their brevity."<sup>4</sup> To mark off the short prose form that started with Poe from all the other types of prose fiction Canby uses the term "modern short story."<sup>5</sup> To him "the history of the short story in English is the history of changing fashions in the writing of the short tale."<sup>6</sup> The modern short story, as Canby uses the term, "reveals itself as merely a special case and particular development of the endless suc-

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<sup>1</sup>What makes Esenwein's book so valuable is the fact that it is based on honest and sound criticism.

<sup>2</sup>(New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909).

<sup>3</sup>Unfortunately A Study of the Short Story, rev. ed. by H. S. Canby and A. Dashiell (New York: 1935) was not available. It gives a summary of Canby's older study and includes the 20th century.

<sup>4</sup>H. S. Canby, op. cit., p. 301.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., e.g. p. 349.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 347.

cession of distinctively short narratives."<sup>1</sup> After the strong emphasis, in the 19th century, on the originality and absolute novelty of the short-story art, it is of considerable value to be reminded of the fact that this type of literature has distinct literary and historical context, forerunners, and related forms. Canby, with his brilliant historical and formal study, successfully points the way for comparative formal criticism in the field of short-story research.

The first traceable influence on a developing English short narrative literature was, Canby says, that which the Roman Church exerted with her "holy tales."<sup>2</sup> Then there came the fabliau, the fable, the exemplum and lai from France. Chaucer was the first to create a new indigenous tale out of French, Italian and Latin clerical sources. The type of this new fabliau survived a short time only through similar achievements by Henryson in the 15th century. During the 16th and 17th centuries the Italian and French novella dominated the English literary scene of short fiction, and it was only with the essayists' periodicals and their brief narrative sketches in the 18th century that the indigenous short tale became popular again. The next step Canby regards as important is the Romantic period with that "sensational, melodramatic tale of the early nineteenth century"<sup>3</sup> that has as its culminating point the art of Washington Irving. A second Romantic type of story, the tale of "fear and mystery,"<sup>4</sup> found its most distinct expression in Poe.

Canby maintains that Poe has to be regarded as the first important contributor to the short prose form since Chaucer. Poe, with his "impressionistic short story"<sup>5</sup> created "a literary type which shares some of the exaltation of all the difficult arts,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

which is incomparably the most successful form of short narrative for us, perhaps the most successful variety of contemporary fiction."<sup>1</sup> Referring to Poe's new stress on unity and totality he says, "this special case [the short story] can show an infinitely higher measure of unity in narrative, of totality in petto, than had ever been sought consciously before."<sup>2</sup>

Although sceptical of exaggerated use of technical devices Canby appreciates the new handling of climax as the central function to which all the other parts of the story have to be functionally related. He calls a climax an "incident" ... which collects ... all the electric charge of emotion, thought, or vivid impression to be drawn from the story."<sup>3</sup> Later he calls it "the situation, which had been the root and first perception of the tale, and now, in this climax, is most sharply revealed."<sup>4</sup> Canby's tolerant definition that "the conscious purpose of the story,"<sup>5</sup> an incident, an emotion, or a situation, the gist of what the writer wants to convey, is the climax, is even applicable to the latest forms of the short-story art. Thus, 'climax' is not necessarily connected with the 'plot' of the 19th century. Stories with little or practically no action can have as striking a climax as the action and trick story in the style of O. Henry.

Concluding, Canby points out a few of the dangers that the art of the short story faces: "Our modern short story began as technique for a worthy effect. In lesser hands, at least, it is degenerating into a technique whose effect is merely technical. The specific word, the rapid introduction, the stressed climax, the careful focus, and the studied tone, are too often the masters, not the servants, of the story."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand the short story, handled by the master, Canby says, can "become a powerful engine for the expression of life."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 301f.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 349f.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 349.

- k. R. W. Neal: The Short Story Presents a Character in a Time of Crisis

R. W. Neal's Short Stories in the Making<sup>1</sup> is mainly designed as a practical handbook for students who wish to take up the writing of short stories. Analysis is, however, a one-way process that is useful only after a story has been written. It is in this sense that 'analysis' is understood in the present study. Neal's book is, nevertheless, of some interest here, as he bases his practical advice on a theoretical first chapter in which he discusses the type of the short story as he derived it from empirical material.

In addition to his idea that the short story is a drama in narrative, Neal emphasizes, above all, the fact that short stories deal with "persons in conclusive action, each according to his own character, in a time of crisis."<sup>2</sup> The first concept, that of the short story as a drama in narrative seems, although widespread, exaggerated and, for the purpose of discrimination on a formal level, not very helpful. The mere fact that the short story generally has an exposition, rising and falling action and an outcome, together with the element of relative brevity does not justify its comparison to a one-act play. The two media, dramatic art with its specific techniques of the stage on the one hand and narrative art with its specific combination of epic, lyric and dramatic elements on the other, obviously do not have enough in common for a comparison of the two to provide us with valuable formal insights into either. A formal statement should help to clarify, not to blur the vision one has of literary types.

Neal's second idea, that the short story usually deals with man in a crisis, appears to be much

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Neal, Short Stories in the Making. A Writers' and Students' Introduction to the Technique and Practical Composition of Short Stories, Including an Adaptation of the Principles of the Stage Plot to Short Story Writing (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914)

<sup>2</sup> Short Stories in the Making, p. 15.

more fruitful. The frightening experience that the world reveals itself to the individual as fragments rather than as a meaningful totality has more and more become the common subject-matter of short-story writers.

Owing to its brevity the short story has to choose a particular situation out of this general condition of man and present a crisis with a minimum of accessories. The plot contains, Neal says, "so much preliminary incident as - and no more than - may be necessary to make clear the essential aspects of the crisis with which it deals."<sup>1</sup> The single situation is carried through a climax to its logical ending. Neal's claim that a "crisis refers to a critical situation of affairs at a certain time, and this time may be either the briefest space of time or a long period,"<sup>2</sup> appears acceptable. It should, however, be understood with the reservation that long periods of time are, in the successful 20th-century short story, usually interwoven for the sake of unity and brevity into a single situation by means of flash-backs.<sup>3</sup>

1. A. E. Coppard: Tales, not Stories

Coppard's greatest productivity lies between the two World Wars. In his dozen volumes of stories and, much more obviously so, in his theoretical statements Coppard follows the idea that the art of storytelling is basically an oral one. In the introduction to his bibliography he comments on the short-story form he uses, "I prefer to call them tales because of a slight distinction in my mind which is nevertheless important to me, that is: a tale is told, a story is written. I have always aimed at creating for the reader

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. e.g. K. Mansfield's Life of Ma Parker (1922).

<sup>4</sup>Jacob Schwartz, The Writings of A.E. Coppard. A Bibliography, Foreword and Notes by A. E. Coppard (London: 1931).

an impression that he is being spoken to, rather than being written at."<sup>1</sup>

Coppard apparently fears that through a more and more sophisticated technique in short-story writing the original close contact between narrator and listener may get lost. "The folk tale ministered to an apparently inborn and universal desire to hear tales," Coppard states, "and it is my feeling that the closer the modern short story conforms to that ancient tradition of being spoken to you, rather than being read at you, the more acceptable it becomes."<sup>2</sup> As a result of this emphasis on a tale that conveys the impression of an oral narrator Coppard is not at all interested in architectonic experiments and sophisticated narrative structures. He demands conservatism in formal things. He re-introduces authorial comment as a necessary ingredient to storytelling and postulates the necessity of an audience. For Coppard the modern short story has become too self-sufficient. He feels that it moves towards a position which is separated from a wide audience by an unbridgeable gap.

Although the conservative postulate of the 'told tale' as opposed to the sophisticated short story deflects attention from many of the artistic achievements of modern short-story writing, it is able to give an interesting and valuable impulse to the development of the modern short story.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Writings of A.E. Coppard, p. VIII.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>One could argue that the type of modern short story which Walter Höllerer calls "arabesque" short story in his typology is a logical consequent of Coppard's ideas. See Part III, Chapter XI, 1.

m. B. Overstreet: Distinctions between the 19th and 20th-Century Short Story

If one disregards James's lonely art, Overstreet is certainly right in stating that the 19th-century short story emphasizes action, the 20th-century short story psychic conditions.<sup>1</sup> Overstreet characterizes the typical short story of the last century as "a story with a plot - a close-knit structure that can be seen steadily and whole."<sup>2</sup> It is a story in which "nothing happens that does not push the story along toward its climax."<sup>3</sup>

The emphasis on action characteristic of the 19th-century short story can, Overstreet says, be interpreted as an expression of two basic beliefs generally accepted at the time. There is the underlying faith "that it is possible ... for people to know the difference between right and wrong."<sup>4</sup> There are very few stories to be found in the last century, he argues, which display an "ethical *laissez faire*."<sup>5</sup> The villain, in most cases, had to repent in the end. There is a distinct omniscient authorial attitude underlying the majority of these plot stories. The whole action seems to be an expression, at times, of certain moral concepts rather than an interpretation of real life - but one has to admit that to many 19th-century writers such moral patterns meant real life. Overstreet sees also revealed in these stories the faith "that people are, for the most part, what they seem to be."<sup>6</sup> Authors apparently based their actions on the assumption that there is a "reliable correspondence between inner character and outward behavior."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bonaro Overstreet, "Little Story, What Now?," Saturday Review of Literature, XXIV (November 22, 1941); quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., pp. 97-101.

<sup>2</sup> Little Story, What Now?, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

The 20th-century author interpreting the Zeitgeist has lost both these faiths. The traditional scale of values proves unreliable and basically superficial. He can no longer deal with ethically 'good' or 'evil' characters, though light fiction still does, hence the term. He finds himself "thrown back upon a study of human nature - human motives, fears, wants, prejudices."<sup>1</sup> The vocabulary has been replaced by one of psychology. "The characteristic science of our century is psychology," Overstreet writes. "It has naturalized in our speech words and phrases as inferiority complex, stream of consciousness, inhibition, the subconscious, frustration, rationalization."<sup>2</sup> These words, to Overstreet, "reflect our growing need to understand what goes on in the hidden corners of our human nature."<sup>3</sup>

There may still, of course, be action in the modern short story. The outward action, however, "is significant only as it throws light upon the obscure mental and emotional states that have bred it."<sup>4</sup> The difference between the older and the modern form of the short story can be seen most conspicuously in the use of the happy ending. What we would call now a sign of escapism was, to the author and audience of the last century, an expected and valued fictional convention. "The nineteenth-century writer - for reasons of common faith - wrought happy endings even out of situations that seemed logically to promise little happiness. The twentieth-century writer - for reasons of common cynicism - first turned to the unhappy and abnormal."<sup>5</sup>

Renouncing a form gained through plot does not mean, however, that the new story of revelation is shapeless. Its form is no longer dictated by the logical sequence of an outer action, it achieves a new architectonic structure through fragments and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

and patterns of the human psyche. The 20th-century short-story writer has abandoned, along with the logic of cause and effect, the logic of the traditional plot. "Associate linkages, personal memories and fears and faiths, rationalized reasons for behavior, subsurface thinking that goes on in contradiction to surface talk - all these, and a multitude of other factors, must be recognized by the writer, today, as part of the deeper logic of any given situation."<sup>1</sup>

The modern short story is characterized, according to Overstreet, by these two factors: a deep interest in human nature, and as a result of this thematic direction, a new form determined by the revelation of psychic situations. Far from being a dying art, as some critics argue, the short story if it "has a chance to mature along the lines of its present growth," Overstreet concludes, "will make its own unique place in literary history."<sup>2</sup>

n. Truman Capote: Form as a Natural Result  
of the Material Treated

Capote, like many of his predecessors in short-story criticism, demands that the artist exert a constant technical control upon the short story. He understands control as the maintenance of "a stylistic and emotional upper hand over ... [one's] material."<sup>3</sup> This does not, however, imply having a preconceived pattern or form ready for a story. Capote stresses the fact that a short-story technique does not exist in the sense that a writer has a system of applicable technical formulas. "Each story,"

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Writers at Work, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: The Viking Press, 1958), pp. 287-288; quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., pp. 132-133; here, Writers at Work, p. 287.

he says, "presents its own technical problems,"<sup>1</sup> and it is impossible to make general statements about their handling. The author has to find the absolute form for each single story he writes. "Finding the right form for your story is simply to realize the most natural way of telling the story,"<sup>2</sup> Capote explains.

The same idea is expressed by Sherwood Anderson about 23 years earlier, when he writes, "form . . . grew out of the materials of the tale and the teller's reaction to them."<sup>3</sup> The final form may be as rigorous and as technically controlled as possible, but must not be forced upon the story; in Capote's opinion form should be what remains after all the unnatural, not absolutely necessary bits of material have been removed. The reader must not be able to imagine that the story might have any other shape without loss of its coercive aesthetic charm; the story must appear to him as "absolute and final."<sup>4</sup>

Capote's statement that the best form of a story is its most natural form is given as an answer to the question of how to arrive at a certain technical skill in short-story writing. This advice, however, is put in such a general way and from the point of view of the writer who examines his finished product that it can be used, at the same time, as a formal criterion for short-story criticism. One must be aware of the fact, however, that Capote's remarks are merely new and general formulations of older ideas such as Chekhov's, Esenwein's, or James's. The reason for this is not to be seen in a lack of originality on Capote's part. It seems to be a general phenomenon that the closer we approach our present time the fewer become the significant and original theoretical statements on the short story as a literary form.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Sherwood Anderson, A Story Teller's Story (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1924), p. 300; quoted in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> M. Cowley, op. cit., p. 287.

It is fairly obvious that the short story of our time is not the sum of all the theoretical remarks about its technique since Irving and Poe. It is, however, unthinkable without these stages of formal development. The 20th-century short story is a literary genre which reflects, in some way or other, most of those technical postulates and, at the same time, expresses most genuinely the characteristic and unmistakable spirit of our age. It is these two basic elements, a century-long search for form and the spirit of our epoch, that give the modern short story its characteristic appearance. At this stage it is time then, perhaps, to conclude this brief historical survey of significant theoretical comments on the short story with an attempt to give a preliminary definitive description of the modern short story as an independent literary genre.

4. The Modern Short Story: A Preliminary Descriptive Definition

One can agree with Ruth J. Kilchenmann's introductory argument<sup>1</sup> that the short story embraces far too many variations to be strictly graspable by means of a rigid formal standardization. Yet, after rejecting the attempt to give a definition of the short story, she marks the short story off from the Novelle and the tale.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the very title of her book, Die Kurzgeschichte, suggests a preconceived idea, however tolerant, of this literary genre. Her selection of stories, finally, betrays a fairly unambiguous concept of what the short story is. Her preliminary remarks concerning the definition of the short story, appear thus to be more

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth J. Kilchenmann, Die Kurzgeschichte. Formen und Entwicklung (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1967), pp. 9-16.

<sup>2</sup>Ruth J. Kilchenmann, op. cit., pp. 17-20

a measure of caution allowing her to analyse and interpret the greatest possible variety of short forms of modern prose fiction. Despite her refusal to provide a list of criteria of the modern short story form, many of her statements have a definitive character. Being the latest and most brilliant comments on this genre available on the academic level, they will, among others, be implicitly accepted in this chapter.

a. Mimesis: Presented Reality

Contrary to the novel that usually attempts to suggest the totality of life, the modern short story presents rather a totality of situation. The reader of the modern short story receives glimpses at and splinters of life instead of a complete picture of fictional reality. The war and post-war situations of this century constitute a time of cultural crisis in which time-honoured systems of values have given way to a chaos of fragmentary, incoherent experiences. It is, perhaps, of interest to mention the fact that in Europe, and in particular in Germany, the year 1945 is often referred to as the year zero, the absolute end and absolute beginning. From this point of view it is easy to understand that reality as presented in the typically modern short story does not suggest an underlying unity and harmony but the fragmentary character of modern man's actual experiences. The reader is confronted with social failures and misfits, with significant, yet abrupt sections of life, often taken from the edge of society. Outsiders and pathological cases, violence and death, and also glimpses at ordinary, banal, everyday life, fill the scene in a modern short story. In the labyrinth of 20th-century thought the honest short-story writer follows his vocation to interpret the spiritual position of man. In doing so he presents a broken reality which reflects the fact that our time-honoured values no longer match at any point with our actual experience.

b. Epic, Lyrical, and Dramatic Elements  
in the Modern Short Story

It has been shown before that two factors mainly determine the short story of today. The one lies outside literature and influences, directly, its contents and, indirectly, its form. This is the Zeitgeist. The other factor is an internal literary one which modifies all the short story's structural details. This is brevity. As in the longer prose forms, the basic stylistic elements (lyric, epic, and dramatic) are present in the modern short story. In this modern short form, however, these elements are subject to the structural influence which brevity exerts.

The fact that we find these three stylistic criteria mixed in the short story brings the latter into a certain relation to the ballad. The extreme stylistic control exerted by the short-story writer and the strong lyrical touch certain writers give to the short story show its relationship with lyrical poetry.<sup>1</sup> One could call a predominantly narrative short story an epic and a mainly scenically arranged one a dramatic short story.

Its brevity, however, prevents the short story from making full use of the epic and dramatic qualities. There is no broad description, no exhaustive indulgence in the joy of narrating. The modern short story can be called epic only in a very limited sense. The scenic presentation in the short story is denied the full play of motivation, of exploiting the logic of cause and effect, which a drama can display.

For obvious technical reasons the short story, despite the brevity the two forms may have in common, must remain essentially different from the lyrical poem. The lyrical element can only give the short story a touch of its atmosphere. The three elements cannot be exploited in the short story as may be the

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. e.g. A. E. Coppard and K. Mansfield; a consistently lyrical modern short story is Ilse Aichinger's Spiegelgeschichte (Mirror Story), see below Part II, Chapter VII, 1.

case even in the novel, where at least the lyrical and epic elements sometimes appear in a pure form: as an inserted poem or a long successive report.

As it cannot make extensive use of either of these features the modern short story would appear to be more handicapped than other literary genres. Yet it is this negative aspect of the short story's limitation in its use of these three stylistic qualities that is partly responsible for its unique character.

c. Length and Brevity

According to an American way of classification mentioned by Ruth J. Kilchenmann a 'novelette' counts between 30,000 and 50,000 words, a 'short story' between 2000 and 30,000, and a 'short short story' up to 2000 words.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that a formal judgment of a short piece of prose fiction merely on the ground of volume is impossible. Legends, fairy-tales, myths, and riddles would all fall into one or other of the categories mentioned above. Only by way of a fruitful combination of arguments concerning length as well as other structural characteristics can the critic arrive at meaningful distinctions.

d. Narrative Correlation

Many of the narrative devices employed in the novel and, to a lesser degree, in the nouvelle cannot be used in the modern short story. Instead of a series of adventures, a chain of incidents, as in a picaresque novel, or a linear development towards a culminating point as in a Novelle or novella, the narrative phases in the modern short story are connected, apparently, irregularly and according to a completely

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth J. Kilchenmann, op.cit., p. 10

subjective authorial plan. There is often a jerky movement in the sequence of narrative phases, a very peculiar selection of what is important, and there is, at times, no obvious coherence. In general the coherence is that of theme only. Seemingly loosely connected phases of narration correspond to the fragmentary presentation of associations of thought. This, of course, can be found in the modern novel as well. But, whereas in the latter these devices are embedded in a wide net of complex patterns, the author of the modern short story has to subject them to the one significant situation which he presents. Artifices like foreshadowing or leitmotifs cannot be given their full epic effect in the short form. Plot, too, if one maintains this term for the modern short story, plays a much more subordinate role than it can play in the longer prose forms and than it did in the action-and-plot short story of the last century. Plot, in many cases, becomes internalized and often reveals itself as merely a part of a structural pattern concerned with the revelation of a significant trait of character. The glimpse of a fragment of life allowed to the reader is determined by the technique of montage in the modern short story. The irregular, fragmentary and seemingly incoherent pattern of the different narrative phases in the modern short story corresponds basically to the spiritual position of modern man which the short story tries to interpret.

e.           Beginning and Conclusion in  
              the Modern Short Story

Since Chekhov the reader has been accustomed to the short story with neither 'proper' ending nor beginning. The average story in the field of light fiction still employs the traditional sequence of problem, complication, climax, and resolution. The honest artist of today, however, expressing his views of life through the form of the modern short story finds himself no longer in the complacent po-

sition of being able to follow this pattern and to give satisfying resolutions. The reader, at the end of the modern short story, is left with the same feeling he has when he faces any possible existential problem in life. The typical short story of our time ends with an unanswered, unanswerable question. It leads the reader to the limitations of our knowledge. There is no final harmony, no comfortable satisfaction on the part of the reader. There is rather a dissonance, a questionable rest, an insoluble problem left. This may, perhaps, spoil the traditional joy of reading but, on the other hand, one feels that the modern short story is more honest and true an interpretation of man's existence than the majority of its forerunners. The fact that we seldom find an introduction as a beginning is partly due to the authorial intention to provide a fragment, a splinter, something torn out of life, rather than a fully motivated event. It springs partly from the modern concept that a more convincing unity of situation can be achieved by a horizontal rather than a vertical arrangement of fictional details. A vertical arrangement of incidents sticks to a chronological time sequence and follows the strict laws of cause and effect. In a horizontal arrangement the reader carries more or less within the one situation and learns the necessary details of the past by means of flashbacks in a stream of thought.

Both devices, renouncing introduction and a proper resolution, add to our understanding of the nature of the modern short story. The first heightens the story's compactness and unity, the second leaves the reader to make decisions not made by the character portrayed or to answer questions not answered by the author.

f. Time-Treatment in the  
Modern Short Story

The pace in a piece of narrative is a result of the relation between the 'narrated time' and the 'reading time.' Naturally, the pace in a novel which tries to give a life-story is comparatively swift, whereas in a novel presenting only a small span of life, for example one day as in Ulysses, the pace is very slow. Since the modern short story emphasizes theme and psychic revelation its pace is much slower than in the average action story of the 19th century. Like the writer of the modern novel, the short-story author shows a rigorous manipulation of his 'time,' with the conspicuous difference that the latter has to obey strictly the laws brevity imposes on him.

Novel-like transitions from one period of time to another one which is separated from the first by a wide temporal gap seldom occur in the modern short story. Effects such as having the hero born in the fifth chapter, as is the case in Tristram Shandy, or emphasizing the significance of the conscious moment in life through the juxtaposition of two slow-moving parts with a swift-moving middle section as in To the Lighthouse, belong strictly to the broad epic world of the novel. Not even on a small scale can the short story exploit such artifices.

The modern short story can, however, within its limitations, manipulate the dimension of time to a certain degree. Despite the stress on the one single situation there are deviations from the narrated present such as flash-backs or glimpses of the future. Usually they are confined to a character's mental activity. What has been said about the extremely subjective and arbitrary arrangement of narrative phases can be repeated under the aspect of time-montage. According to some predetermined effect the chronology is altered and broken up into, at times, barely intelligible units. The time-limitation which the stress on a single situation sets is thus overcome by the technique of montage which allows external

time-units to enter the narrow circle of the one situation. This subjective time in the modern short story is contrasted in traditional narrative technique with the objective time of the calendar and the clock. One disadvantage of a rigorously altered time sequence is, of course, that it can become a burden for the reader. This disadvantage, however, is well balanced by the great advantage that the author may arrange his time-units in such a way that they give pointed expression to the main idea he is after. The significant fragment of life which the author presents can thus be illustrated by small time-units cut out of the chronology of an ordinary time sequence and incorporated in the one important situation.

g. Space-Treatment

Like all other structural elements the handling of space in the modern short story is strictly subject to the rules brevity imposes. The chain of different localities with which we are confronted in the Odyssey, the typical chivalrous romance or picaresque novel, is denied to the modern short story. And within the narrow sphere of its single situation the modern short story tends to give impressionistic glimpses of locality rather than a photographically realistic description of setting. Whereas, in the novel or nouvelle, the reader is given a certain fixed time and space, he will find that the modern short story is often neither temporally nor locally determined.<sup>1</sup> This is a result of its strong emphasis on universal validity. The modern short story wishes more to illustrate, in an artistic way, a certain truth than to present a concrete, traceable historical situation.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. e.g. Dublin in Ulysses, London in Mrs. Dalloway, the Yorkshire moor in Wuthering Heights.

#### h. Characterization

Even if the stress is on characterization, the modern short story does not provide a plastic portrayal of a character within a conclusive environment. The novel and, to a certain extent, the nouvelle or the tale can do it. Individual and full characterization, the creation of 'round' characters, is not possible in the short form. Instead of using great masses of material the modern short story employs a few significant features to present a few important traits within the character of a person. The reader is called upon to complete with his imagination what is only hinted at in the story. Thus, the figures created meet the demands of the idea underlying the modern short story and, by not being portrayed as absolutely concrete individuals, they bear ironically a strong mark of universal validity.

#### i. Matter-of-Fact Language and Symbolism

At a first and cursory reading one is at times shocked at the apparent economy of the language of the modern short story. Sometimes it is matter-of-fact to a degree that tends towards banality. The author of the modern short story often employs a language that works strongly with understatements and hints at things rather than dealing with them explicitly. But behind this economy of an everyday jargon, there often lies a second layer of reality revealing the bare facts as symbolic and meaningful. The reader who takes the trouble to penetrate the surface layer of a seemingly banal reality more often than not finds himself rewarded with the perception of a deeper layer of actual reality on which an essential problem of man's existence may be tackled. There is a tension within the modern short story resulting from the existence of these two layers. During the process of reading, the surface layer of

everyday language gradually becomes transparent and reveals to the alert and sensitive reader the deeper ones of ideas. This has the effect of fascinating the reader and keeping him in suspense. The difference in nature between this form of suspense and that created by the older action-stressing story, plot-suspense, corresponds fully to the basic difference in the nature of the two types of stories.

k. Universals in the Modern Short Story

Only during the process of analysis can all these different structural elements be regarded in isolation. In reality they are interwoven features of one artistic whole. They all aim - within an ideal story - at supporting the one preconceived universal. In its most general form this idea is the interpretative presentation of the spiritual position of modern man or, more precisely, of a fragment of this position. Such a glance at the problematical existence of man may be objectified in the modern short story as the presentation of a youth not able to adapt himself to the world (Paul's Case), a man's fight for his own religious integrity (The Strength of God), an artist's problem's (The Snows of Kilimanjaro), the theme of man and love (The End of Something), man and fear (That Evening Sun), man and the subconscious (The Lottery), man and madness (Silent Snow, Secret Snow), man and old age (The Jilting of Granny Weatherall), or man and death (Guests of the Nation, An Odour of Chrysanthemums)<sup>1</sup>. These are only a few possible general ideas typical of the genre of the modern short story. Like the different structural elements of a story, they often emerge as the main idea while other universals support them or act as foils. One thing, however, is common to them all: they show a human being in a state of crisis. Certain circumstances force somebody to find a new spiritual position. Sometimes the new position is not expressly stated in the story. In this case the crisis is transferred

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. table of short stories below, pp. 433-436

from the story into the reader's mind. The reader then tries to find an answer to the given problem. In confronting the reader with a problem he has to attempt to solve by himself the short story takes on the nature of possible existential situations which man faces outside literature. All the ideas treated in the typical modern short story ask questions that are urgent and stirring. They throw accepted positions into question, revealing their hollowness and actual instability. The serious modern short story questions our environment as an accepted trustworthy bearer of values. It shows the paradox of modern man's intense loneliness in the bustle of industrial civilization. It shows his desperate attempt to readjust his convictions to his daily experiences. The modern short story with its existential ideas is characteristic of modern man's search for a new unity and spiritual security.

#### 1. Conclusion

The concrete instance of the short-story type which we find in 20th-century literature does not, of course, combine all these 'modern' elements. In proportion as it embodies a certain number of these modern traits it can be called a 'modern short story.' In this thesis this term is given preference to the term '20th-century short story,' as there are to be found a great number of stories written in this century which are dominated by the characteristics of the typically 19th-century action-and-plot story. Furthermore, there are a number of short stories written in the last century that employ certain 'modern' features, mainly that of a new, questioning authorial attitude. Although traditional in their narrative technique, they do already present a distinctly 'modern' spirit. The emergence of the modern short story within the history of the short story is the gradual process of the short story's taking off its traditional characteristics and putting on the modern ones described above.

## CHAPTER II

### THE INFLUENCE OF BREVITY AND LENGTH ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THEME AND STRUCTURE

The basic assumption of this chapter, and one of the basic assumptions of this thesis, is that no author is in the position to treat any theme by means of any possible structure, if his work is to meet the aesthetic demands of art. It is assumed here that certain themes require certain structural treatments if the result is to be aesthetically satisfying. This assumption does not, as one might perhaps think, contradict the concept of artistic freedom. But it does say that it is only within certain structural limitations that the artist may allow his creative imagination free play.

The final form of a piece of fiction can be understood as the sum of its structural elements which grow "out of the materials of the tale and the teller's reaction to them."<sup>1</sup> An author of fiction who has accepted the stipulation that the relation between theme and structure must be aesthetically effective finds himself confronted with two basically different groups of themes. The first group embraces themes which require a comparatively long narrative treatment, the second includes themes demanding brevity. James expresses artistic concern with the technical problems these two particular groups pose when he distinguishes between "developmental" and "anecdotic" themes.<sup>2</sup> For simplicity's sake the two types of themes are here referred to as 'long themes' and 'short themes.'

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<sup>1</sup> Sherwood Anderson, op. cit., p. 360.

<sup>2</sup> H. James, Prefaces, p. 234.

1.        Long Themes

If an author of fiction intends to present processes such as developing love or hatred, growing indifference, the development of a disease or of spiritual disintegration, he has to make use of the wide narrative scope which the structure of the novel or a novel-like structure offer. Similarly, a convincing picture of the complex pattern of a society, a certain milieu or a round character can be achieved only within the long form. To explain this more lucidly one could recall the spiritual processes presented in the three novels A Passage to India, The Rainbow, and To the Lighthouse. Although completely different pieces of art they have one thing in common: they employ the technical device of a three-stage structure. In A Passage to India E. M. Forster portrays the spiritual process of mutual human understanding between different races. In the first part of the book the Indian physician Dr. Aziz and the English schoolteacher Cyril Fielding seem to have achieved a deep and honest relationship which, in the turbulence of conflicting emotions in the second part, is unable to prove valid and lasting. In the final part a reconciliation between the two main characters takes place, introduced by the symbolic union of all things in a religious feast. A complete spiritual union is, however, denied to the two friends. They have to part, as they belong to apparently incompatible groups. Inner and outer life are, according to Forster, irreconcilable in this world. It is evident that the author needs space here to develop the different spiritual positions convincingly. The attitudes of the main characters and their foils have to undergo abrupt changes and slow modifications that can be presented with verisimilitude only within the wide narrative field of a novel.

D. H. Lawrence, in The Rainbow, uses, though not as obviously as Forster, the same technical device of the tripartite structure to objectify a spiritual process. The three stages are here the three

different stages of mental attitudes held by Tom, Anna, and Ursula Brangwen. The main theme is the spiritual development of man from a stage of simple blood-intimacy in the first generation to that of full consciousness of man's individuality in the third. The theme of the increasing complexity of the human psyche appears to be particularly convincing, because it is presented here in a chain of different generations. Fundamental changes such as Lawrence demonstrates in this novel are not capable of being objectified without this historical aspect of a long development through a few generations. And in order to give each generation and its main representative the necessary complexity the author, to make sure his work is aesthetically satisfying, has to make use of the full narrative range the novel offers.

Among the novels mentioned here To the Lighthouse certainly displays the most convincing integration of a long-theme in the tripartite structure. The meaning of life reveals itself in rare moments of intense and mystical perception. Mrs. Ramsay shares them in the first slow-moving section of the novel and Lily Briscoe takes part in her understanding at the final moment when she finishes her painting at the end of the book. The significance of these rare moments is underlined by the emphasis that Virginia Woolf puts on the first and last sections which deal with very little outer action but with a complex net of thoughts and emotions. In contrast to this technique, in "Time Passes," the fast-moving lyrical middle part, the author covers ten years packed with outer action. Drastic events such as the death of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue and Andrew Ramsay, are told in parenthesis. Thus the author gives pointed expression to her concern with the intensive moments of inner life rather than with the incidents, however important, of an external action. Again, it is plausible that the attempt to hold up an intense moment in life and to juxtapose to it a fast-moving flux of time full of incidents requires a wider field than a short narrative form can offer.

Both the theme of trying to find spiritual fulfilment and the technique of the tripartite structure used in these three novels are conspicuously space-hungry. The technical device employed here can be understood as a logical and aesthetically effective way of objectifying thematic materials, logical, that is, in the sense that the techniques used appear to be the most natural way of presenting these thematic materials. This does not imply that the final form given to these novels is the only possible shape which they could have received. There is still an infinite variety of possible concrete final shapes within the structural limitations these long-themes set. But, at the same time, it is obvious that certain shapes could not have been used without spoiling the aesthetic effect the novels have.

## 2. Short Themes

A few of the characteristics of the modern short story as described before are very briefly surveyed in this section under the aspect of the architectonic relationship between presented themes and the principle of brevity. More so than in the novel or even in the nouvelle one feels in the modern short story the controlling influence which the general structural limitations exert in this short form. The outer principle of brevity has a strong effect on the inward structural element of theme. Brevity demands themes which Henry James calls anecdotic. These short themes are characterized by their concentration on momentary incidents. Developmental processes and detailed descriptions of longer themes are replaced here by moments of recognition (My Old Man), of sudden love (The Horse Dealer's Daughter), or of initiation (Indian Camp). The reader understands these presented moments and the little surrounding narrative material as self-

defining units. A stretching of a short theme into a long theme would appear, though technically possible, to be aesthetically dissatisfying. It would lose its immediate impact, the concentrated force which brevity provides. The same aesthetic dissatisfaction would be felt if a typical long theme were to be compressed into the shape of a short story. An author may take one part of a long theme and treat it in the short-story form. He may cut the situation of the first kiss out of a long development of love and deal with it as an independent theme. The two themes, the short theme of the first kiss and the long theme of developing love, then, have very little in common. They are essentially different. And even the similar situations, the situation of the first kiss within that novel of love and that of the first kiss in the short story, are basically different artistic creations. In the first case there is a situation which is a functional part of a larger whole, a sub-theme that serves only to heighten the aesthetic effect of the main theme. In the second case we have a short theme that is completely self-sufficient and an end in itself. With the new limitations brevity imposes upon the first-kiss situation this theme gains, at the same time, absolute independence and significance.

3. The Structural Significance  
of the Death Situation

Single incidents or situations in a novel are usually not capable of gaining the same structural weight which they can have in the short form. This assumption will be proved to be acceptable if we compare in outline the structural role which the incident of death, a thematic element of very great importance, can play in both the long and the short form.

a. Death in the Long Form

When Tess in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles dies, the narrator remarks with bitter irony, "'justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals had ended his sport with Tess."<sup>1</sup> Besides giving pointed expression to Hardy's pessimistic Weltanschauung this sentence, at the same time, interprets Tess's death as the logical end and culminating point of a series of misfortunes and tragic coincidences in her life. Tess's death is the punishment for her final rebellion against a cruel fate. In so far as Tess's tragic end is foreshadowed in the novel, her death exerts a certain structural influence on all the foregoing events. The immediate death situation, however, is structurally powerful only in its final position and meaning. It is the final affirmation and summary of Hardy's bitter accusations against society and human fate. The actual death situation is only potentially present in the rest of the book. It manifests itself mainly as a more or less distinct feeling of an impending disaster. However, it has no permanent dominating structure-determining power over the whole work. Other situations such as the idyll in Froom Valley gain, at last to a certain degree, self-sufficiency and individual significance.

Another death incident that has relatively great importance within the structure of a novel is the hero's self-sacrifice. In Conrad's Lord Jim, Jim dies in order to regain his honour. This final situation shows Jim as an idealist who repeatedly and unintentionally betrayed his ideals. Only through his death can he win a lasting victory over his weaknesses, a victory that he is denied in life. As in Tess of the d'Urbervilles the careful reader may expect a tragic ending as a result of the con-

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles (New York: Random House, 1919), p.457.

sistent tragic tone of the book. Jim's death, however important, is not the dominating structural pivot of the story! If there is one at all, it is, perhaps, the narrator's consciousness through which all the incidents are filtered and given a meaningful order.

In Women in Love, to give one more example, Gerald Crich dies in the snow-and-ice world of an alpine winter after failing to bring Gudrun to love him. Gerald's death is a realistic and symbolic expression of the absolute failure to establish a satisfying equilibrium between man and woman. Gerald's failure results in Gudrun's psychic and his own physical death. Structurally this death incident serves mainly as a foil to Birkin's and Ursula's partial success in establishing an acceptable relationship. Although strongly foreshadowed and of considerable importance Gerald's death, as in the novels mentioned above, does not have the dominating structural position and effect which the death incident can have in the short form.

#### b. Death in the Short Form

Any incident in the short-story structure has a greater structural significance for the whole than a similar incident would have within the novel. It should be acceptable, then, that the structural importance of the death incident is likewise greater for the short than for the long form. In addition to this structural fact one has to realize that an amazing proportion of short stories, steadily increasing since the First World War, deals with death as a central thematic unit. This can be explained by the generally increasing interest in the existential problem which death poses for our personal life.

As a formal starting point for a thorough investigation of the structural role the incident of death plays in the modern short story one could affirm the truism that death in this genre occurs

either at the beginning (e.g. Life of Ma Parker), in the middle (e.g. A Painful Case), or at the end (e.g. The Snows of Kilimanjaro). The story with death at the beginning and the one with death at the end are the two extreme types of which all individual cases are variants.

In the first case the whole structure of the story is concentrated backwards onto the initial incident. In the second case the whole structure is concentrated towards the final death situation. This extreme formulation is only valid, however, if death is the central thematic point. But even in short stories where death plays a necessary but not vital part, the structure is intensely modified and moulded by the position of the incident. In a detailed analysis in the second part of this thesis an attempt will be made to show the interrelation between the death situation as a thematic force and the architectural arrangement of structural elements in a number of individual modern short stories. Before valid statements about the structural role of death in the typically modern short story can be made, however, the importance of the death incident to the structures of some older forms of prose fiction and to those of certain 19th-century forerunners of the modern short-story type must be discussed.

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## CHAPTER III

### REMARKS ON THE STRUCTURAL ROLE OF DEATH IN SOME RUDIMENTARY NARRATIVE GENRES

It is an amazing and not yet fully explained fact that there was an abundance of short fiction in the Middle Ages - in variety of genre as well as in productivity within specific genres. Only since the last century does there seem to have been a kind of renaissance. In this chapter a few rudimentary genres of fiction will be discussed. As is the case with the short story as a definite genre of literature, it seems impossible to give strict definitions in a mathematical sense. Some kind of clear distinction, however, seems necessary to enable us to find 'pure' phenomena. Obviously such prototypes are rare in literature. Yet without them one could hardly trace back all the interweaving structural details in the mass of mixed forms. Too strictly lexical a definition has here been avoided, and an attempt has rather been made to give definitive description.

In the majority of the genres to be dealt with here, death has an important and unique structural function. By means of a short analysis at the end of each section an attempt will be made to demonstrate how distinct a role death plays in the structure of each genre.

#### 1. The Legend

The term 'legend'<sup>1</sup> here characterizes a genre of short fiction that originated in the Roman Catholic Church during the first centuries after

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. French légende hagiographique; German Heiligenlegende.

Christ's death and, throughout the Middle Ages, was to be found either as a single 'story' or in collections such as the Acta Martyrum, Acta Sanctorum, or Legendae Sanctorum.<sup>1</sup> The most important collection of saints' legends, the Acta Sanctorum, was begun in the 17th century by Johannes Bollandus and the Jesuit Heribertus Rosweidus from Flanders. Though this work has not yet been finished, it comprises today more than 25,000 lives of saints.<sup>2</sup>

The long tradition of the legend, the great number of different examples, and the general unity of theme allow us to regard it as a distinct literary genre with typical characteristics. At first glance the general form of the legend as a literary type seems to be determined by the representation of a saint's life (vita). In order to be able to investigate the structure of the legend more thoroughly, however, we have to sum up very briefly the procedure leading to canonisation.

Fifty years after the death of a person who is regarded as a potential saint, a kind of trial is conducted by the congregatio rituum in which it is to be proved whether this person, now called servus Dei, had in the first place shown heroic virtues<sup>3</sup> and secondly worked miracles.<sup>4</sup> Having passed this examination he is declared beatus by the congregatio rituum. If further miracles are worked through this beatus after the beatification another trial is held and finally the Pope may declare the beatus a saint (sanctus).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Legendae Sanctorum were compiled in the middle of the 13th century by Bishop Jacobus of Varrazzo; quoted in André Jolles, Einfache Formen (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1958), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>1. spes, fides, caritas; 2. iustitia, prudentia, fortitudo, temperantia; quoted in André Jolles, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>posthumous miracles are worked through things the saint had touched, clothes he had worn, anything he had possessed or which stood in a meaningful connection with him.

<sup>5</sup>"Decernimus et definimus N. sanctum esse...", André Jolles, op. cit., p. 27.

The legend in its basic form naturally reflects the significant moments of that process leading to canonisation. Heroic virtues and posthumous miracles to a very large extent determine the structure of the legend. To stress these two main elements the priority of historical presentation is replaced by a priority of events able to illustrate virtue and miracle.

Contrary to the structure of a more biographical story, the story in a legend is normally not wound up with the death of the hero. Death in the legend, as in the process of canonisation, gains the significance of a pivot. Thematically the hero's death outbalances all other incidents in his life. Usually it is immediately before his death that the saint displays his outstanding heroic virtue most convincingly. His birth and details of his former life may become insignificant in the face of his death; they may even be contrasted with it. This would apply in particular to those legends in which a formerly wordly person, a heathen, or even persecutor of Christians is converted and dies in the manner of a saint.<sup>1</sup>

The significance of death reveals itself most clearly in those legends in which a saint is tortured to death for his belief's sake. Death, then, is understood as the most virtuous culminating point of a series of virtuous deeds. In those cases where the story ends with the death of the hero the miracles worked through him posthumously are usually told beforehand, often in a preamble or exposition. Generally however the saint's death is followed by praise of his power and by various miracles. This form has as its archetypal pattern the story of Christ's virtuous life, death, resurrection, and further working of miracles. An early example is the Georgslied (ca. 896).<sup>2</sup> There is as yet no con-

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. e.g. Hartmann von Aue, Gregorius, ca. 1190 or the many legends of Saint Paul; quoted in Hellmut Rosenfeld, Legende (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

nection between the hero and the later dragon motif. In this old verse legend George is a martyr who is tortured to death, rises from the dead and again preaches his Christian message. This pattern is repeated a few times. Not all the details given in this legend serve the purpose of depicting the life-story of a saint; the stress is obviously on conveying the message that this saint, even and indeed particularly after his martyrdom, has great power and mercy to help his believers. A similar basic narrative structure was employed by Adelbrecht in his Johannes Baptista (ca. 1130; 267 lines).<sup>1</sup> Emphasis again lies on the saint's martyrdom; his death leads to a final praise of Johannes who, on Doomsday, will give help to all repenting sinners.

The structural significance of the saint's death is obvious. The incident of death clearly separates a life full of heroic virtues from an afterlife in which the saint reveals himself to his believers by means of miracles.

One could, in order to bring into sharper focus death's structural function in the ordinary legend, contrast this type with another which by some critics is called "antilegend."<sup>2</sup> One basic form of this antilegend is exemplified by the story of the Jew who will never find any rest, because he did not allow Christ to rest in front of his house while carrying the cross up to Golgotha. This 'wandering Jew' is not granted the "requies aeterna" for which one asks God.<sup>3</sup> His not being allowed to die is his punishment for wicked behaviour. The death of a saint is normally the manifestation of the hero's most heroic display of virtue and a reward for his religious life. And whereas the saint goes on after his death to fulfill God's wish by working miracles, the 'wandering Jew' is condemned forever to prophesy disaster wherever he may go.

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<sup>1</sup>See Hellmut Rosenfeld, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>André Jolles, op. cit., p. 51-59.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

The legend has been deliberately placed at the beginning of this chapter. It would seem that in this genre of short fiction the incident of death is of particular and great structural significance. Death, in most legends, is the most evident display and concentration of that first element of a saint, his heroic virtues; it is only after the hero has passed this climax that he can act in a manner that allows us justly to call him a saint. Death, in the legend, could be interpreted as a mirror that reflects a virtue-displaying life on earth onto the higher level of a miracle-working afterlife in heaven.

## 2. The Fairy-Tale

Sensitive readers often feel shocked at the apparently severe and, as they think, cruel punishment the evil-doer is condemned to suffer at the end of certain fairy-tales. To understand the structural and thematic position of death as punishment - the form in which it mainly occurs - one has to consider it in the full context of all other significant structural elements.

The fairy-tale - if we may again use a literary term as an ideal abstraction - is a literary type that tends to display a particular course of action, characters, properties, and style.<sup>1</sup>

Its course of action, in its most general form, is determined by such scheme as the following: difficulties and their overcoming, struggle and victory, a task and its solution. Behind this scheme stands the even more general pattern of expectation and fulfilment. No matter by which particular story this pattern is fulfilled, it is always a generally valid action rather than a historically individual one. The same is true for the characters in the fairy-tale. We find a repertoire of

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<sup>1</sup>Max Lüthi, Märchen (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), p. 23; cf. also J. Campbell, "Folkloristic Commentary," in M. Hunt (ed.), Crimm's Fairy Tales (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1959), pp. 339-870.

types that appear again and again in this kind of fiction: the hero/heroine is contrasted with his foils, unsuccessful brothers and sisters, usurpers, or by his enemies. Then there are those beings supporting the hero, and also the individual or people he saves. Whereas the hero in most cases belongs to our real world, although he may enter the world of supernatural beings and make use of their magic powers, his enemies and his supporters often belong to the world of magic. All characters in the fairy-tale are represented as standing in certain distinct relation to the hero. They are all clearly divided into good and evil, beautiful and ugly, rich and poor. And what has been said about the general nature of action is also applicable to the characters. We hear about the young prince, the old king, and the wicked witch. They are never given a precise individual characterization. Sometimes we do not even learn their names; it is the mere evocation of their general type that is important.

The properties, concrete or abstract (a magic hood or a piece of good advice), also have this character of general validity. They do not need verification through individual and detailed presentation. They are evoked and the audience immediately accepts them.

The last element, the particular style of presentation, displays as clearly as the others this peculiar openness to clear definitions. We always find a rapidly progressing action, mostly of a single-strand nature. There are stereotyped phrases (once upon a time ...) and a marked predilection for certain numbers (three, seven, hundred). Preference is given to pure and clearly distinguishable colours (white, red, black, golden, silver) and to pure metals (gold, silver, copper, iron), minerals, and glass. Everything seems to be projected onto the level of action: the dramatis personae are mainly characterized through action. There are no long descriptions of emotions, milieu or situations. Rules and laws in fairy-tales are very

strict. Taboos must not be violated. Very often there is a choice between either gaining a princess and a crown or losing one's head. The use of miracles serves the same purpose of contrasting means: a hero's hopeless position may suddenly be reversed into utter bliss.

Generally speaking the mode of the fairy-tale tends to stylisation, to a leading away from individual details to generalization and sublimation; it could be called abstract.

Against this background one is in a better position to consider the role death plays in the fairy-tale. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, we are concentrating here on death as a means of punishment. Death, like all the other structural details (birth, loss, marriage, reward), is not to be understood as an individual incident that happens at a particular time and place to an individual person. In the fairy-tale the person who dies is a personification of evil. If we look more closely at three well-known examples, we will clearly see the particular way death was and should be understood. The wicked stepmother in Little Snow-White, the witch in Hänsel and Gretel, and the old queen in Brother and Sister are all burnt alive. A terrible lot and, one might perhaps argue, a cruel punishment

According to Germanic law - and this subjective feeling of justice was alive throughout the Middle Ages - thieves had to be hanged, murderers broken upon the wheel, witches and sorcerers had to be burnt alive. This concept was profoundly influenced by magic: witchcraft as it manifested itself in this or that witch was understood as the most heinous crime. The equilibrium of the world had been disturbed and had to be re-established by handing the witch over to the element of fire, as only fire was believed to have the necessary purifying power. Death here is not to be interpreted as an excessively severe punishment of a more or less guilty delinquent; it is the only one possible, and as such a

necessary elimination of evil.<sup>1</sup>

Another kind of death is that suffered by the wolf in The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids and in Little Red Riding-Hood. As obviously no religious taboo has been violated no ritual form of death is applied. In the first story the wolf is filled with heavy stones so that he gets drowned when he tries to drink from the river; in the second the wolf is simply shot or axed to death by the young hunter.

When magical beings die they either tear themselves to pieces like Rumpelstiltskin or are killed by some other magical character, as is the case with the old dwarf and sorcerer in Little Snow-White and Rose-Red.

Here a supernatural being is the cause of the disturbed order of the world. The re-establishment of order is not brought about by man, but by nature itself.

Death in the fairy-tale is treated in the same way as all the other structural elements. The tendency to present marked contrasts and clear distinctions, different from the arrangement of things in the real world, a tendency already characterized as an inclination to abstraction, also and in particular includes the handling of death. Thus death's structural function in the fairy-tale can be understood as the extreme negative counterpart (elimination of evil) to an extreme positive solution (gaining a princess and a throne).

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Heinrich Mitteis, Deutsche Rechtsgeschichte. Ein Studienbuch, rev. ed. by Heinz Lieberich (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), p. 26.

### 3. Légende Populaire

The French term is given preference here as both the German and the English words could lead to some misunderstanding. The German 'Sage' might suggest the meaning of 'saga,' characterizing a completely different literary genre, whereas the English terms folktale and legend are not precise enough.

Légendes populaires are related to the holy legend and, even more so, to the fairy-tale through the element of the numinous. This common quality, however, provides at the same time characteristic differences.

Whereas in the fairy-tale the extraordinary, the world beyond reality, is merely an integrated part necessary for the story's course of action, the numinous in the légende populaire plays a central part. There is a strong emphasis on ghosts, apparitions, giants, dwarfs, gnomes, sprites, goblins, demons, witches, sorcerers, the devil, etc. And although all these characters may appear in the fairy-tale as well, the stress in the fairy-tale is more on swift action. The légende populaire concentrates more on single numinous situations.<sup>1</sup>

It seems also that there is a different attitude underlying the presentation of that numinous quality. The distance between narrator, audience, and characters presented on the one hand and the numinous situation and quality on the other is very small. Unlike the fairy-tale reader, the audience here feels more directly involved, frightened and threatened by the unknown and dangerous. And whereas in the fairy-tale there is a mixing and interweaving of the two spheres of this world and that other, the numinous and profane elements in the légende populaire are kept strictly separate.

There is no feeling of danger and emotional tension, if an animal talks to the fairy-tale prince; on the contrary: he and we feel soothed and con-

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Max Lüthi, op. cit., p. 7.

soled. The "mysterium tremendum et fascinosum"<sup>1</sup> is lacking. Lüthi says that the "numinous loses its specific gravity" in the fairy-tale.<sup>2</sup> In the légende populaire the numinous is extraordinary, superior to human nature and fatally dangerous.

Besides the numinous quality certain other elements should be mentioned for definition's sake. The légende populaire is bound to a certain place and, more often than not, to a certain time. It demands our belief in what is narrated, as it claims to render real events which have been changed by way of a long oral tradition or by deliberate artistic transformation. Artistic handling of subject-matter and narrative technique in the légende populaire is, however, never as elaborate as in the fairy-tale. The latter generally has a far more complex and consciously artistic structure. There is, for example, always a certain element of conscious irony in the fairy-tale - "and if they have not died, they are still alive to the present day" - that is completely lacking in the légende populaire.

In the light of these descriptive statements the question of the role of death in the genre of the légende populaire may be considered. People in légendes populaires die by being turned into stone, having their skin torn off, being fetched by the devil incarnate, etc. Death, again, is punishment, but, unlike the fairy-tale, the punishing power always belongs to the numinous world. The crimes committed are usually not offences against a human community but violations of a numinous order.

The well-known légende populaire of Doctor Faustus will illustrate this in greater detail. The story as it is presented in the German Volksbuch von Doktor Faust seems to meet all the demands of our rough definition. As a contemporary and acquaint-

<sup>1</sup>Max Lüthi, op. cit., p. 9f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

ance of Martin Luther, Faust is bound to the 16th century and Germany. The Volksbuch, as its title suggests, is written in a simple style for a broad and popular audience. The story's main interest is in the numinous: Faust's handling of magic powers, his pact with the devil, and finally the devil's making his personal appearance to kill Faust and fetch his soul. Furthermore there is the very short distance between narrator, audience, and Faust's companions on the one hand and the devil and magic on the other. There is no irony that makes the reader realize that what is presented is meant to be only a story. We feel the same shudder that Faust's companions experience when they find their master's corpse after a night of horror. The audience at no stage is in doubt about whether Faust's acquaintance with magic and devil is dangerous, culpable and wicked. Thus neither the audience nor Faust's disciples, however shocked they may be, are particularly surprised at the outcome.

Faust's death is not just the end of a magician's life. His corpse is found, headless on the dunghill in front of the house, while his brains are spattered around the walls of his room. The nocturnal killing is heard by Faust's companions who dare not come and protect him for all the horrifying noise they hear from their master's study.

Faust's death is terrifying. Worldly punishments for worldly crimes are often severe, but violations of the numinous world are met with punishments beyond human imagination. Death here, and in almost all légendes populaires, stands at the end of the story as a logical and predictable result of a series of more and more severe offences against a numinous order.

4. The Riddle

The last of the rudimentary fictional forms to be treated here is the riddle. This comparatively pure form, literally as well as orally transmitted, has its origin in the Orient and seems particularly to have thrived well among the Hebrews.<sup>1</sup> In early Greek culture we find the riddle in oracles and embedded in myths<sup>2</sup> and during the later more sophisticated era in social games such as riddle contests.<sup>3</sup> In Germanic times the riddle formed an equally important part of folk myth, literary tradition, and even legal practice.<sup>4</sup>

At first glance one would not necessarily connect the riddle with death. In analysing this genre more carefully, however, one soon realizes the clear either/or present even in its modern descendant, the newspaper crossword puzzle. There is always a person 'enigmatizing' something and another being asked or compelled to unriddle it again. The one who asks forces the second one to an answer, the examined person - it is, in a way, an examination with, perhaps, a fatal outcome - submits himself to being questioned and struggles to find the solution.

The typologists<sup>5</sup> subdivide the riddle into two main branches, the Sphinx-riddles and the Illo-riddles. In all the riddles of the first group there is the alternative of finding the solution or having to die. The Sphinx-riddle in the myth of Oedipus shows this deadly either-or quality most distinctly.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. e.g. Solomon's riddle contest with the Queen of Sheba; the discussion of the riddle in this section is based on the chapter "Rätsel" in André Jolles, op. cit., pp. 126-149.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Lycophon's Alexandra; Oedipus and the Sphinx.

<sup>3</sup>W. Schultz, Rätsel aus dem hellenischen Kulturkreis, 1912; quoted in André Jolles, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 132f.

<sup>5</sup>A. Jolles or the Finnish school headed by Antti Aarne.

Death here has a manifold structural function. Firstly, we are told that the Sphinx was a deadly threat to the city of Thebes. Secondly, she killed all who were not able to guess the meaning of the riddle she proposed to them. Thirdly, Oedipus' solving it not only meant the liberation of Thebes but at the same time the Sphinx' death.

The Sphinx-riddles are wide-spread in folk literature, and appear mainly in folk-tales and fairy-tales. A typical example is Rumpelstiltskin.

The second type, the Ilo-riddle, has as its basic situation a person accused of a crime who is granted his life, if he can propose a riddle the judge is not able to solve.

In the first case, characterized by the Sphinx-riddle, not being able to guess the meaning of a riddle means death, in the second, the Ilo-riddle, ability to propose a riddle the judge cannot solve means life.

The research in the field of the riddle as an early literary genre has shown that all riddles can in fact be derived from these two basic forms. And although we apparently have lost the immediate contact with the fatal threat or freeing power implied in the riddle, we still have a feeling of tension when we are presented with the problem of a riddle's solution: Any examination, as has been pointed out, illustrates this situation.

To show how the riddle is still alive in literature André Jolles hints at the comparatively young fictional type of the detective story or detective novel.<sup>1</sup> Here the basic pattern of the riddle has been expanded. One may compare the criminal to the person who "enigmatizes" something - his crime and himself - and the detective to the one who has to unriddle it. Both types of dramatis persona are normally confronted with their possible death; the criminal, if the riddle of his crime is solved, and the detective, if he is trapped by the criminal.

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<sup>1</sup> André Jolles, op. cit., p. 148f.

The riddle has been put at the end of this chapter as it seems to display most convincingly the coercive structural effect that death may have in certain literary genres.

During the nineteenth century, with the gradual development on the other hand of that new prose form, the specifically modern short story, and of a new philosophic concept of and emphasis on human existence on the other, death again seems to deserve our particular interest. Whether its functional significance in the short story will prove to be as clearly graspable as seemed possible with those rudimentary forms will have to be investigated in the chapters to follow.

## CHAPTER IV

### FORERUNNERS OF THE MODERN SHORT STORY IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND THE STRUCTURAL FUNCTION OF DEATH SITUATIONS

It is the aim of this chapter to give a possible explanation of the birth of the typically modern short story. Two main factors seem to be responsible for its characteristic appearance: a distinct thematic direction and a definite formal concern.

The new thematic direction may be summed up by saying that certain writers in the 19th century, as well as certain philosophers, began to concentrate more than before on individual man and his existential needs.

Parallel yet independent there is the artistic concern with the formal problem of brevity which, since Poe, has never disappeared from the literary scene.

An attempt will be made to show how in certain cases these two trends merge and give birth to a distinctly new type of short story, a type which for simplicity's sake has been called the 'modern short story.' This term is rather vague and will be of little use to later generations who may feel that they have more justification in calling their literary forms 'modern.' For this reason the term 'modern short story' will be replaced in the final typology at the end of the thesis by more specific and descriptive terms.

1. America

a. E. A. Poe: The Masque of the Red Death

Poe's The Masque of the Red Death<sup>1</sup> merits particular consideration in this thesis. It is a typical example of the grotesque in a short piece of prose fiction of the last century. It shows very lucidly how extraordinarily alert Poe is to the possibilities which this genre offers artistic treatment. Not only is the element of the grotesque of primary importance as far as tonal unit is concerned, it is reflected also in the narrative structure of the story. In addition to this the author has the third-person narrator give an enumeration of grotesque elements which is exhaustive enough to serve as an attempt at a definition. Besides these interrelated elements of the grotesque The Masque of the Red Death is characterized, to a very high degree, by the structural significance which the final death incident has for the story as an artistic whole.

The most important forerunner of the grotesque tale is without doubt the Gothic Novel. Although it is a matter of controversy, Poe was apparently also acquainted with the idea of the grotesque in the writings of the German E. T. A. Hoffmann. Poe's own concept of the grotesque finds its most lucid expression not in his theoretical works but in the story to be discussed here.

Describing the grotesque "masqueraders" the narrator in The Masque of the Red Death says, they showed "much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm," "... unsuited limbs and appointments ... debrious fancies such as the madman fashions," features of the "beautiful ... wanton ... bizarre ... terrible" and "not a little of that which might have excited disgust." A little later they are called "a

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<sup>1</sup>(1842), in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe, introduction by Hervey Allen (New York: Random House, Inc., 1938), pp. 269-273.

multitude of dreams."

With this description Poe's narrator enumerates all the essential elements which the modern concept of this term embraces. One could, perhaps, add an interpretative generalization as does W. Kayser when he says that the grotesque transforms the familiar reality into an unfamiliar world. The grotesque distortion of things, the simultaneity of the beautiful and nauseating, of the glittering and terrible transforms the familiar into a fantastic, unfamiliar and dreamlike world.<sup>1</sup> This is not an isolated phenomenon in The Masque of the Red Death. Poe uses a consistently grotesque atmosphere throughout the story to prepare the reader for the intruding of the numinous forces. When the narrator describes the masqueraders as beautiful but, at the same time, terrible, the careful reader either understands it as a hint at some impending disaster or, with the story's outcome in mind, interprets it as an anticipation in nuce of the contrast between the beauty of the Prince's secluded life and the terror of his death.

The different structural elements of The Masque of the Red Death stand in a clearly perceptible relationship to one another. They all lead up to the structural pivot of the story, Prince Prospero's and his friends' death. Although understandable in themselves as more or less realistic ingredients necessary to the progress of the action they become luminous with meaning if interpreted under the aspect of the final death incident.

Death in the form of the final incident as well as a constant external threat is used as a device to restrict the story in space. The Red Death which rages through the country forces Prince Prospero and his friends to retreat to "one of his castellated abbeys." The narrow circle of this refuge provides the scene of action. This spatial restriction adds, to a considerable degree, to the structural unity of the story. Poe goes even one

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<sup>1</sup>Wolfgang Kayser, Das Grotteske in Malerei und Dichtung (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1960), p. 62.

step further in his restriction by employing the artifice of a second and narrower circle for the actual ball situation within his limited space. The "masked ball" takes place in the "imperial Suite" of seven apartments. The space of these seven room, like the space of the abbey, is subjected to the structuring force of death. The rooms lead, in a winding line, to the seventh and last apartment which, by the Prince's order, has been decorated with the colours black and red, the colours of the Red Death. It is in this seventh chamber that Prince Prospero finally meets his death. Thus, Poe erects a narrow spatial frame within which he can achieve a considerable unity and compactness.

Poe's spatial restriction has a close parallel in the restriction of time. In an introduction giving the appearance and symptoms of the Red Death, the characters, a description of the castle, and Prince Prospero's means of entertainment, the narrator covers a period of about six months. The actual event, the masked ball, takes place in a period of not more than one afternoon and one evening. The time limit is set by the Red Death at midnight. Although the time-treatment in The Masque of the Red Death is by no means original or even experimental - Poe employs a strictly chronological sequence of events - time is deliberately subjected to the demands of brevity. By confining the narrated time to a few hours Poe aims at and achieves what he calls "unity of impression" or "unity of effect."

Despite its relative complexity The Masque of the Red Death is typical of Poe as far as characterization is concerned. The restriction to one main character is certainly appropriate for a short piece of fiction. Poe has Prince Prospero introduced as a "happy and dauntless and sagacious" man who has an "eccentric yet august taste," whereas other dramatis personae necessary to the action are described in a fairy-tale manner as "a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and the dames of his court." This concentration on one main character does not, however, result in the creation of a

'round' character. Prospero, like his friends, remains a 'flat' character, a type. This method prevents the reader from understanding Prospero's death as an individual's fate. On the other hand this more abstract handling of characters allows the reader, in a story of relative complexity such as The Masque of the Red Death, to interpret Prince Prospero, on a symbolic level, as a humanum genus figure and, thus, grasp his fate as universally valid.

The careless reader who understands The Masque of the Red Death on the surface level for its effect of Gothic horror only, misses a great deal of its more subtle structure. There is a complex pattern of interrelated symbolic elements which not only add to the general atmosphere but bear significantly on the thematic aspects of the story. The "castellated abbey" itself hints at man's flight to castles and churches in order to have his life of pleasure secured. The door symbol as it appears in the "gate of iron" has the double-meaning of shutting out and letting in. The magic number of the seven apartments may suggest, perhaps, the seven ages of man. Similar to man's experience in life, "the vision embraces but little more than one at a time" while one proceeds from one chamber to another. The sequence of the seven apartments, like the seven ages of man, ends with the black wall of death. This seventh room is "shrouded" in black velvet, the colour of death. To enhance this effect Poe makes the window panes reflect a "deep blood color."

To the modern reader Poe's obvious effects here may appear as crude when he has his room reflect the symptoms of the Red Death mentioned at the beginning of the story. Seen in its historical context, however, Poe's method in combination with the mastery of the laws of brevity is a significant step ahead in the evolution of the short story as an independent literary genre. The effect which this seventh and last apartment has upon the revellers is also used to foreshadow the outcome of the story. Only few of the Prince's friends are "bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all." The guests' recoiling

from the threshold of this last link of the chain of pleasure seems to symbolize their fear of death. In order to heighten the foreshadowing effect of the colour symbols and the reaction of the Prince's guests to that last room Poe introduces the symbol of the clock which, standing in the seventh apartment, suggests the expiring time and approaching end. The clock, too, has the black colour of death.

The author deliberately creates the dense atmosphere of horror as the main effect, which is steadily heightened towards the end of the story until it culminates in the horror of the presence of the Red Death. The author, with great technical skill, has subjected a great number of his structural details to creating the one horrifying impression. It would, however, detract considerably from the artistic value of The Masque of the Red Death, if its significance were based upon this effect only. It is generally true that the question of theme was not Poe's primary concern. Yet in The Masque of the Red Death Poe, consciously or unconsciously, achieves, at least to a certain degree, plurisignificance.

The climactic moment of Prince Prospero facing his death is a moment of recognition not only for the story's characters, but also for the reader. When the narrator calls the Red Death a "thief," his remark is ambiguously significant. Death has to make use of the same device of the mask to penetrate through the Prince's 'masked life' and to regain his legitimate "domination over all." Prince Prospero appears to have attempted to escape man's inevitable fate. He has withdrawn to a "deep seclusion." The threatening reality outside is replaced by security and pleasure inside. The Prince lives the life which his symbolic name seems to suggest. Beauty, wine, and dancing have been put in the place of decay and death. The pleasure, however, is masked.

At this point the structural importance of the element of the grotesque becomes obvious. The "glitter" is not the only characteristic of the Prince's life of pleasure, the "horror" is there as well. In a

nutshell, so to speak, the author gives here the pattern of the whole structure; it is an ironical contrast between pleasure and horror, life and death. This contrast is underlined by the juxtaposition of the "feverish heart-beat" of the first six apartments to the appalling blackness of the last room's "sable drapery."

Prince Prospero and his friends try to avoid death as they avoid this last chamber. When they "weld the bolts for the walls' iron gates" the courtiers steal from death a short period of magnificent pleasure. The unreal nature of this life is stressed by the fact that the narrator calls the masked courtiers "dreams." Whenever they hear the clock strike a full hour, they become aware of the unreality of their existence and stand "stiff frozen." At midnight the revellers suddenly realize that the mask of the Red Death is amongst them. Their reacting with disapprobation, surprise, terror, horror, and disgust resembles closely their earlier reaction to the pestilence which is devastating the country outside. The Prince, who hitherto has avoided facing death, has to follow him finally from the sphere of pleasure and life in the "eastern or blue chamber" to the sphere of horror and death in the western apartment which is decorated like an open coffin.

As has been emphasized before the element of the grotesque is present in the story not only in the form of a suggestive description or as a prevailing atmosphere; it is the basic pattern of the structure as a whole. The glitter and horror, the familiar and unfamiliar, are the two extreme properties of the grotesque. They also form the two extreme poles in the structure of the story. Light, Beauty, and Life are contrasted with Darkness, Decay, and Death. If one accepts the interpretation of Prince Prospero as a symbol of man who, despite his inevitable fate, attempts to postpone death, one realizes how closely the element of the grotesque can approach the tragic. Man's most glamorous life, the story suggests, implies certain death. Whatever attempt man makes to veil the fact of his inevitable end by the means of

the feverish atmosphere of a pleasurable life his fall, only a short while postponed, will be the more terrible. When the narrator says in the final paragraph that "the presence of the Red Death" was finally acknowledged he implies that nature's equilibrium, which had been disturbed by the attempt to postpone death, is readjusted. This idea is confirmed by the final sentence in which Poe skillfully uses alliterations to give emphasis and musical effect to his last statement: "And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all."

b. Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Birthmark

The modern reader is usually put off by two conspicuous weaknesses in Hawthorne's writings. The one is that most of his stories reveal the strongly didactic attitude of a preacher, the other is a tendency to construct rather than artistically create a concrete piece of art out of an abstract situation. Both weaknesses are certainly present in The Birthmark.<sup>1</sup> They seem, however, to be outweighed by two factors which make the story appear significant for this thesis.

Hawthorne, in The Birthmark, achieves a concise form which is based on a rigorous artistic control and mastery of the technical laws of brevity. Brevity, here, is mainly a result of Hawthorne's exclusive concentration on Aylmer's concern with and removal of the birthmark on his wife's cheek. There is a preciseness and cogent logic in the narrative development of the story that seems to symbolize the hero's scientific outlook. In addition to this technical mastery of form Hawthorne lays strong emphasis on a moral and metaphysical theme, a feature which cannot be discovered in Poe's art.

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<sup>1</sup>(1843), in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., pp. 210-224.

The abstract formula underlying The Birthmark could be put like this: a passionate alchemist unintentionally kills his beautiful young wife while attempting to remove a birthmark from her cheek in order to give her flawless beauty. Death thus plays a powerful structural and thematic role. The whole of The Birthmark is constructed towards the final incident of death or, one could argue, the narrative arrangement of the story is completely comprehensible only from the structural pivot of the final death incident.

The death incident has a strong backward effect on the whole story. The primal technical device for making death a prominent structural element throughout the story is that of foreshadowing. For clarity's sake one can subdivide the elements used for foreshadowing death into two groups. The one is mainly concerned with Georgiana's presentiments. The other embraces mainly Aylmer's thoughts, remarks, and actions revealing tragic irony.

The hero, Aylmer, steps out of the narrow circle of his artificial world into the normal world of human relationships in order to marry a beautiful young woman. This action of leaving his science, however, is only a temporary measure. It has to be proved still whether his passion for his young wife will be stronger in the end than his passion for scientific knowledge. When Aylmer realizes and feels more and more strongly that the otherwise perfect beauty of Georgiana is spoilt by a small birthmark on her left cheek - he kisses his wife only on her right and perfect cheek - Georgiana anticipates that her husband loves perfection more than human beings. "' You cannot love what shocks you!'," Georgiana replies to her husband who maintains that he loves her despite the flaw on her cheek. Gradually the young woman becomes so conscious of the mark that Aylmer has only to glance at her face to change the rosy colour in her cheeks into "deathlike paleness." When Aylmer has a dream which anticipates in a symbolic way the procedure and outcome of his fatal experiment Georgiana,

contrary to her husband, understands it as warning. But although she feels that the stain may go "as deep as life itself" she is so unhappy in the meantime that her life has become a burden to her which she would "fling away with joy" to satisfy Aylmer's wishes. The conviction becomes stronger and stronger within Georgiana that removing the birthmark would most probably mean her death. But, as she loves her husband more than herself she pleads "spare me not, though you should find the birthmark take refuge in my heart at last."

When Georgiana enters her husband's laboratory she is "cold and tremulous" and faints. After she has recovered from her "death-like faintness" Georgiana finds herself in a beautiful room and, with clairvoyance, compares it to "a pavilion among the clouds." Her presentiment of her coming death grows stronger when she feels "a strange, indefinite sensation creeping through her veins, and tingling, half painfully, half pleasurably, at her heart." Then, while Georgiana is reading in her husband's book recording all the experiments which he has ever undertaken her assumption becomes certainty. Although impressed by Aylmer's ardour and laborious ambition that speak from these records, Georgiana realizes that "his most splendid successes were almost invariably failures, if compared with the ideal at which he aimed." Georgiana's attitude at this moment of recognition is willing self-sacrifice. She regards herself "of all mortals the most fit to die," because she feels that Aylmer's scientific passion is far greater than his love for her as an individual.

Georgiana's presentiments of the experiment's failure and her approaching end are contrasted, throughout the story, with thoughts, words, and actions by Aylmer that express tragic irony. Once his scientific mind has focused on the birthmark as a flaw which spoils his wife's beauty he is possessed by an alchemistic passion of wishing to remove it. The little birthmark begins to take on monstrous proportions in his mind and he begins to understand it as the "symbol

of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death."

What makes these thoughts tragically ironical is the fact that the reader, guided by Georgiana's deeper insights, measures them with the pre-knowledge of a coming disaster which, to the piercing intellect of Aylmer, does not exist. To overcome decay and death will be his triumph, Aylmer is still prophesying to his wife while she is already feeling that his 'triumph' will mean her death.

When Georgiana touches his artificial flower its leaves turn black. Aylmer who is not capable of grasping the possible meaning of this failure merely comments that "there was too powerful a stimulus." As it is, death is also foreshadowed in the second experiment in which Aylmer fails to portray his beautiful wife by means of chemical processes. Instead of the grace of her face Georgiana perceives that her features are blurred and distorted and only the birthmark comes out extremely clearly and over-dimensionally. The reader understands as tragic irony that Aylmer is unable, even at this stage, to gain a sceptical attitude towards his science. Not deterred by these "mortifying failures" Aylmer even expresses his belief to Georgiana that he may find a means of prolonging life "perhaps interminably." Against the background of Georgiana's death as the gist of Aylmer's scientific knowledge this presumption appears, indeed, bitterly ironical and tragic. The author does not only employ for his indirect characterization the hero's thoughts, words, and action, he also resorts to the device of character foil to underline Aylmer's inhuman nature. Aminadab whose language is more the "grunt or growl of a brute" is juxtaposed to Aylmer as more human, when the narrator has him say, "if she were my wife, I'd never part with that birthmark."

Being shown a powerful "cosmetic" Georgiana asks her husband, whether it was this lotion with which he would remove her birthmark. Aylmer's answer, again, must be understood by the conscious reader as tragically ironical, when he says, "your case demands

a remedy that shall go deeper." This corresponds to Georgiana's earlier remark that the birthmark may go as "deep as life itself." Aylmer's answer is also ironically ambiguous in that it can be applied to his own irremediable case of not understanding. Without realizing it Aylmer is only too right in saying that Georgiana's "seclusion would endure but a little longer," and that the result was "already certain." Georgiana, who shares the wakeful reader's presentiment, understands "seclusion" as her soul's seclusion in her body and the "certain result" as her death.

Aylmer is the only one in the story who, due to his infatuation, is not capable of grasping the double-meaning of his words and actions. He still does not believe in a possible failure. Georgiana's remark that she feels "most fit to die" is met by his answer that she was "fit for heaven without tasting death!" And, ironically, the potion Georgiana swallows tastes to her "like water from a heavenly fountain."

The device of tragic irony in The Birthmark is fully exploited in the climactic situation, when the birthmark is slowly vanishing from Georgiana's face and Aylmer is rejoicing over his success. Ironically he misinterprets Aminadab's chuckling laughter as an expression of delight. And even when his wife, already feeling the grip of death, is pitying her blinded husband, he can still exclaim, "my peerless bride, it is successful! You are perfect!"

This is the last sentence the hero is allowed to utter. It sums up, perhaps, all the tragic irony with which the hero is characterized during the whole story. He is praising the success of his own experiment without being able to grasp the meaning of his own words. When the "now perfect" woman dies, the reader is not given Aylmer's reaction. The author does not want the reader to see a final change in the blinded man's attitude. Aylmer's infatuation is as perfect as the final result of his experiment.

Technically the gap between reality and Aylmer's view of reality is very skillfully presented

by the device of tragic irony. To the reader Aylmer's thoughts, words, and actions are clearly ambiguous. They can either be interpreted according to his own pseudo-scientific beliefs or to the "profounder wisdom" of Georgiana. It is an aesthetically satisfying achievement that Hawthorne succeeds in presenting the theme of infatuation, which is tragically ironic in itself, by the device of tragic irony throughout the story. Each element dealing with it anticipates in a nutshell the final tragic contrast of perfection and death.

The presumption of God's creative power is contrasted, throughout the story and explicitly at the end, with the result of destruction and death.

Despite the flaws which result from a didactic treatment of a moral idea, Hawthorne's Birthmark must be regarded as a significant stage within the evolution of the short story form towards the typically modern short story of our days. The fact that the author transfers a general human situation which poses a moral and metaphysical problem onto an artistic reality and treats it didactically is, judged in isolation, not very relevant for the purpose of this thesis. It is the brief and controlled treatment of its theme that makes The Birthmark so significant for the development of the short story.

Brevity is achieved here by a rigorous concentration on the main structural contrast which exists between Aylmer's presumptuous wishes (perfection) and his final achievement (destruction). Death, in The Birthmark, is the structural pivot about which the whole story is constructed. Every single element of the story expresses, directly or indirectly, the tragic irony which stems from this basic contrast. There are no side-effects, side-actions or, apart from Aminadab who does not gain significance as a character, any secondary characters. Until the very end the possessed alchemist Aylmer believes in his knowledge and, blinded, sacrifices his greatest good, whereas Georgiana, from the moment she learns about her husband's intention, feels that her death will be the certain outcome of Aylmer's sacrilege.

Hawthorne's analysis of the psychic differences between the two characters also serves the story's clear polarity.

Unlike Poe who restricts his idea of a single effect to the sphere of mystery and horror in art Hawthorne makes an attempt to subject the structural problems which his moral and metaphysical theme pose to a unity of impression in a wider sense. By structuring his whole story around the final pivot of the death incident Hawthorne achieves a surprisingly controlled and short form.

c. Melville: Bartleby

Norman Springer<sup>1</sup>, in his excellent interpretation of Melville's Bartleby<sup>2</sup>, shows convincingly how the whole story becomes meaningful, if one reads it under the aspect of the first-person narrator's limited ability to understand. Springer impressively reveals the symbolic level on which the careful reader, unlike the narrator, may see incidents and attitudes presented in the story in a meaningful interrelation. The figure of Bartleby, however, is grasped as comparatively real, namely as representing a person to whom the walled-in existence which the lawyer lives has become utterly meaningless. Bartleby, in Springer's article, is seen as a man who, after realizing the absurdity of his existence, in choosing nothing chooses death.

Obviously, the basic effect of Melville's story lies in the irony springing from the discrepancy which exists between the lawyer's attempt to look through the mystery of Bartleby and his conspicuous failure to do so fully. However, the lawyer's

<sup>1</sup>Norman Springer, "Bartleby and the Terror of Limitation," PMLA, LXXX (1965), 410-418.

<sup>2</sup>(1856), in Eugene Current-García and Walton R. Patrick, American Short Stories, 1820 to the Present, rev. ed. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1964), pp. 111-143.

fundamental failure is not, one could argue, that he is unable to look through things as such, but rather a failure to realize in what way these things could be meaningful to his own existence. When he finds Bartleby dead in the Tombs, the lawyer gains the partial insight which brings Bartleby into connection with mankind. His "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" reflects a grasping of a general truth. Yet Bartleby's death is not able to make the narrator aware of the fact that this might not only signify a general loss but a personal one, his very own.

The lawyer reveals himself to the reader as looking at things as external facts which exist without having an immediate connection with his own being. Whenever he reflects upon his own possible actions, it is in terms of whether his behaviour might perhaps contradict the rules of honesty, generosity, or religion. Despite his searching interest in Bartleby he renders him as a real item of the surrounding physical world. Yet, how real actually is Bartleby?

The first-person narrator, throughout the story, is very much interested in discovering some connection between Bartleby and the external world. The lawyer asks his scrivener for his birthplace, for relations and friends, but receives no answer. Bartleby appears "like a ghost" who retreats into his "hermitage." Bartleby's "pale form" remains in a "standing revery behind his scree." There is a "wonderful mildness" and "stillness" about him. "He never spoke but to answer," is how the narrator characterizes him. The author deliberately avoids providing empirically traceable details about Bartleby's history. He has the narrator merely search for connections between the scrivener and the external world, instead of allowing him to look into and question his own existence. Bartleby is portrayed as having only the minimum of characteristics necessary for his contact with the outer world. His looks, actions, words, and the fact "that he was always there," quite obviously move him away from the physical rough breathing world to which the lawyer belongs.

The first-person narrator on the other hand is unambiguously portrayed as being part of the unmistakably 'real' world of modern business. He is sufficiently characterized by his professional behaviour, his money, his career, and his office. His self-assertive handling of his business routine, his argumentation and logical thinking make him appear as a distinct opposite to Bartleby and prove him to be a proper lawyer. His officious activity and haste reflect the effects which the surroundings of Wall Street have on his character. Despite these features the narrator is not a predictable type, he gradually reveals himself as comparatively complex. He ponders upon his attitudes and thinks over the pros and cons of possible actions. This aspect of the lawyer's character apparently stresses his connection with 'justice.' But even the ideal of justice is only able to make the lawyer think in terms of objective argumentation. He is far too much concerned with outer reality to look at the problem which Bartleby poses as a problem that might have some relevance to his own existence.

Exploiting the tragically ironical situation in which the misinterpreting narrator finds himself a little further than Springer does one may come to the conclusion that Bartleby not only symbolizes the deplorable part of mankind that cannot live a walled-in existence but also a spiritual part of the lawyer himself. The fear, pity, and, finally, repulsion which the narrator feels for Bartleby spring from a "certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill."

The irony is that Bartleby's gradual retreat, expulsion, and decay are in reality the narrator's "excessive and organic ill." When the lawyer records, "what I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder," the careful reader realizes that what the narrator does not see is the fact that he himself is the victim who is losing the spiritual element which Bartleby symbolizes. "Disorder," then, is more a characteristic of the lawyer's Wall-Street existence than

of the nature of Bartleby. Analogously, when the lawyer says of Bartleby that "it was his soul that suffered and his soul I could not reach," one could read, under the aspect of the story's symbolic meaning, "my" instead of "his" soul. This interpretation will not appear to be too far-fetched if one takes into consideration that in the very next sentence Melville has his narrator state, "I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning." The two statements that the lawyer cannot reach Bartleby's soul and that he does not accomplish the purpose of doing something for his own soul seems to be connected too obviously to allow a misinterpretation. Being unable to form a satisfying contact with Bartleby, a spiritual part of himself, and fearing, after being already "seriously affected" in a mental way, "further and deeper aberrations" on his part, the narrator decides to rid himself of this mysterious being.

On the same symbolic level Bartleby's habit of working less and less and his final refusal to work at all can be understood as symbolizing a process within the lawyer himself. A spiritual part of his being is not able to fulfill the requirements of the officious bustle and dead routine which belong to the lawyer's professional existence. If one accepts the symbolic meaning of the lawyer's office as his soul, one may interpret Bartleby's retreating behind his "screen" or "hermitage" and his standing in "his dead-wall reveries" as the gradual expulsion of that spiritual part of man out of his being.

This reading finds a certain confirmation in the fact that Bartleby's retreat is a result of a series of shocks. At first he serves his master willingly. After a while, however, he refuses to do monotonous work; and after Nippers, Turkey, and the narrator himself disturb Bartleby behind his screen he gives up copying at all. The narrator feels that Bartleby has been offended at being "mobbed in his privacy," yet is not able to realize that Bartleby's last refuge has been fatally violated.

Finally the Bartleby element, "like the last

column of some ruined temple," is standing "mute and solitary" in the lawyer's empty soul. But before the narrator leaves his hollow soul behind him he looks at the "motionless occupant of a naked room" and admits, "I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to be rid of." But although he is partly conscious of the fact that something has been torn, the lawyer is not able to comprehend that it is he himself who has lost something vital.

The symbolic meaning of Bartleby as a spiritual part of the narrator becomes, perhaps, even clearer, if one concentrates on the scrivener's death. After the reader knows the outcome of the story the lawyer's misinterpretation of Bartleby's "dull and glazed" eyes is obvious. It is not only strained eyesight which gives Bartleby's eyes this look, it is an expression of a misused human being's failure to fulfill the requirements of a hectic world. It is furthermore a device by means of which the author has the narrator unconsciously foreshadow Bartleby's dead "dim eyes" at the end of the story.

When the lawyer feels that Bartleby has become "a millstone to ... [him], not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear," he wishes to get rid of that part of himself which not only does not add to, but also hinders his professional career. Yet, despite the lawyer's retreat from Bartleby he shows a strange and cogent interest in this mysterious being. It is instructive to know that it is finally the 'others' and not the lawyer himself who lead Bartleby to the Tombs. This could well be interpreted as symbolic, as the lawyer allows the external world, the bustle, the noise, the inhuman officiousness and efficiency to drive the spiritual part, which Bartleby embodies, to its final destiny. When Bartleby is led in a "silent procession" to the Tombs one again realizes how inadequately the first-person narrator understands his surroundings. "Tombs," which means 'graves,' 'vaults for the dead' or 'death' itself, is called by the narrator the "Halls of Justice."

This misinterpretation, too, reflects that fundamental irony on which the whole story is based.

Stung with remorse the lawyer is eager to explain to Bartleby that he was not to be blamed for the fact that scrivener had been brought to the Tombs. When the narrator again feels this compulsion to visit Bartleby, he finds him dead with his "dim eyes ... open," "strangely huddled at the base of the wall" and his knees "drawn up." The lawyer's being attracted by Bartleby is once more expressed in the confession, "something prompted me to touch him." The narrator feels a "tingling shiver" that runs up his arm and down his spine to his feet.

After Bartleby's death the lawyer again makes an attempt at understanding, yet fails to see a connection between the external event and his own personality. The fact that Bartleby, according to some rumour, had been a subordinate clerk in some "Dead Letter Office" leads the narrator to the partial insight that "dead letters" remind one of "dead men." He is unable to realize, however, that Bartleby himself has been destroyed like an "unclaimed letter." One might also hint here at the second meaning of dead letter as a law no longer observed and, thus, understand the dead Bartleby as a part of human nature which, in surroundings like those of Wall Street, is neglected and bound to die.

Understood on this level Melville's story presents a narrator who, in rendering the strange case and death of Bartleby, his scrivener, reveals his own spiritual decay and death. He is left at the end of the story as a man who, although capable of gaining exact surface knowledge and partial insights, has lost a deeper understanding of and feeling for the needs of his own and human nature in general.

Melville's Bartleby is a comparatively long short story. It may be called, with some justice, a nouvelle. It neither resembles the brief pieces of Poe or Hawthorne nor the form of the typically modern short story. The relatively great length of Melville's story is due to a detailed introduction, the use of character foils (Nippers, Turkey, Ginger Nut), a chronological sequence of a considerable number of narrative steps (Bartleby's appearance, his refusal of

certain jobs, his refusal to work at all, his refusal to leave the office, the lawyer's moving to another place, the attempts to get Bartleby out of the office and his arrest, and, finally, Bartleby's stay at the prison and death) and the first-person narrator's reflections on Bartleby's behaviour and his own reactions to them.

The mere narrative structure of the story would thus not offer much for this thesis. There are contemporary stories which, as far as the question of brevity is concerned, point far more clearly in the direction of the modern short story. There is, however, in Bartleby another, more significant feature which finds close parallels in the typical short story of our time. It is a modern handling of the death incident.

Death as a means of creating horror as in most of Poe's stories or as a device serving Hawthorne's allegoric-symbolic treatment of moral and metaphysical ideas is replaced in Melville's story by employing the death incident as an artifice which gives pointed expression to an existential problem.

This is valid, if we regard Bartleby, as does Springer, as the absurd hero who faces a meaningless existence (deadwall) and refuses to go on living.<sup>1</sup> It is equally valid if we interpret Bartleby as a spiritual part of the first-person narrator who, while he is recording his scrivener's strange case, is telling the story of his own spiritual death.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Springer, loc. cit.

d. A. Bierce: The Boarded Window

Ambrose Bierce's short short story<sup>1</sup> - under 2000 words in length - presents an American pioneer who faces the terrible experience of having lost his young wife through his own fault. When the woman falls seriously ill and is seemingly dead, the husband lays her body out on a table in front of an open window. Trying to keep the death-watch beside his wife he falls asleep. During the night he suddenly wakes up. The table is shaking under his arms. He is imagining light footsteps, when something is suddenly hurled against the table. Mad with terror the man seizes his gun and discharges it. In the flash of the sudden light he perceives an enormous panther dragging his wife towards the window. The shock leaves him unconscious. When he comes round, the sun stands high. He sees his wife's corpse lying in a pool of blood near the window. With a second, much more terrible shock, he realizes that his wife had not been dead, but was killed by that panther. The ribbon with which he had bound his wife's hands together was broken, and between her teeth he perceives a fragment of the panther's ear. Her tightly clenched hands, too, prove to him the terror of her death agony.

Unlike Poe Bierce does not indulge in keeping up an atmosphere of horror throughout his story. Its main effect springs from the discrepancy between the realistic narrative and the final shock of terror. The first-person narrator gives the reader a precise temporal and spatial introductory description, a short characterization of the main character and the source of his story. Both temporal and spatial details serve the author's aim of verisimilitude. 1830 is given as the year of Murlock's, the hero's, death. The "immense and almost unbroken forest" is reported not to have been situated far from where Cincinnati now stands.

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<sup>1</sup>(1891), in Angus Burrell and Bennett Cerf (eds.), An Anthology of Famous American Stories (The Modern Library; New York: Random House, Inc., 1953), pp. 345-348.

The hero is characterized by the fact that nobody had ever seen him "smile" or "speak a needless word." He is portrayed as being part of the forest's "gloom and silence." Although he cannot be much older than fifty, he looks like seventy. The narrator gives as a reason for this fact that "something besides years had had a hand in his aging." Murlock is directly characterized by the narrator describing him as having white hair and beard, "lusterless" and "sunken" eyes. His shoulders are recorded as bent, and in a summarizing suggestive phrase the narrator calls the old pioneer a "burden bearer." The details, the narrator admits, were provided by his grandfather, for he himself had never seen Murlock. This device of pretending not to be responsible for any wrongly recorded facts also adds to the intended effect of verisimilitude. The introduction is closed with the report of Murlock's death and his burial beside his wife. By telling the reader that Murlock's burial is the ending of the "final chapter of this true story" the narrator again aims at verisimilitude and at the same time provides necessary expository material.

From the level of the narrated present the narrator leaps back onto the level of an earlier time in which young Murlock had come to the West as a pioneer to build a home for his wife and himself in the forests. This flashback provides the actual story. It can be subdivided into four narrative steps. The first gives Murlock's start of a new life and his wife's illness. The second deals with his laying her out in state. The third culminates in Murlock's first shock when he sees the panther dragging his wife's body towards the open window and the fourth provides Murlock's final shock of terror and recognition.

The last two parts are constructed analogously in as much as they both present Murlock in a 'sleep' from which he awakes to be shocked by a terrible experience. The last part functions as a device to heighten the first shock of Murlock's confrontation with the panther in that it has its climax in the infinitely more shocking experience of having to realize

that his wife had still been alive when the panther lacerated her throat.

Although the final discovery of what had actually happened comes to the reader, as to the hero, as a stunning shock, the narrator has carefully built up the reader's expectation of some grave event by the artifice of foreshadowing. Old Murlock's gloomy appearance, the boarded up window, the grave of his wife, and a series of authorial comments prepare the reader for the revelation of some secret.

The author has his narrator comment that there were "few persons living today who ever knew the secret of that window" or hint that "something besides years had had a hand in his [Murlock's] aging." Before the reader is given the action on the time-level of the flash-back the narrator has gradually revealed to him a few necessary ingredients of a definite secret event which he is now most anxious to learn. The final shocking experience is explicitly hinted at when the narrator comments on Murlock's inability to grasp the meaning of his apparent loss, "that knowledge would come later, and never go."

Good foreshadowing, of course, never reveals what will actually happen; it only suggests the possibility of disaster or happiness. Rereading the story and, thus, being able to anticipate the final outcome the reader is able to appreciate these devices as having a definite structural position and function. Here, unlike most of Poe's stories, the device of foreshadowing is not employed to create a dense atmosphere of horror and mystery. It is used to stimulate the reader's expectation and, thus, create tension (within the story's structure) and suspense (within the reader).

A feature which sets The Boarded Window clearly apart from typically 20th century fiction is the use of the narrator's direct comments. The first-person narrator a few times deliberately steps out of his role of recording events for an audience and either comments on the action, addresses the audience or addresses the audience and himself.

After the reader has learnt that Murlock was

not capable of grasping how hard he was struck the narrator reflects in general on the phenomenon of grief, comparing it to an artist who uses great variety of instruments "upon which he plays his dirges for the dead." Still reflecting on the general nature of grief he continues, "some natures it startles; some it stupifies. To one it comes like the stroke of an arrow ... to another as the blow of a bludgeon, which in crushing benumbs."

After this argumentative generalizing on the nature of grief the narrator again adopts his role as direct catalyst between action and audience. Similarly, when the terrified Murlock stretches his hand out on the table only to find it empty, the narrator comments on the phenomenon of terror turning to madness, and, thus, motivates Murlock's following action. A distinct addressing of the audience by the narrator takes place, when the reader is told that "there are few persons living today who ever knew the secret of that window," and the narrator concludes, "but I am one, as you shall see."<sup>1</sup>

Later the narrator includes himself in the circle of the assumed audience and says, "we may conceive Murlock to have been that way affected," i.e. benumbed.

All these devices are used to make the audience feel that the narrator stands outside his story; they give the story an emphasis on the act of narration rather than on the story as a written piece of art with an inseparable, artistic unity.

The incident of death in this short story is of obvious and primal significance. The reader is confronted with three death incidents: Murlock's death, the apparent death of Murlock's wife, and her actual death. Murlock's death "closes the final chapter of this true story." It is anticipated to allow the full effect of Murlock's terrible experi-

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<sup>1</sup>my italics.

ence to be brought home to the reader without any further additions that could weaken the shock. Following the natural time sequence by putting Murlock's death at the end of the story would certainly spoil the story's intended aesthetic effect. After the woman's death a considerable gap of time had to be bridged before Murlock's death could have been recorded. The climax with its aim of leaving the reader stunned would certainly lose its impact. With no comment to follow and disturb the picture of the lacerated woman having a fragment of the panther's ear between her teeth the climax releases the reader into the silence of shock. Here lies the power and weakness of Bierce's short story.

The second death incident - and it must be regarded as a proper death incident as far as Murlock's understanding of the situation and the progress of the story is concerned - the apparent death of Murlock's wife, has its main function to promote the action and prepare the contrast between Murlock's interpretation of the situation and reality. The laying out of the body and Murlock's 'death-watch' do not gain self-sufficiency within the story's structure. They serve as a necessary basis for the events to come.

The last death incident, the woman's actual death, is not explicitly stated. It becomes obvious from the gruesome picture portrayed. In its shocking realization all the elements of foreshadowing find a shrill and stunning answer. With sudden recognition the reader understands every detail which was mentioned before. But there is no second level of meaning. The hero has no epiphany, only the experience of a painful shock.

Although a short short story, The Boarded Window has not a completely homogeneous aesthetic effect on the reader. The story is broken up into different parts. There is a change between narrated present and past, and the narrator's interfering with the process of the actual story seems to be more satisfying in longer forms of fiction. It is only

from the moment when Murlock is said to return to his log-cabin and find his wife ill with fever that the reader is spell-bound till the end. The narrator's addressing the reader and commenting generally on certain phenomena adds considerably to the first part's loose structure. These features seem to come close to A. E. Coppard's demands of the story as a told tale. There is little experimentation, an expository beginning, and a conspicuously present narrator. The extreme brevity of The Boarded Window, however, does not appear to be able to bear the looser and space-hungry structure which Coppard's ideal demands. Its poignant brevity and, in the second part, its rigorous artistic compression set the story apart from a more loosely arranged architecture of a 'tale.' Despite a certain looseness at the beginning the author has exerted strict artistic control on the story's structure in order to bring out his final shocking effect.

As for the single effect in the short story Ambrose Bierce is certainly a disciple of E. A. Poe. However, one important difference has to be seen between the two artists. Whereas Poe generally combines his effect with elements of the supernatural and numinous, Ambrose Bierce bases his shocking effects on reality, however fictional. As a result of this the reader does not find himself in a permanent atmosphere of the grotesque, mysterious or horrific, as is mostly the case with Poe's stories, but is entangled in a net of realistic details which suddenly appear to have hidden, all the time, the most shocking fictional truth.

The truth revealed here, however, is single-levelled. The character who experiences the shock is not portrayed as 'round' enough to make his experience and his reaction to his experience appear as the main aim of the story. The final shock effect remains an end in itself. However close in external form to the type of the modern short story, it is this fact, above all, which sets it apart from its younger relation. Despite certain weaknesses, however, The Boarded Window seems to be a typical enough an example within the evolution of the short story to find a place here.

e. Henry James: The Altar of the Dead

George Stransom, the introvert hero of the story<sup>1</sup>, lost his fiancée long ago. Since Mary Antrim's death Stransom has developed an intense love of the memory of the dead. With the passing of time Stransom transforms his love in a "religion of the dead." Stransom's attitude of hallowing the memories of his dead friends is contrasted, in one episode, with that of Mr. Creston who apparently does not value the grief which he feels over Kate's, his wife's death.

When Stransom reads in the newspaper of Sir Acton Hague's death, he is left completely cold. Acton Hague, a friend of his early manhood days, had once wronged him greatly. One day Stransom chances to enter a Catholic church and decides to objectify the spiritual altar which he has erected for his dead in his mind by lighting candles on a real altar. Through long years he communes with a fellow worshipper, a mourning woman who uses Stransom's altar for her own purposes.

When the cluster of candles grows larger and larger with the years George Stransom is finally permitted to call upon his fellow worshipper and discovers that she too had once been a very close friend of Acton Hague. She too had cruelly been wronged by the deceased but, contrary to Stransom, has long forgiven him. She has seen in all the different candles only the one light in memory of Acton Hague, whereas Stransom has been unable to bring himself to light a single candle for his estranged friend. The disclosure drives the protagonist towards a physical and spiritual crisis and, after a short spell of alienation between the two

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<sup>1</sup>(1895), in Leon Edel (ed.), The Complete Tales of Henry James (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964), IX, pp. 231-271.

worshippers, Stransom returns to the church for a last time. Infused by the vision of Mary Antrim's spirit with the wish to forgive, George Stransom dies in the arms of his fellow worshipper with the forgiveness of Acton Hague on his lips.

If one sees the hero's psychic development from a merely realistic view-point, it is unconvincing. Yet understood as a symbolic-parabolic story rather than a realistic one, The Altar of the Dead reveals its own logic and beauty. The hero's development is deliberately restricted to a series of situations presenting his attitudes to his dead friends. It is a development, however restricted it may appear, from a partly authentic to a fully authentic spiritual position.

Although internalized outer action, in the form of a number of death incidents, plays a multiple and highly significant role in the structure of the story. The first death incident, the death of his fiancée, functions as an initial impulse arousing within the hero the desire to cherish the memory of the dead with deeper devotion than is usually called for. His sense of "being bereft," an innate piety, and the fact that "he had never forgotten" combine and gradually compel him to form in his imagination a "religion of the dead." The memory of his most cherished dead slowly expands into a pious observance of the memory of all his dead friends until "an altar ... rears itself in his spiritual spaces."

The second death incident, Kate Creston's death, is not presented directly by the narrator. The reader learns of it through Stransom's recorded flash-back thoughts. It functions mainly to allow the hero to contrast his own deep reverence of the dead with the cheap forgetfulness and shallow attitude of Kate's husband whom the protagonist chances to meet in front of a jeweller's shop in the company of a lady who he feels is essentially shallow.

A third death incident is introduced, however, to reveal to the reader that George Stransom's apparently perfect worship of his dead is not without a shadow. The protagonist's cold reaction to the news of Sir Acton Hague's death appears as the bitter residue in the otherwise flawless sphere of his inner world. But it is only later when the reader is given Stransom's fellow worshipper's attitude to his former friend as a foil that this shadow takes on central significance.

Death is also employed as an indirect device indicating the flux of time necessary to bridge the gap between the hero's partial maturity in his middle years and his final state of perfection. The death of "many of his friends" and the growing number of candles on Stransom's altar perfectly fulfill the function of indicating the passage of time.

The protagonist's inner contradiction between the loving memory of his friends and his bitter feelings towards Acton Hague is turned into a conflict through the death of his fellow worshipper's aunt. It is this death incident which changes the more impersonal relationship to his friend into a personal one and introduces the central crisis in the story.

Through the purifying process of a severe illness, which serves as the outer expression of the hero's inner crisis, George Stransom arrives at a state of complete forgiveness. His attaining a fully authentic spiritual position and complete union with the dead coincides with the final reconciliation with his fellow worshipper and finds its pointed expression in his own death.

Despite the author's concentration on a single aspect in the hero's psyche, his worship of the dead, the story is much too complex to pass as

a typically modern short story. The narrated time covers nearly a lifetime and is structurally determined by a chronological sequence of situations characterizing the hero in his single psychic aspect and indicating the development of his "religion." Summary varies with scenic presentation providing the story with an alternating narrative pace. These aspects and the fact that the story depends heavily on a linear sequence of a fairly large number of outer incidents give The Altar of the Dead its nouvelle-like appearance.

What makes the story significant for the birth of the modern short story on the other hand is the author's concentration on an individual limited quest for authenticity. Because he chooses the single symbolic aspect of the worship of the dead James's short story is more convincing than a more complex fictional attempt would have been. This restricted search then finds a pointed resolution in a final limit-situation. It is through this final pointed situation that all the foregoing incidents and attitudes appear as directed towards and, as far as this is possible in a relatively complex structure, subject to the final structural pivot of Stransom's peace and death.

f. Stephen Crane: The Upturned Face

With Crane's The Upturned Face<sup>1</sup> the short story has reached a form of development which is so close to what has been described as the modern short story type that the differences between a good short story about the Second World War and Crane's narrative is one of degree rather than essence.

In both form and theme this story about the Spanish-American War anticipates what the writers of the lost generation attempted between the two World Wars and what the later generation of short story writers had to say. Written just before the start of the 20th century and published in March 1900, two months before Crane's death, The Upturned Face shows a dense brevity and immediacy of thematic presentation which could hardly be improved even with the most modern techniques.

The brevity of the story is due to a number of interrelated narrative elements. Crane first of all restricts his story to one significant situation, the burial of an officer who had been killed in action. The author has clearly divided his story into two parts. The first deals with the preparations such as digging the grave, searching the officer's clothes, putting the corpse in the grave and saying a prayer. The second part gives the actual burying of the dead.

At the beginning of the story the reader is informed, in two sentences, about the main purposes of the situation and about the main characters. Within the first nine lines nearly all the necessary setting - general enough to give it universal validity and precise enough to provide the necessary spatial impression - is given. The span between the moment at which the two officers stand before their dead comrade and that when the final shovel full of earth

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<sup>1</sup>(1900), in Robert Wooster Stallman (ed.), Stephen Crane. An Omnibus (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), pp. 389-393.

covers the face of the corpse provides the temporal frame for the story. All the structural devices such as time-treatment, handling of space, characterization, presentation of action, reflection, dialogue, report and description are subjected to that narrow frame. No flash-backs in the form of memories or authorial hints, no foreshadowing, no anticipation of future events related to the burial situation are incorporated in the story. Only a minimum of details of setting is provided; just as much as is necessary to give the story verisimilitude: there is a hill on the top of which the officers' company of Spitzbergen is having a gun-fight with the Rostina sharpshooters. Between the two groups, below their company, the two officers, with the help of two privates, bury their dead friend.

The author's deliberate controlling of the spatial description shows how conscious he is of the fact that a single superfluous detail of setting might shift the balance and detract from the main theme of the story. Crane concentrates on two main characters. The two privates play a subordinate role and may, perhaps, be regarded, though only in a very limited way, as foils. Their prime function seems to be to enhance the effect of verisimilitude. An officer, in those days, did not normally do manual labour.

The concentration on the two officers within a limited situation allows the author to create an amazingly clear picture of possible human behaviour in the face of death within his restricted narrative form. All the details of action are directly related to the burial. There are no side-actions, and not even the main action is reported in a continuously detailed manner. The reader is given certain minutely observed details out of which he has to reconstruct the flux of the whole event in his own mind. The reflections of the men never lead out of the narrow circle which the burial situation sets. This, of course, effects the density as well as the brevity of the story. The officers' reflections as everything else the reader learns about them serve to characterize them and, at the same time, 'augment' the central theme.

The dialogue employed in The Upturned Face is, although not represented as a continuous flow, highly intensive. It is interrupted by bits of report and, thus, heightens the impression of unrest and haste. Whatever is said by a character propels the action and speeds it up. Even the prayer which the officers attempt to speak is fragmentary and has a jerky movement that adds to the general unrest and tenseness of the situation. However, the strongest effect on the atmosphere created is exerted by the continuous threat of death which the sharpshooters mean to the men. When the privates start to shovel they do so "amid the swift snap of bullets." When the officers have finished dead Bill's things and the two privates are "laboring for their lives" the reader again is reminded of the fact that the bullets are "spitting" over their heads. A little further the prayer is framed by the two sentences: "The Rostina sharpshooters fired briskly" and "the fire of the Rostina sharpshooters was accurate and continuous." After the first shovels of earth have been emptied on the corpse the one private is wounded and they are both sent to the rear.

The threat of death is reflected throughout the story by the fear which the men, more or less obviously, show. The author's artifice of having the action accompanied by the continuous threat has a complex effect on the whole story. Thematically it allows the author to expose the characters' feelings and reduce human behaviour to the bare genuineness which is only shown in limit-situations. Structurally it gives the story additional density, atmosphere, and speed. "'Why don't you hurry up ... Hurry, do you hear?'," shouts the adjutant. Timothy Lean works "frantically, like a man digging himself out of danger." The wounded private "scrambles" hard for the top of the hill, and at the end the pale adjutant, horrified by the chalk-blue face of the corpse and fearing for his own life, shouts "beseechingly," "' Go on, man.'"

By speeding up the action and cutting short the dialogue the author also adds to the brevity of

the story. Here Crane, consciously or unconsciously, fulfills Poe's demand that intense effects cannot be drawn out unduly without losing their aesthetic value. And it would in fact detract from the effect of the death threat, if the reader were to be reminded every now and then and over a long period that "overhead the bullets were spitting." If the threat has no immediate effect, it necessarily loses its power and impact.

Finally Crane rigorously subjects his treatment of theme to the limitations which his single and narrow situation sets. Generally speaking one could call the theme in The Uprturned Face human beings in the limit-situation of having to face death. Crane's theme, thus abstractly formulated, may be divided into a number of concrete single themes which have all significant functions in the story as a whole. They are all subjected to the burial situation and, besides their universal validity, do not step out of this narrow circle. By this device the handling of theme, too, adds to the story's homogeneity and dense brevity.

The two main characters face death in a double way; in the "chalk-blue face" of their comrade and in the threat of the flying bullets around them. The two forms of death with which they are confronted, the corpse at their feet and the threatening sharpshooters, are closely interrelated. The threat of death reminds the two officers that the dead man in front of them is real and that death could happen to each of them at any moment. The reactions of the two men show very clearly that they are not used to death as a common event as were the soldiers at Verdun. Death to them has come as a terrible shock which, despite signs of a certain stereotyped brave behaviour at the beginning of the story, is more and more distinctly felt by the reader towards the end of the burial. It is a shock which distinctly reveals differences between false and genuine attitudes, between conventions and reality.

Of the two officers the adjutant is obviously the weaker character. In the face of the threatening

bullets he suggests postponing the burial until the next day. He does not assist Timothy Lean in searching their dead friend's pockets. Unable to restrain his emotions he vents his rage on the two privates. He starts to laugh hysterically and, in order to suppress his feelings, he suggests, in the rough manner of speech which is supposed to show his superiority, that they should "tumble him [dead Bill] in." Later, when the adjutant suddenly remembers a phrase of the burial service he "exploits it with the triumphant manner of a man who has recalled everything, and can go on." Yet, he is only able to remember one line and has to give up, repeating the word "mercy" once more "in quick failure." A certain weakness of character on the part of the adjutant is also shown by the fact that he, as soon as the first shovel of earth has been emptied on the dead man's feet, starts to babble platitudes. Finally, when the rain of bullets becomes more and more threatening he suggests that they might perhaps have been wrong in burying their comrade just at this time.

All these points are contrasted with Timothy Lean's more subtle and ethically more valuable behaviour. Timothy insists on burying Bill at once. He does not wish to "tumble" but to "lay" his friend in the grave. He is the one who remembers, although not completely, the traditional formulas of the burial service. But instead of taking pride in this or showing feelings of triumph he is "husky and ashamed" and stops "with a hopeless feeling." When the scared adjutant, towards the end, utters his doubts about the necessity of their action Timothy Lean reprimands him in a rough manner. Although frightened and shocked he finishes the burial himself and finally covers the chalk-blue face of his dead friend.

Both young officers show a strong fear of the nearness of death. Timothy Lean's hands "waver" when he tries to open the dead man's buttons. He does not seem "to dare touch" the first bloodstained button. When he has finished collecting Bill's things, he rises with a "ghastly face." Both are very particular

that their fingers should not touch the corpse. It is hard for them to accept that they are facing death here in a very personal form. They try to avoid the touch of death. This shirking the actuality of death is also reflected in their not accepting death's finality. The chalk-blue face until the very last moment expresses Bill's connection with life. Its "gleaming eyes" still "stare at the sky." After they have laid the corpse in the grave the adjutant suggests that they should say something "while he can hear" them. And it is the face of their dead friend that is covered at the very last moment.

Throughout the story there is a tension between traditional behaviour and conventions and the actual behaviour which the reality of this terrible situation demands. The conventions do not prove valid in the face of death and leave the officers in utter insecurity. The grave is not a "masterpiece" in which one cannot see the dead, but a "poor shallow thing." The formulas of the conventional burial service are fragmentary. Instead of giving them the satisfaction of having fulfilled the ritual in the proper manner they leave them ashamed and helpless.

Both officers use their military language and tone to regain their shaken self-confidence. Timothy Lean "barks" the command "Attention!" to establish the military order which, he has learned, is a necessary ingredient of a soldier's burial. The adjutant "burst out in a sudden strange fury at the two privates" to hide his own confused emotions. But towards the end of the burial Timothy Lean breaks the military code, when he shouts at the senior officer, "'Damn you ... shut your mouth.'" In the face of the harsh reality of the situation the adjutant does not even react to the younger man's reprimand. Death as the most shocking limit-situation forces the two men to reveal their genuine qualities. Timothy Lean, despite his horror and fear, shows a piety, faithfulness and bravery which are beyond the superficial rules of the conduct a military code prescribes. The adjutant, who is the senior officer, appears to be superior by rank only. In the face of

death he cannot but reveal his basically rather hollow and cowardly nature.

The feeling of helplessness in a novel and terrifying situation is reflected by the fact that the two officers are "always looking at each other" for mutual affirmation. The very first line of the story underscores this element, when the troubled adjutant helplessly asks what they should do now. After the officers have laid the corpse in the grave "they sigh with relief." A little later the author comments with bitter irony how satisfactory it is for Lean that the private has emptied the first shovel of earth on their dead comrade's feet and not, as Lean had feared, on his face. After Timothy has sent the privates to the rear and filled his shovel to bury the dead he hesitates. He has to force himself to throw earth on the corpse. And when he finally starts, he does it with a movement "like a gesture of abhorrence." Suddenly the full meaning of his burying a dead friend comes home to him and he stops, tired, and mops his brow. In front of his half-buried, dead comrade Timothy Lean, contrary to his fellow officer, for a moment forgets about the sharpshooters' bullets and, like "a tired laborer," rests for a short while. The feeling of helplessness overcomes him a last time, when nothing but Bill's face is looking out of the grave. The horrible thing that he had postponed all the time has to be done finally. Throwing the last shovel of earth in the grave means irrevocably extinguishing his friend's existence. Timothy Lean recoils for a last desperate moment from doing the inevitable. Then a shovel full of earth covers the "upturned face" of the dead. Nature's indifference toward the burial situation is sharply contrasted with the horror and despair of the soldiers. The bare realistic detail of the "plop"-sound which the falling earth produces on the corpse effectively underlines the discrepancy between the harsh reality of the burial as an event and the shaken frame of mind of the characters. The final "plop", too, makes the two men realize that their comrade has ceased to exist. They have to accept death as a finality.

2. Europe

a. J. P. Hebel: Unexpected Reunion

J. P. Hebel is generally regarded as a master of the German anecdote. His famous Unexpected Reunion<sup>1</sup> does in fact fulfill the demands of one subgroup of this genre in that it presents an extraordinary event in an extremely concise - under 1000 words - and pointed manner. Yet one can find in this very short piece of prose fiction a series of structural peculiarities which seem to set it apart from the merely anecdotal and to make it interesting for this thesis.

In the narrated past, about half a century before the third-person narrator records his story, a young miner and his pretty bride intend to get married in a Swedish town. But shortly after the parson has announced their wish the miner is killed below-ground. The mourning bride puts away a black scarf with a red border which she had made for her beloved to wear on their wedding, and she never forgets him. Fifty years pass and in 1809 a group of miners find deep under the earth a young man's corpse which has been preserved by iron vitriol. Nobody in the town can recall having known the youth until the miner's bride, now an old bent woman, appears on the scene. The dead but still beautiful body is laid out in state in the old woman's room before it is brought to the grave yard. When the miners come to fetch the dead, the woman puts that black silken scarf round his neck. In her Sunday dress, as if it were her wedding, she attends the burial of her beloved.

In a short piece of fiction with a narrating time of not more than ten minutes that covers a narrated period of time of about fifty years the

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<sup>1</sup>(1811), in Ernst Penzoldt (ed.), Die schönsten deutschen Erzählungen (München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1961), pp. 78-79. Original title: Unverhofftes Wiedersehen.

author's main technical concern is the treatment of time. The two dramatic scenes, the young couple's mutual promise at the beginning of the story and the old woman's final reunion with her dead fiancé function as a bracket which prevents the middle part from outbalancing the structure. This is obviously the danger of Hebel's skillful bridging the time gap of fifty years. Hebel does not make his narrator leave the mourning bride and come back to the old woman with a traditional phrase such as 'fifty years later ...' The last descriptive remark which the narrator gives of the young bride is that "she never forgot." This "never" prepares the reader for accepting the final event as partially motivated and aesthetically satisfying. When the passage indicating the flux of time starts with "in the meantime," the reader understands that a gap is now being filled until a point is reached in the narrative at which the "not forgetting" of the young bride is met with some answer or solution. The act of the woman's "not forgetting" is distinctly symbolized by her putting away the black silken scarf with the red border which she had made for her bridegroom. The old woman's reunion with the dead and the fulfilment of her long waiting is symbolized by her putting the scarf round his neck before he is buried. She had not waited in vain.

It is worth while having a more careful look at this middle section and at its technique of bridging the time gap, although the section constitutes only a minor part of the story. The author covers the fifty years by providing a series of important or, as far as this particular anecdote is concerned, seemingly important historical events that happened all over the world: the destruction of Lisbon by an earthquake, the Seven Years' War, the abolishment of the Jesuit Order, the liberation of America, the conquest of Prussia by Napoleon, etc. When the fast narrative pace employed here is slowed down, the narrator, at the same time, approaches the original scene geographically. The bombardment of Copenhagen is followed by the narrator's recording

of some miners who, in 1809, find the preserved body of a long-deceased youth.

The problem of space-treatment is solved in this narrative by its clear subordination to the handling of time. The leaps of space - Portugal, Prussia, America, etc. - are not employed for their own sake but for the presentation of the flux of time. The function of space in this middle part is, one could say, subordinated to the function of time. The micro-structure of Hebel's Unexpected Reunion in its time-treatment reminds one of the macro-structure of Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse. In both cases there is the emphasis on the slow-moving time and single event in contrast to the fast narrative pace and the many seemingly important events. Whereas Hebel, however, only implies this, Virginia Woolf makes conscious and elaborate use of this effect. J. P. Hebel's merit here is to have solved the problem of presenting a long stretch of narrated time in a minimum of narrating-time without resorting to the traditional phrases used for bridging time gaps.

Through the extraordinary event of a chemical reaction, an incident which is only briefly dealt with, death in this anecdotic narrative is not allowed to play its normal role of complete destruction. When the reader is confronted with the young miner's death, he experiences it as a shock which contrasts the parson's second announcement of the young couple's coming wedding. After the time leap the reader is told that the youth's body is as handsome and his features as clearly recognizable as if he had just died. This effect is enhanced by the appearance of the old bent woman approaching with the help of a crutch. Death here has reversed all normal relations. Whereas the living is withered beauty and powerless old age, beauty of youth is preserved in the dead. Death serves also as a device here to make the people who are surrounding the dead realize that the shrunken old woman had once been the beautiful bride of that handsome young man.

Unexpected Reunion has often been classified as an early example of the genre of the short story in German literature. The reason for the hesitation one feels when one applies the term anecdote to it apparently lies in the fact that one does not normally find such technical competence and relative complexity in the narrative genre of the anecdote. Unexpected Reunion has in common with the short story a controlled brevity which is the result of the author's rigorously honing away all that is unnecessary. The artist obviously concentrates on the exhibition of a single extraordinary event in the shortest possible form. Only when he records different historical events to bridge the time gap he has to neglect this aim for a short while. This is achieved in a few lines, however, and by means of an additive style showing the relative insignificance of the recorded events for the main point of the story. A poetic density is achieved by the symbolic use of the scarf which the young bride made and the old woman puts around the dead miner's neck. These aspects make it, perhaps, tempting for the reader to classify Unexpected Reunion as a short story. There are, on the other hand, a number of elements which do not appear to be characteristic of this genre.

Unexpected Reunion presents, although in a very concise manner, an 'extraordinary event.' This is an essential characteristic of the German 'Novelle' as well as of the anecdote.<sup>1</sup> The 'extraordinary event' in a typical 'Novelle' is embodied, however, in a complex structure of antecedents, developments, entanglement of plot, climactic phase, complete ending, etc., whereas in an anecdote the 'extraordinary event' is presented on the level of outer action merely and restricted to its bare structural elements as event. Despite the object-symbol of the scarf and the narrator's description of the 'extraordinary event's' effect on a group of people, the outer action

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion of the genre of the German 'Novelle' see E. K. Bennett, A History of the German Novelle, revised and continued by H. M. Waidsch (Cambridge: University Press, 1961).

does not lead any further to a symbolic and more significant level. The emotional stir the reader feels at the faithfulness of the woman and her final reward does not make the story essentially more poetic. It is, in fact, one of the differences between the anecdote and the short story that the latter tends more to poetic significance or multiple meaning.<sup>1</sup> To describe something as 'merely anecdotic' seems to be suggesting the same difference.

Another feature of Unexpected Reunion which seems to lead readers to connect it with the concept of the short story is its ending. Ruth Kilchenmann<sup>2</sup> lays particular emphasis on the old woman's last words, "'the earth will not keep a second time what it has returned once,'" and suggests that this at least implies the idea of an 'open ending.' However tempting this interpretation may be, it seems that one must not regard this final sentence in isolation. Two things in particular appear to be of some significance here. First the sentences immediately preceding the woman's statement are, as Ruth Kilchenmann admits, of importance. After the dead is put in the grave the old woman says: "'Sleep well now, another day or ten in your cool wedding bed, and do not get tired. I have only little to accomplish and shall come soon it will be day again.'" The woman explicitly states that she is waiting for the day, when they both will have overcome the night of death. In addition to this the author does not leave any doubt that the woman is deeply religious. This fact should be taken into consideration as a second point. The main characteristic of that woman is her unflinching faith. As firmly as she kept herself unfulfilled for that young miner so does she believe in their final heavenly reunion. From this view-point

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<sup>1</sup>This does not, of course, apply to the short story of light fiction; cf. Part III, Chapter X.

<sup>2</sup>Ruth J. Kilchenmann, op. cit., p. 23.

the story's ending does not appear to imply any ambiguity and little of what one would call an 'open ending.'

Another characteristic of Unexpected Reunion which should perhaps be mentioned here is its narrated time. The period embraced by the story practically covers a life-time. This seems to be neither a typical feature of the short story nor of the genre of the anecdote or of a 'Novelle.' Were the span of time not presented in such an amazingly controlled and concise structure, it would be regarded as a characteristic of the looser structure of a 'tale.'

Finally one could perhaps mention that it is at least rather seldom that a short story writer does not give his characters names. The reader does not come to know the main character in Unexpected Reunion other than as "young pretty bride" or "the miner's fiancée." This feature tends more towards the adequate method of characterization in an anecdotic narrative. Its attempted conciseness tends to prevent that minimum of individualization which the short-story writer usually employs.

Although too elaborate and slightly too complex to be classified as a typical anecdote it seems that Unexpected Reunion is even further away from any type embraced by the term 'short story.' This difficulty of associating it with one clear genre does not, as has been repeatedly stressed, detract from its literary value. It is, perhaps, one of the reasons for its high artistic rank. As for the question of its generic affiliation Unexpected Reunion must be regarded as a piece of very short prose fiction with strong anecdotic features.

b. Nikolai Gogol: The Overcoat

The Overcoat<sup>1</sup> is generally regarded as Nikolai Gogol's masterpiece. Perhaps it is the outstanding quality of its tone of compassionate love for the wretched Akakii Akakiievich that makes the reader judge it so favourably. The story centres on the small official's miserable life and death. An omniscient third-person narrator provides the reader with details of Akakii Akakiievich's inner and outer existence leaving him with a deep sense of pity for the story's protagonist and, at the same time, for all men in a similar predicament.

In a simple chronological sequence the reader is given a description of Akakii Akakiievich's everyday life, his habits, the complication through the arrival of the Petersburg frost, Akakii's efforts to save money and his anticipation of being the owner of a new overcoat, the short period of happiness, the theft of the overcoat, Akakii Akakiievich's futile attempts to find help, his disease and death, the reactions of his colleagues in his office, and a "fantastic ending" with Akakii Akakiievich appearing to a number of people as a ghost.

Quite obviously The Overcoat has a two-level structure. On the surface level the reader learns the events of Akakii Akakiievich's pitiable fate. On the second level many of the apparently merely factual data reveal themselves as symbolic and, in a multiple way, meaningful. The narrator spends considerable time and space delineating the character of the story's tragic hero. Akakii Akakiievich is laughed at, mocked at, treated with arrogance and contempt by his fellow clerks and assistants. Yet he bears all this with patience and fulfills his task of copying what he is told to copy. His work absorbs him to such a degree that he asks for permission to

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<sup>1</sup>(1842), in Harry Fenson and Hildreth Kritzer, Reading, Understanding, and Writing about Short Stories (New York: The Free Press, 1966), pp. 143-179.

go on copying simple things, when he is offered a more fastidious job by some "director." Akakii Akakiievich does not give any thought to his dress, and while others spend their evenings with some pastime or other he either transcribes a few pages which he had brought home or he goes to bed.

Akakii Akakiievich is characterized as a man who has lost all sense of his personality, who does not live himself but merely fulfills a function which a tyrannous bureaucracy and society have imposed on him. This is reflected in his neglect of his clothes and private interests. However, there is some kernel left in him without which a human being ceases to exist. Whenever this innermost remnant of personality is touched, Akakii defends it with the little power he has. On the realistic level he tries to defend himself against the jests of his colleagues, when he bursts out, "Leave me alone! Why do you pick on me?" There is only one "recent entrant" in the office who understands these "heart-piercing words" and realizes the "hidden ferocious coarseness" which lurks in people.

On a symbolic level one can interpret Akakii Akakiievich's need of a warm overcoat as an expression of his basic need for human warmth. Thus the frost of Petersburg becomes meaningful as the cold atmosphere and cruelty of Akakii's environment, the indifference and contempt which society shows towards the little man. His new overcoat, the necessity of which Akakii has gradually become aware, signifies a protecting cover, a symbol of his value as a human being that has to be respected to a certain modest degree. The theft of his coat can be understood analogously as a pointed expression of what society has been doing to Akakii Akakiievich since his childhood days, robbing him of the protection which a human being needs to be able to exist, of his self-respect. Without his overcoat Akakii cannot survive the frost, just as he cannot live without the knowledge of his own humble significance as a person.

By means of this device of a double-structure the author presents an individual in a concrete situation and, at the same time, gives his story universal validity.

Depriving Akakii Akakiievich of his overcoat means the annihilation of his spiritual and physical being. His death can also be interpreted as particularly pointed expression of his permanent spiritual death during his existence as a "Perpetual Titular Councilor." The clerk's death is also used by the author to condemn, in general, the society's, and, in particular, the "certain important person's" guilt in not having cared for an indigent poor man like Akakii Akakiievich. The clerk's death can also be seen as lying on an axis which separates the suppressed, helpless, laughed at, despised real Akakii Akakiievich from his apparition in which all his inhibited feelings free themselves and take revenge upon society and the "certain important person." A final interpretation of Akakii's death could be to see it as having the function of arousing in people who had despised and rejected the clerk stronger and stronger feelings of remorse which, finally, become objectified in the hallucinations of Akakii's ghost.

All these possible interpretations of the function of Akakii Akakiievich's death have one thing in common: they all conform to the story's structure-forming underlying theme. Gogol presents a human being who, deprived of an essential part of his life by his fellow citizens, is incapable of going on living. He arouses social pity, as Akakii's misfortune and death are due, to a large extent, to his subordinate social position. Gogol, above all, criticises severely Christian and human failure to help. According to Gogol's particular philosophy of 'position'<sup>1</sup> the story shows how society in general and a man of high rank in particular are unable to fulfill the ethical demands which their special 'position' imposes on them.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Heinz Wissemann, "Struktur und Ideengehalt von Gogol's 'Mantel'," Stil- und Formprobleme in der Literatur, Vorträge des VII. Kongresses der Internationalen Vereinigung für moderne Sprachen und Literaturen in Heidelberg, ed. Paul Böckmann (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1959), pp. 389-396.

As far as the question of literary form is concerned The Overcoat is only partly a true relation of our modern short story. It is far too complex to fulfill the demands of concentration on one significant situation. Although every detail in the story is arranged in a meaningful relation to the theft of the overcoat and Akakii Akakiievich's death, the narrator enjoys considerably describing the atmosphere of Akakii's office, his argument with his tailor, and, above all, the character of the clerk. The extension of the story beyond Akakii Akakiievich's death can also be regarded as a novelistic amplification that sets The Overcoat apart from the laws of brevity and dense compactness. This is, of course, no evaluative judgment about the story as a piece of art. Its unique quality is due to the total complexity which The Overcoat presents.

Despite certain novelistic amplifications and its general complexity there are a few thematic and structural features which prove that Gogol's story belongs more to the evolution of the short story than to any other literary development. Every single detail in the story has some reference to the existential problem of the individual's loss of his personality in a soulless and all-powerful bureaucratic machinery. In a more novel-like structure the different fields of description would most probably have gained much greater self-sufficiency. In The Overcoat all events are focused on the relatively 'round' character of Akakii Akakiievich. Even the "fantastic ending" is not added to the story without being closely related to the central problem. This is particularly true, if one understands the apparitions as expressing the real Akakii Akakiievich's unexpressed feelings and subconscious needs. The shift of emphasis from a mere 'story' or the extraordinary event of a 'Novelle' towards the presentation of the problem of a suppressed individual on the one hand, and the strict subjugation of all elements to the elaboration of this theme on the other are features which should remind the reader more of the genre of the short story than of any other literary form.

c.           Gustave Flaubert: A Simple Heart

The narrative pattern of Flaubert's A Simple Heart<sup>1</sup> resembles that employed in Tolstoi's The Death of Ivan Ilich<sup>2</sup> in that it spans the lifetime of the protagonist and ends in a final rewarding vision. But unlike Ivan Ilich's hollow life the life of the heroine in Flaubert's story is a fulfilled life of a very particular kind.

As in the life of a saint the high moments of a long chain of external incidents are events which illustrate the heroine's worthiness of her final reward. An omniscient author-narrator records Félicité's life of self-denial and hardship as a servant in the household of Madame Aubain. "For half a century" Félicité renounces her personal joys and serves her mistress faithfully for "four pounds a year." The pattern of the holy legend is evoked too by Félicité's nursing "cholera patients," protecting Polish refugees, and looking after the sick and dying Père Colmiche.

The blows which she has to suffer from her early childhood days to her old age are the death of her parents, the jilting by her lover, the deaths of Victor, her beloved nephew, and that of the delicate Virginie Aubain. The only great happiness which Félicité experiences is when she is given a present of a parrot called Loulou. It embodies to her the beautiful and exotic and reminds the simple soul of her nephew who had died somewhere far away. After Loulou has died Félicité has the bird stuffed and shuts it up in her room.

After Madame Aubain's death Félicité's firm

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<sup>1</sup>(1877), in Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1943), pp. 535-568.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. below, pp. 146-156.

grip on life loosens and, more and more, her active devotion to others during her life gives way to a mystic retreat into herself. This inner change is given outer expression by her becoming physically weaker and weaker till she has to lie down, fatally ill with pneumonia.

Her last hours coincide with a religious festival in which Loulou, her sole possession, can be found "hidden under roses" on an altar. When the procession reaches her courtyard, Félicité's death agony begins. Inhaling the vapour of incense "sensually" and "mystically" Félicité is granted a strange and beautiful vision of the Holy Ghost. In her last moment she perceives a "gigantic parrot hovering above her head" in an "opening in the heavens."

Certainly it does not quite embrace the story's full meaning to say that Flaubert "treats only incidents which have a direct bearing on the idea of the heroine's need to give affection."<sup>1</sup> The author's conscious use of death incidents in the story appears to stress at least as much the theme and image of the suffering heroine. It is the full complex character of the serving, loving, and suffering maid, heightened by the aspect of Félicité's innocent mysticism that is conveyed in the story.

It is this attempt at creating a certain totality of the heroine's personality which is partially responsible for the story's outer appearance. Unlike Tolstoi who distinguishes clearly between the former life of his hero and the final vision by the different devices of a contracted and expanded scale, Flaubert has employed a fairly equal manner of selection. It is not a shallow life that is contrasted with a final change and insight, but, as in a saint's legend, a life which appears

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks and Warren, op. cit., p. 598.

to be more and more worthy of the final revelation.

Flaubert's handling of scale sets A Simple Heart clearly apart from the modern short story. His method of alternating panoramic and scenic view, of rigorous summarizing and detailed presentation gives his work more the appearance of a long tale or nouvelle.

An instance which renders A Simple Heart relevant to the development of the short story, however, is the author's concentration on the final moment of revelation. Through this final epiphany the heroine and with her her whole former life are raised to a more meaningful level and given a religious significance which the reader would not have expected at the beginning. The strangely beautiful vision of the Holy Ghost at the end turns Félicité's life of a faithful servant to man into a life of serving God. As in the typical holy legend the moment of death is the highest and most pointed expression of the heroine's state of holiness.

d. Guy de Maupassant: La Mère Sauvage

The narrative structure of La Mère Sauvage<sup>1</sup> is clearly subdivided into three parts. The introductory part is given as the narrated present by a first-person narrator. The middle part, the actual story, is recorded as narrated past by a third-person narrator, Serval by name. In the last few lines the author switches back to the narrated present and has his first-person narrator conclude the story.

The two parts of the narrated present serve as a frame for the middle part, recording events which happened in the past. But not only does this device of framing an actual story within a story serve the purpose of giving the piece of art a clear and attractive shape, it also fulfills the task of providing some necessary thematic preparation and the conclusion.

As far as atmosphere is concerned the aesthetic effect of La Mère Sauvage is considerably enhanced by the contrast of elements of the idyllic and violent. The introductory part is used to create an atmosphere of the idyllic, when the first-person narrator recalls his "tender memories" of the countryside's "sensuous charm," its little brooks, the sun and the woods, and sums all this up in the exclamation "divine happiness!" This pleasant atmosphere is strongly contrasted with the narrator's sudden perception of a ruined cottage and his foreshadowing, rhetorical question, "what is sadder than a dead house, with its skeleton standing upright, bare and sinister?"

This contrast finds a distinct parallel in the middle part, where the former familiar and pleasant relation between the old woman and the four soldiers is suddenly interrupted by her atrocious deed.

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<sup>1</sup>(1889), in Ray B. West, Jr. and Robert Wooster Stallman (eds.), The Art of Modern Fiction (Alternate edition; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1949), pp. 56-61.

Apart from its function to prepare and enhance the effect of the actual story this first part of the frame also serves as a partial motivation of Mère Sauvage's behaviour. The first-person narrator mentions that he had known Mère Sauvage fifteen years ago and recalls how she had lost her husband, who was shot by the gendarmes as a poacher, and thus was left alone with her only son.

For the middle part the author has his first-person narrator introduce the owner of Virlogne, Serval, as a narrator who appears a reliable witness of the event to be presented and, thus, helps to heighten the verisimilitude of the story and the fictional illusion it creates. After the report that Mère Sauvage's son enlisted in 1870 the reader is given a description of the tough countrywomen in general and Mère Sauvage in particular. When the Prussians invade France, four young Germans are allocated to her. Analogously to the first part of the introduction a picture is given of the pleasantly familiar life the four young soldiers and the old woman live together. This idyllic atmosphere is suddenly destroyed when Mère Sauvage receives the news of her son's death. The simple woman imagines how her only boy had almost been cut in two by a Prussian cannon-ball. The author has the narrator skillfully contrast the mother's hidden grief with the loud gaiety of her guests. When she has to prepare a rabbit for them, the bloody body brings home to her with a shock her son's fate. Mère Sauvage asks the Germans to write their names and addresses on a piece of paper for her. At this stage the reader more and more clearly has a presentiment of an impending disaster. The skeleton of the burnt cottage at the beginning, Serval's remark that the woman is ripening a thought while the young men are devouring the rabbit, and the fact that there is only one link missing to make the chain of events symmetrical - Victor's death, the letter in Mère Sauvage's pocket, that other letter she makes the soldiers write - make the reader's presentiment become certainty. That is why he will understand the following passages as tragically ironical. When the woman carries

bundles of hay up into the loft where the soldiers use to sleep, they help her. The soldiers cannot but misunderstand the woman's explanation "that they would not be so cold." After the soldiers have retreated to sleep she lights the whole house. She goes outside and watches the "gigantic fiery furnace" and listens to the "heartrending calls of anguish and fear," satisfied. The contrast between the idyllic and the terrible is repeated once more in the one sentence which compares the countryside to a cloth of silver tinted in red. The contrast which had been suggested in the introductory part and elaborated in the middle part is intensified here by the picture of the peaceful landscape tinted with the colour of blood.

The second part of this story within a story deals with Mère Sauvage's relating of what she had done to a German officer and with her execution. After she has handed the addresses to the soldiers and asked them to write to their mothers exactly what had happened she is put against the still hot wall of her cottage and shot. It is significant to note here that Serval mentions that Mère Sauvage "was almost cut in two," when the bullets of twelve soldiers hit her. This and the fact that the dead woman still holds her letter covered with blood in her hand reminds the reader of the beginning of the middle part, where Victor Sauvage has to part from his mother.

With the phrase "my friend Serval added," the narrated present with the first-person narrator is reached again. Serval is recorded as explaining that his château had been destroyed by the Germans as a retaliatory measure. This statement answers the question which is implicit in the second sentence of the story, where the first-person narrator passes the remark that Serval had finally "rebuilt his château." Here, as in the last detailed statement given of Mère Sauvage, the author reveals his sense of symmetry and concern with fictional architectonics. As a conclusion the first-person narrator hints at his thoughts about the mothers of those four young

soldiers and about the "atrocious heroism" of Mère Sauvage. His last action, his picking up a black stone from the ruins, has the function of dismissing the reader thoughtfully rather than providing the story with a decisively unequivocal ending.

Death, in Naupassant's story, happens on the level of reality with little suggestion of a second symbolic or universal meaning. The death of Mère Sauvage's husband is presented as a bare fact. He had been shot as a criminal, a poacher. This first death incident functions as an additional motivation of Mère Sauvage's manly and tough appearance and prepares the reader for being able to appreciate her later loneliness. Mère Sauvage remembers her husband's death when she receives the news that her son has been killed. She feels the loss of her boy the more painfully, for she is not given back the boy's body as she was given back the body of her dead husband "with the bullet in the middle of his forehead!" Here, the 'bullet in the forehead' of the first death incident is strongly contrasted with the 'nearly cut in two by a shell' of the second, her son's death. After Mère Sauvage has read the terrible news it takes her some time to grasp its full and shattering meaning. Her simple imagination tries to reconstruct "the horrible thing." The author skillfully contrasts here in the image of the dying Victor Sauvage the old woman's idea of war, embodied in the cannon-ball, with her memory of a detail of a habit of Victor's, his "chewing the corner of his big moustache ... in moments of anger." More and more the death of her son takes possession of the old woman. When she is asked to kill a rabbit for the Prussian soldiers, she is unable to do it. The blood of the animal, the sight of the palpitating body, makes her see her son lying in his blood, cut in two. At the same time, the killers of the rabbit, her Germans, become first symbolically then really, the Prussian murderers of her son Victor. One could, perhaps, interpret the woman's refusal to eat symbolically, as her fasting before she has accomplished her sacrifice.

Once Mère Sauvage has identified the Prussians in her house with the Prussians who killed her son she proceeds to achieve her aim with the determination of an insane person. Her whole being is concentrated on the one thing, the killing of the German soldiers and the revenge of her son. When the cries cease to be heard in the fire, a deep satisfaction overcomes the woman. Her own death means nothing to her; she has gained her victory and revenged her son. It is obviously significant that the author has given the son and the mother symbolic names, Victor and Victoire Sauvage; it is a savage victory the old woman wins by her terrible deed. For the one son four young men have to die and for Victor's fate of being cut in two by a cannonball they have to suffer the more terrible death of being burnt alive.

When Mère Sauvage is shot by the Prussian firing squad she is reunited with her son not only through the mere fact of her death, but also through the shocking parallel of being almost "cut in two." How deliberately the author works with the device of contrast one realizes, if one compares the harsh violence of the death incidents, particularly the murder of young Germans and Mère Sauvage's own death, with the "divine happiness" of the 'locus amoenus' of the first half of the introduction.

It is a well-known fact that in the 19th century Guy de Maupassant, besides Anton Chekhov, has most effectively influenced the evolution of the short story. A judgment like this obviously implies that a majority of Maupassant's stories form a constructive link in the chain of development from the short story of Poe and Hawthorne to the typically modern short story of our day. One could test this judgment by investigating what Maupassant's stories, or a representative example such as Mère Sauvage, have in common with this modern type, and what innovation Maupassant's technique manifests compared to the older types. One could simply ask: How does Maupassant master the representation of life and, at the same time, the structural problems of brevity?

In the introduction to Pierre et Jean<sup>1</sup> Maupassant makes two statements which bear upon this question. He writes, "Le réaliste, s'il est un artiste, cherchera, non pas à nous montrer la photographie banale de la vie, mais à nous en donner la vision plus complète, plus saisissante, plus probante que la réalité même,"<sup>2</sup> and later, "un choix s'impose donc - ce qui est une première atteinte à la théorie de toute la vérité."<sup>3</sup>

Maupassant wishes to represent life in a denser manner than a photographic representation can offer and by means of artistically arbitrary selection. This process of densifying can be clearly observed in La Mère Sauvage. There is a strong and persistent concentration on the presentation of Mère Sauvage's deed and her own end. The arrangement of the death incidents forms a cogently logical line. The density of the story is heightened by the fact that the death of mother and son are interrelated by the motif of being "cut in two." The author correlates his frame with his story by the device of ironic contrast of an atmosphere of the idyllic and the horrifyingly violent. Maupassant neither restricts himself to the creation of a Gothic atmosphere like Poe, nor to the building up towards a final shock like Bierce, nor does he emphasize any moral qualities or imply moral judgment as did Hawthorne. The author of La Mère Sauvage aims at presenting a particular human truth, amorally, and most densely and artistically. In this and in the 'open ending' Maupassant's Mère Sauvage is closely related to the type of the modern short story.

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<sup>1</sup> Guy de Maupassant, Le Roman (introduction to Pierre et Jean), in Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: 1902), XXI; quoted in Ruth J. Kilchenmann, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Guy de Maupassant, op. cit., p. XIV.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

e. Leo N. Tolstoi: The Death of Ivan Ilich

In twelve sections the reader is provided with a summary of Ivan Ilich's life and a more detailed presentation of his illness and death.<sup>1</sup> The first section gives the situation of a few relatives and friends paying the dead a last visit. The dead face expresses, it seems to a more sensitive friend, Peter Ivanovich, a warning for the living. It is apparent that Ivan Ilich in his death has reached a valid spiritual position after undergoing a deep process of catharsis. The careful reader will start to appreciate the following chapters with the consciousness of this appearance of the dead Ivan Ilich. The device of anticipating Ivan Ilich's death and laying out in state in the first section divides the story into two parts. In relation to this first section the following chapters appear to be flash-backs from the narrated present.

The new narrative level of time is introduced with Ivan Ilich's early childhood and youth. In a summary his father is mentioned, his brothers and their education. We learn about Ivan Ilich's studies at a law college and are given direct glimpses of his character. Stress is being laid on the young man's sense of duty and the fact that he is attracted by persons of high office and rank. The rest of the second section sums up his career to the point where he becomes an examining magistrate in a small town. Although Ivan Ilich does not misuse the enormous power which this office carries with it, he nevertheless enjoys this new power considerably. He comes to know his future wife and finally marries her; firstly because this means a financial and social gain and secondly because it

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<sup>1</sup>(1886), in The Complete Works of Count Tolstóy, trans. and ed. by Leo Wiener (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1904), XVIII, pp. 3-80.

seems to meet the approval of his superiors. But his life which for him, we are told, has to be easy, pleasant, and always decent, is disturbed in the first year of marriage by unexpected matrimonial misunderstandings. As a result of this Ivan Ilich concentrates the more ambitiously on his professional duties and career. After a year of a rather tense marriage Ivan Ilich has become a public prosecutor. He feels more and more estranged from his wife and gains his pleasure mainly from his profession, discussions with his colleagues and playing Whist.

The third section records an important change in Ivan Ilich's life. He is offered a lucrative post in Petersburg and moves with his family to the capital. While he is furnishing the flat he falls from a chair hurting his side. This accident is mentioned a few times and ironically commented on by Ivan Ilich himself as an accident that could have had more serious consequences, had he not been such a strong and skillful gymnast. The reader, of course, has a presentiment of some future disaster and the more carefully observes and judges Ivan Ilich's actions, words, and feelings. Shortly before we are given a distinct hint of a more imminent disaster at the beginning of section four, Ivan Ilich is portrayed as feeling very happy. Real life apparently conforms to his expectations: it is easy, pleasant, and decent, and "everything was well."

Section four starts then with a soothing statement that "all were well," which is, however, questioned immediately afterwards by the remark that Ivan Ilich now and then has a strange taste in his mouth and an unpleasant feeling in his left side. From this point in the story Ivan Ilich begins to change as a person. His first step towards a relative clairvoyance is taken when he consults a famous physician. Comparing the man's handling of his profession with his own and his colleagues' behaviour in the court, the physician's artificial dignity reveals itself to him as a fraud. The only question which is important to Ivan Ilich, whether his disease

is dangerous or not, the physician is unable to answer. Ivan Ilich now starts to concentrate on himself in a way he never did before, first as far as his physical health is concerned, later including his psychic problems as well.

In irregular time leaps the following sections approach Ivan Ilich's end. They either begin with a short sentence summing up a certain lapse of time, "thus passed a month and two months" or "two more weeks passed" or continue the action of the preceding section without a gap between them. The structural function of these devices is to lead the outer action towards an ending which is enhanced by their thematic function of indicating Ivan Ilich's smaller and greater steps towards his final purification.

The more terrible his pains become and the more helplessly he has to realize his physical and psychic condition the more clearly he looks through people and their actions. More and more the people surrounding him reveal themselves to him as living a great and permanent lie. Only, when they all leave him he feels that the lie of normal life leaves him with them: the lie of the physician, of his wife, the social lie, the lie of surface life. The nights and their darkness become brighter to Ivan Ilich, because it is during the nights that the only person who never lies, Gerassim a young peasant servant, stays with him and tries to soothe his pains. It is significant to note that it is Gerassim, the only 'clean' person in Ivan Ilich's environment who willingly does the kind office of keeping Ivan Ilich physically clean: Ivan's ideals have been reversed. Instead of an easy life there is the terrible life of physical pain; and Ivan Ilich instead of enjoying a pleasant, decent, and independent life has to face unpleasant indecency and dependence upon others which his disease forces upon him.

While the lies of the others poison his last days Ivan Ilich, by the terrible pains he has to stand and by the experience that his approaching death is inevitable, begins to look at and question

his whole life. In the twelfth section, when Ivan Ilich dies, the reader has accompanied this man along his way of life which at first was pleasant, then painful, and finally unbearable. This process has a reverse side in which Ivan Ilich's life reveals itself, as it does to him in his final hours, first as a farce and as such worthless, later as a painful search for truth, and finally as the last hours of a dying yet fundamentally honest man who is at last able to realize himself.

At a first careless reading the title of this masterpiece may tell us merely the fact that a man called Ivan Ilich dies. But the death incident is not the all-important thing. It is used as a structural device to reveal certain possible attitudes towards death. Interpreted in this way the title could be read as "Ivan Ilich's and his environment's attitude towards his death or, more generally, towards death."

The story's subdivision into two parts, with the first section anticipating a situation after Ivan Ilich's death and the other eleven sections providing Ivan Ilich's 'life'-story, is complicated by an additional inner division of the story into two thematic parts. The first presents Ivan Ilich's pleasant life without any consciousness of his possible death and the second deals with the changing and changed Ivan Ilich.

Analogously we can divide the people of the story into two groups according to their attitudes towards death. The first group embraces Ivan Ilich before his illness and all the other characters mentioned, except for the young peasant servant Gerassim. The second group consists only of Gerassim and Ivan Ilich after he has been purified through the terrible physical pain and his experience and acceptance of the inevitability of his approaching death.

For the first group death is non-existent as a personal possibility. When Ivan Ilich's colleagues in Ivan Egorovich Shebek's cabinet read the news of Ivan Ilich's death, the first thing they can think

of is possible promotions which normally take place in a case like this; then they feel a considerable joy at the fact that it was he and not they themselves who died. Ivan Ilich's friends at the law court remember their obligations of etiquette and prepare for a visit of condolence.

Peter Ivanovich to whom Ivan Ilich's dead face seems to give a warning does not want to accept anything as unpleasant as this and reassures himself by glancing at Schwarz and his elegant appearance. His friend's smile and posture appear to suggest that he stands above things like disease and death. Looking again at the dead Peter Ivanovich is suddenly grasped by a certain fear that such terrible pains and such a horrifying death might happen to him as well and at any moment. But he consoles himself with the usual thought that it was somebody else's, Ivan Ilich's destiny, not his; and it must and cannot happen to him. He even asks the widow detailed questions about the process of the disease as if this particular lot was rooted in Ivan Ilich's nature not in human nature in general or in his own.

In this first section the widow, too, is characterized by her attitude towards the dead and death. Peter Ivanovich is able to reconstruct Ivan Ilich's physical pains only from the effect they had on Praskovya Fedorovna's nerves. And it is not even her own suffering that makes her approach Ivan Ilich's old friend, it is her greed. When Peter Ivanovich realizes that she is only interested in how much money she can demand from the state, he retreats. But he himself flees into the fresh air and to the surface life of Whist to shirk the responsibility which Ivan Ilich's death seems to demand. He flees from admitting that the consciousness of his own possible death should and would have an essential effect on his life.

During the process of Ivan Ilich's disease the reader is confronted (apart from the hero) with more or less famous physicians and Ivan's family.

The questions which Ivan Ilich has to answer when he consults a physician for the first time, the self-complacent look in the man's eyes and the routine of auscultating, all these things appear to him to be only tricks to cover up the danger of the situation, to blur the vision, and to hide the truth. The question whether Ivan Ilich's life is in danger does not exist for the physician. For him there is only the question, whether it is the appendix or a floating kidney. While Ivan Ilich is penetrating through the doctor's mask of routine he suddenly has a partial insight into himself: doesn't he himself behave exactly the same way when he acts as a judge? He suddenly sees himself in the role of an accused to whom the only question that matters is: is my life in danger?

Later Ivan Ilich understands more and more clearly that all the physicians have acquired a stereotype relationship between themselves and the suffering people whom they visit. Their medicine and advice, Ivan Ilich feels, are merely means to cover up the inevitable. The more Ivan Ilich has to suffer the more penetrating becomes his intellect and he is able to look through the great lie that surrounds the dying man. Finally he asks the physician to let him alone, as he is neither able to prevent him from dying nor even able to stop his suffering. Opium is the last possible medicine the physician can offer to alleviate Ivan's pains. It is, at the same time, the last means of preventing the patient from seeing his own position unveiled.

Ivan Ilich's wife and daughter are characterized by more or less the same attitude towards death. When Ivan's brother-in-law comes for a visit and tells Praskovya Fedorovna that her husband is a dead man, she does not want to believe it. Mother and daughter go on leading their social lives as though nothing serious was happening at home. Disease and approaching death are regarded by them as factors which unduly disturb their personal happiness. Not only are they unable to understand

Ivan's imminent death as potentially transferable onto their own lives, they do not even have enough tact to spare the dying man the offending exhibition of their perfumed and well-dressed appearances before they go out to a ball.

In the different yet fundamentally similar behaviour of all these people Ivan Ilich recognizes his former indifference towards the questions which necessarily result from an earnest consideration of death as a personal possibility. His whole former existence had been adjusted to the formula, how to live in a serene, pleasant, and decent manner. His profession, his games of Whist, his dinners, his marriage, his trying to improve his social position, all this had to conform to the simple surface criteria. His whole former life had been lived without the consciousness of his own future death. He had lived like the majority of people with the accepted assumption that death happens to people when they are old, it does not happen to oneself, at least not so early that one ought to worry. In the face of his own death Ivan Ilich suddenly doubts - and this doubt comes to him as a shock - whether his whole life had not been based on wrong assumptions.

This group of people which lives inauthentically, to use a modern term, is contrasted with a second small group consisting of Gerassim and the main character after his purification through pain. Gerassim is the first to tell Ivan Ilich that he has to die. In a simple and honest way Gerassim accepts death as "the will of God." He is the only person of Ivan Ilich's surroundings who does not pretend that his master's death is perhaps postponable. Gerassim's life, unlike that of most of the others, is not a lie. It is for this reason that the dying Ivan Ilich feels more and more attracted to him. The poisoning lie which he faces daily is absent at night when Ivan is alone with his servant. It is significant here that the author combines the apparent darkness of night with truth and clarity and the

seeming brightness of daytime with the darkness of fraud. This contrast reaches a final climax in the enlightened moment which Ivan Ilich is able to experience immediately before he dies.

Ivan Ilich's new attitude towards death is first suggested when he suddenly realizes that "it is not a matter of appendix of kidney but a matter of life and ... death." This first recognition of the main question of his disease is, however, blurred again and again by Ivan Ilich's attempts to make himself believe that his illness is only a transitory matter and his old form of life will sooner or later be restored. This falling back on the general lie accompanies and disturbs his process of purification until his death agony begins.

Although Ivan Ilich is able to see through the farce of the physicians' professional behaviour he nevertheless allows himself, for a considerable time, to be deluded by the glimpses of hope which their remarks arouse. Even when the priest has come to give Ivan Ilich the extreme unction the sick man again starts to think of his appendix and the possibility of recovery. He is still in doubt and he is still able to hate. The fact that his death agony lasts for three days may be interpreted as a sign of his not having gained ultimate honesty. The narrator explicitly states that Ivan Ilich's justification of his own life prevents him from entering the black hole of death.

At last, towards the end of the first day, Ivan Ilich suddenly admits, "yes, it was all the wrong thing." He believes that the truth can still be grasped. As an answer to this insight he feels someone kissing his hand. Ivan Ilich opens his eyes and perceives his son and wife. All his hatred against his wife and his own despair are gone. He has even the power to pity. The dying man now feels everything that had tortured him leave his body. — With his giving up the justification of his former life and his hatred the pain is gone and the fear

of death has been transformed into a quiet acceptance of the inevitable. The threat of death is gone and Ivan Ilich, in his last moments of consciousness perceives instead a light. In his last moment he realizes that what appears to his family as Ivan Ilich's death is in fact his overcoming death.

The position of the death incident in The Death of Ivan Ilich is of a manifold structural significance. The anticipation and placing at the beginning of the final situation together with Ivan Ilich's actual death at the end of the story, gives the narrative structure additional unity. Ivan's dead face at the beginning serves as a measure for the reader by means of which he is able to judge the different characters and their attitudes towards death throughout the story.

The first section can be interpreted as posing the question of how Ivan Ilich reaches this final peace which finds a detailed answer in the story that follows. It is Ivan Ilich's personal process from an inauthentic to an authentic existence. His authentic attitude towards his life and death is, however, compressed into his last moments of life. Besides the fact that death functions here as the actual physical death of one of the characters in the story, physical death takes on universal validity as death in the form of a personal possibility for everybody, a possibility that has to be accounted for and accepted as one of the permanent measures of our lives.

According to the generally accepted measure of length<sup>1</sup> The Death of Ivan Ilich would still be regarded as short story as it counts well under 30,000 words. In company with Ruth J. Kilchenmann one could argue, however, that besides a mere judgement of length certain structural features should be investigated by the critic before classifying a piece of art generically. The main reason

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Ruth J. Kilchenmann, op. cit., p. 10

for not regarding The Death of Ivan Ilich as a typical short story is that its narrative structure proceeds more like that of a novel. There is a series 'novelistic amplifications' which remind one more of a long form than of a short form: the reader is given a chronological sequence of data in Ivan Ilich's life, his childhood days, his education, his early career and marriage; we accompany Ivan Ilich to Petersburg and through his different stages of disease until he dies.

This is a life-story, even though greater emphasis is laid on Ivan Ilich's illness and death than on his former life. A great number of different people are not as clearly delineated as the hero, yet they are prominent enough to understand them as human beings. There is considerable care taken with the portrayal of milieu, of professional behaviour and society. And, most important of all, there is the long and detailed development of the main character's change of attitude from a lower to a higher spiritual position.

Despite all these elements, which have been given the term 'novelistic amplifications,' there is a rigorousness of artistic control felt throughout the story which renders it significant for the purpose of this thesis. There is a structural control in the more limited sense which, by the use of the death situation as a frame, gives the whole story intense unity. There is also structural control in the wider sense including details of theme, which makes man's attitude towards death the all-embracing and all-important theme and, thus, makes the earlier phase of Ivan Ilich's life appear mainly as a necessary foil to render the tremendous change in the man's outlook and whole being the more convincing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Norman Friedman, "What Makes a Short Story Short?," Modern Fiction Studies, IV (1958), pp. 115f.

It is this handling of the death incident as the pivot of the story and the touchstone of people's understanding and subsequent conduct of their lives which links The Death of Ivan Ilich, with the most modern thinking as represented in philosophy and art. Heidegger's death concept in many ways seems to be a systematized enlarging on the ideas implicit in Tolstoi's story.<sup>1</sup> On the literary side Hemingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro reveals more than merely accidental similarities with the older masterpiece by Tolstoi.<sup>2</sup>

f. Anton Chekhov: The Lament

Chekhov, in his short story The Lament<sup>3</sup>, presents an old cab-driver who tries desperately to find someone to whom he can tell the story of his son's death. The time section which the author has chosen out of Iona Potapov's life is deliberately restricted to the narrow span of one evening, the short period within which the old man's grief over the loss of his son becomes too much for him and, having not found anybody with whom he could communicate, he tells his sad story to his little horse.

Since his son's death nearly a week ago old Iona has been unable to find a single human being interested in his grief. He feels that he has "to speak about it properly to anyone." Four

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962), p. 298, footnote xii.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Part II, Chapter VII, 1; Chapter VIII, 3.

<sup>3</sup>(1886), in Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, Inc., 1943), pp. 242-247.

times Iona Potapov tries to establish a simple relationship with customers, but in vain.

Iona's first fare, an officer, passes a joke encouraging the old cab-driver to talk to him. "My son, barin, died this week," he says, and although the officer is not really interested in Iona's grief he reacts by asking the polite question, "What did he die of?" Having found someone to whom he can tell his sad story the cabby turns round to his customer. A harsh "'hurry up a bit!'," however, and the officer's closed eyes cut short Iona's attempt to release his grief.

After waiting a while in the cold Iona is glad to see three young men approaching him. They do not offer a fair price, but he does not mind, as long as there is someone to whom he can talk. However, instead of listening to the old man's words they insult him. When Iona murmurs that his son died this week, he is given the cold commonplace that "'we all must die!'" But even when they call him an "'old pest'" Iona prefers their company to being left alone.

A hall porter with whom the old cabby tries to start a conversation rejects him brutally, telling him to move on. Iona realizes with pain that "it is useless to turn to people for help." Without having even earned his fodder he returns to the stables.

A last attempt to commune with someone is made by Iona when he talks to a young cab-driver who sleepily has a drink from a bucket of water. But before Iona's words reach him he is fast asleep again.

Left absolutely alone with his grief the old cab-driver tries hard not to think of his dead boy. Not having found anyone who is interested in his painful experience the old man's feelings are

too much for him, and "he tells the little horse the whole story."

Chekhov has arranged his material very carefully to the effect that the first mentioning of the death of Iona Potapov's son appears to the reader to be hardly more than a sad incident, whereas at the end of the story its shattering meaning is deeply experienced. By various devices Iona's loneliness is underlined throughout the story.

At the beginning an idyllic atmosphere is created by the image of the snow-covered horse and driver. Under the picturesque cover, however, there is a man alone with his "limitless" grief. The crowds rushing past underscore rather than lessen the cab-driver's loneliness. The people who Iona wishes to listen to his tale of grief react with increasing coldness. The officer's lack of interest is followed by the students' insults and finally there is not even left that superficial contact; the porter simply wishes to get rid of the old man.

Iona's failure to share his grief with someone is ironically contrasted with the final situation in which the old man turns to a beast, his little horse. To the careful reader this does not come completely unmotivated. Chekhov prepares for the final situation by personifying Iona's silent companion. "It [the horse] is, no doubt, plunged into deep thought."

The Lament is not presented in the usual narrative past tense, but in the more lyrical present tense. Chekhov achieves great immediacy through this device and, at the same time, heightens the ironical contrast between an outer everyday world and the unbearable hidden grief of his protagonist. The narrated present also supports

the artist's achievement of dense and brief presentation. Chekhov's concentration on his single character, the single situation of an evening, and the central function of the death incident give The Lament its modern appearance. It is the author's restriction to the existential situation of a man unable to share his unbearable grief with somebody which allows us to call The Lament a typically modern short story.

### 3. The Birth of the Modern Short Story

The development of the typically modern short story within the evolution of the short story as a new art form is obviously due to a change in the Zeitgeist of the 19th century. This change is visible in a new attitude towards and understanding by man of his own position in this world and in revolutionary technical innovations in the field of fictional art. Although the technical innovations are more conspicuous, they certainly do not have any priority to the thematic 'innovations' as far as the development of the modern short story is concerned. Both are results as well as expressions of a new, more differentiated understanding of man.

The epoch-making application of the 'interior monologue' by the Russian W. M. Garshin in his Four Days (1877), the French E. Dujardin in Les Lauries sont coupées (1888), or the German V. E. Schnitzler in Leutnant Gustl (1901), as well as the technique of time and space-montage, the breaking up of the unity of the language into fragments of meaning and sound - Dada for example - the presentation of a sequence of associations instead of the traditional chain of events, all these and a number of other experimental features in fiction, together with the influence of the film, added to the evolution of the typically modern short story. Besides the technical problems which the shorter form had in common with the novel and novel-like forms the short story had to master the particular structural and thematic difficulties which were imposed on it by brevity.

As far as the thematic 'innovations' are concerned there is to be observed a new emphasis on the presentation of the individual, his insecurity, his freedom from traditional values, the permanent compulsion of choice, man's absolute responsibility towards himself, the Little Man in his

everyday environment, in short, on problems which, within the scope of philosophy, are tackled by existentialist thinkers.

These two main processes, that of mastering the problems which brevity poses and that of interpreting man's new spiritual position are assumed here to be the decisive factors in the evolution of the typically modern short story. Within the restriction of a small number of representative stories and the thematic limitation of death, a problem which catalyses most clearly the compulsion of individual choice, the two processes can, perhaps be made convincingly visible.

a. The Achievement of Brevity

By adopting Coleridge's idea of the piece of art as an organic unity<sup>1</sup> and by going one step further in maintaining that the greatest possible organic unity and intensity can be achieved in short pieces of literature Poe was the first to theorize explicitly on the short prose tale as an independent art form. But whereas Coleridge's aesthetic concept stresses the unity of beauty and truth in art, Poe abolishes truth in favour of 'beauty.'<sup>2</sup>

His constant concern with the problems which his struggle for intense unity of impression or effect create for him make many of his stories appear technically perfect. His emphasis on technical aspects sets him apart, too, from the German E. T. A. Hoffmann with whom he is often compared. Poe's concern with the technical aspects of short fiction leads him to a considerable mastery of the difficulties which arise from

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Una Pope-Hennessy, *Edgar Allan Poe 1809-1849. A Critical Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1934), p. 245. See also Coleridge's definition of beauty in *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1958), II, pp. 232-234.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Una Pope-Hennessy, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

brevity. His neglect of 'truth,' however, results in a serious limitation of his art.

Death, for instance, is very rarely used as a theme significant in itself or as illuminating man's position in this world. In most cases it is merely an aesthetic effect the author is after. Death is there to shock and terrify, but never forces a character to react to it morally or spiritually. Although The Masque of the Red Death is thematically significant beyond its boundaries of surface action and its brilliantly presented atmosphere of the grotesque, it does not exploit death as a means of measuring an individual's understanding of his own spiritual position. Poe's primal merit remains thus restricted, even in his best stories, to the achievement of creating dense and homogeneous atmosphere and brevity through rigorous artistic control of the materials employed.

Contrary to Poe's adaptation of Coleridge's ideas, Hawthorne seems to overemphasize that other element, truth, or, more precisely, the particular form of moral truth he was after. Hawthorne presents an abstraction of a moral problem or truth in a brief and artistically arranged narrative. In The Birthmark Georgiana's end is not employed in order to show Aylmer's attitude towards death, but as a pointed contrast to and ironical reversal of the alchemist's struggle for perfection.

Brevity appears here as a result of Hawthorne's deliberately honing away that which does not immediately serve his artistic presentation of that moral abstraction. The stress on theme is an important element in the evolution of the short story. Compared with the typically modern short story, however, Hawthorne's moral theme appears to be presented not objectively in terms of a concrete individual facing a problem which demands his choice, but subjectively or didactically in terms of allegory.

The Boarded Window by Ambrose Bierce reminds us of Poe's art in that every single structural element of the story functions to enhance the final

effect in the form of an unnerving shock which the hero and the reader experience at the end. As in Poe's stories brevity is a result of subduing every single detail to the achievement of a preconceived final shocking effect. Bierce's more concise language and the fact that he does not exploit the supernatural make The Boarded Window appear to be a step forward towards the modern short story. The exploitation of the death incident as a mere shock, however, sets it apart from the later examples in which death - if it is a major constituent of the story - is presented as an existential problem.

J. P. Hebel's Unexpected Reunion, although strongly anecdotic, should be regarded as a milestone in the development of the short story not only in the German sphere, but in general. Kafka who has influenced international literature as much as any German writer of significance refers to J. P. Hebel as to one of his classical models besides Poe, Hoffmann, Kleist, etc.<sup>1</sup> Unexpected Reunion is an example of an artist's attempt to approach the form of the short narrative from the even shorter form of the anecdote. Contrary to most of the writers of the short story who achieve brevity by honing away as much material as possible, J. P. Hebel has to fill in the bare structure of a few bare facts which are artistically arranged towards an extremely pointed ending with the more plastic ingredients of a 'story.'

One has to admit, however, that Unexpected Reunion, though a masterpiece in the genre of the anecdote, at the same time, overcomes the narrow boundaries of this extremely concise form. The extreme brevity of the anecdote is somewhat extended here by a relative complexity with which the extraordinary event of the 'reunion' is presented.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Hans Bender, "Ortsbestimmung der Kurzgeschichte," Akzente, III, (June, 1962), pp. 205-225.

Yet, as in the stories already discussed in this section, death, although a constituent part, is subordinated to an action aiming at a strong final effect and does not function by posing an existential problem which has to be taken into account by an individual.

b. Death as an Existential Problem  
in Longer Short Stories

The Overcoat, Bartleby, The Death of Ivan Ilich, and The Altar of the Dead appear to have as a common characteristic the fact that, although all their authors are obviously concerned with density, they lay greater emphasis on theme than on brevity. As far as the short story as a developing art form is concerned these stories do not in fact add to its form in a narrow sense.

It is their particular presentation of man and, within the narrower focus of this thesis, their presentation of man in the situation of death that is of special interest. The stories to be discussed here are obviously too long to be easily recognized as close relations of the modern short story. Their handling of theme, however, reveals this relationship most convincingly.

Gogol's Overcoat, in many respects, reminds the modern reader of the later Bartleby. It presents the existential problem of the individual's loss of his personality in a soulless, bureaucratic machinery. The coldness of the Petersburg frost finds an equivalent in the hectic business atmosphere of Wall Street. It has been said already that The Overcoat can be regarded as an important step within the development of the short story according to both its handling of theme and its structural strategy. But although the potentially novelistic or developmental features are all subjugated to the

theme of the suppressed "Little Man"<sup>1</sup> and the symbolic theme mentioned above, it is mainly the new emphasis on that existential problem that relates The Overcoat to the short story of our day.

The theme of Melville's Bartleby has been summed up before as the presentation of the first-person narrator's own spiritual death. Besides its significance as the interpretation of an individual the story has also universal validity in that it presents in the hollowness of modern civilization the precarious state of our time.

The author has deliberately sacrificed the formal aspect of brevity to the elaboration of his theme by means of traditional methods of a chronological sequence of events, reports, pieces of description and dialogue. The artistic control which Poe demands can be recognized, perhaps, in the fact that the final situation seems to embrace everything of significance that happened before. The reader and, at least partially, the lawyer experience Bartleby's death as an expression of the emptiness of the narrator's own life. The whole story can be interpreted as the symbolic presentation of the lawyer struggling with the spiritual part of his own being and trying to grasp the completeness of his own existence. Herein lies the actual combining link that relates Bartleby to the typically modern short story.

The Death of Ivan Ilich is apparently the story within the literature of the 19th century which offers most to the discussion of what structural role the death incident can play in a short piece of fiction. Its great intensity, density, unity, and, despite an enormous complexity, its relative brevity have been singled out as significant. For the question of the story's relation to the typically modern short story it seems, however, to be more important to see how Tolstoi presents

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<sup>1</sup>Frank O'Connor, The Lonely Voice. A Study of the Short Story, (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 15.

an individual's attitude towards his death.

The author sacrifices brevity partially to be able to elaborate this theme as convincingly as possible. The death situation itself, the pivot of the story, is expanded to show not only one momentary attitude in a given situation, but a development of a man's spiritual outlook on life and death towards a final and total recognition of truth.

In The Altar of the Dead, Henry James transplants Hawthorne's general moral interest into the psyche of individuals. Often the novelistic elaboration of his themes and his typically epic language prevent him from restricting himself to the structural laws of brevity. The Altar of the Dead with its esoteric circle of characters may well serve as an example.

Despite The Altar of the Dead's relative length and 'old-fashioned' language and despite the fact that there are subtle connections with Hawthorne's art, there are a number of elements which are responsible for its modernity. The individual's search for values within himself which he cannot find in the outside world announces the scepticism of the 'lost generation.' Life is no longer represented by means of a successive report presupposing the secure position of judgment the modern writer has been forced to abandon. The questionable character of human existence is stressed by an analytic method of testing, illuminating and partially revealing differentiated psychological structures. The story's modernity can be seen in its particular presentation of the theme of an individual's attempt at fulfilling his spiritual self. The fact that the hero reaches his aim, however, provides The Altar of the Dead with a note of hope which sets it apart from the majority of modern short stories which end rather with a tone of undecidedness and emptiness.

c. Brevity and the Existential Treatment of Death in Some Short Stories of the 19th Century

If brevity as a result of rigorous artistic control on the one hand and, on the other, the existential presentation of man's confrontation with a death situation appear to be the two main constituent elements of a short story, one can, perhaps, justly call it a modern short story.

Towards the end of the last century, as a result of an author's experiences in a war - Maupassant, Crane - or due to a general scepticism, pessimism, and disillusionment - Chekhov - and as a result of the technical development of brief pieces of fiction since Poe, there are stories to be found some of which are barely distinguishable from the fictional pieces of the period after 1945.<sup>1</sup>

Although Maupassant, in his Mère Sauvage, still emphasizes action very much, there is as a central theme the mother's confrontation with her son's death and her decision to sacrifice the lives of four soldiers and her own to revenge the loss. Her own life and death have become meaningless in the face of her beloved Victor's death.

Crane's The Upturned Face marks a distinct step from Mère Sauvage towards the modern short story. It should in fact be classified as one of the first and finest examples of this type. The limitation of time and space and dramatis personae, and the general density of its structure make the aesthetically satisfying brevity of The Upturned Face possible. Brevity and the treatment of the death situation as an existential limit-situation for the two main characters give the story its modern appearance. Two individuals are presented in their different attitudes towards the death of their comrade and

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. some stories discussed in Part II, Chapter VII, 1 and 2, for example.

the threat of death from enemy sharpshooters. Fear of death and the conflict of not wishing, yet having to accept death as a finality determines the tone of the story. A minimum of what could be said is said, a maximum expressed by implication. This and the abrupt beginning and ending adds to the modernity of Crane's The Upturned Face.

In Chekhov's Lament the death incident is employed to present an old father's grief and his attempt at overcoming his deep sorrow by communicating his son's death to other people and the indifferent, embarrassed or unsympathetic reaction of a series of people towards death and a man's grief. The old cabby's desperate attempt to find somebody who is willing to listen to his story fails. The only being prepared to listen is his horse, and to her he opens his heart. The attitudes of the officer, the students, and the young coachman to Jona's grief are revealed objectively by means of dialogue and a few short passages of report. The painful experience of death and the shirking of the responsibility with which death may burden one are contrastingly juxtaposed to one another in this brief and brilliant short story as existential problems. As in those three foregoing examples it is this combination of artistic brevity and the presentation of death as an existential problem that allows the critic to classify The Lament as one of the first and best typically modern short stories.

The splitting up of a series of representative 19th-century short stories into three groups, the first of which is characterized mainly by the achievement of artistic brevity, the second by the existential presentation of death in longer narrative structures, the last by an aesthetically satisfying combination of those formal and thematic aspects, does not imply that with the birth of this third possibility the other two groups are disappearing.

The two older forms still exist in addition

to the typically modern short story. There are examples, particularly of the second type, such as Conrad's Heart of Darkness or Thomas Mann's Death in Venice, that, far beyond controversy, are accepted as summits of great art. It seems, however, that certain forms within the evolution of the short story are more typical of a certain stage of development than others. The action-and-plot story appears to be more and more restricted to the wide realm of light fiction, while the longer 'existential' story seems to find an equivalent, towards the end of the last century, in the brief 'existential' story. This last type has been called the modern short story in the absence of a more adequate term. It is this particular type of short story which prevails in the 20th century and seems to be most apt to voice the feelings and thoughts of two war and post-war generations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>These statements disregard the development of light fiction.

## CHAPTER V

### REMARKS ON DEATH CONCEPTS IN EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY

To turn towards pure philosophy to find death concepts clearly expressed does not mean that philosophy has priority over art in the interpretation of human existence. Existentialism itself tends to produce representatives who are pure philosophers as well as artists. Kierkegaard tried to transcribe existence by means of concrete existential types, and Jean-Paul Sartre balances his systematic philosophy by an equally imposing artistic output. Camus, whom we usually regard as the philosopher of the absurd, rejects pure philosophic speculation as rational optimism, and attempts as an artist to grasp the absurd and the questions of existence and death.

It would certainly be inappropriate here to go into detail about traditional philosophic attitudes towards death, but generalization seems necessary. The main stream of traditional thinking can best be exemplified by the powerful classical Stoic concept of death and the Christian one expressed in the call of "memento mori" resounding through the expiring Middle Ages. The attitude in the face of death presented in the Phaedo is a classic example of the Stoic position. Socrates' concept of death seems briefly to be first, that death is to be understood as a separation of the soul from the body. Death is thus seen under the aspect of corruptio, the disintegration into its different parts of a compound whole. Secondly, this corruptio is understood within the context of the general organic flux of coming-to-be and passing-away.

Death in this respect is something man has in common with animals and plants. Thirdly, death is interpreted as the future final point, putting an end to the course of life. Thus the Stoic looks forward to death as something that is still pending. This naturally involves the question: What will happen after death?

Christian thinking for a long time bore the impress of the Stoic death concept. Boethius, who was himself a Stoic, and even St. Augustine show the strong influence of these ideas.<sup>1</sup> The value of death in Christian thinking is, of course, seen under the aspect of man's relation to God. As J. Huizinga points out the thought of death has never been stressed more than during the late Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastical and secular literature of that time appears to be dominated by three main motifs. The first asks, "where are all those who once filled the world with their splendour?"<sup>3</sup> "The second motif dwells on the frightful spectacle of human beauty gone to decay. The third is the death-dance: death dragging along men of all conditions and ages."<sup>4</sup>

Stoicism, medieval Christian thinking, and classical metaphysics accept the commonplace statement "omnis homo est mortalis" as a valid generalization. But existentialist philosophy now gives this traditional sentence a new and poignant emphasis. 19th and 20th-century existentialist thinkers stress that dictum's significance for the concrete individual human being and formulate it accordingly: I am mortal. To continue this thread of thought leads us to Heidegger's concept which could be characterized by an even more pointed formulation such as "I am mortal," implying that our unrelieved condition of being mortal is the

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. R. G. Olson, An Introduction to Existentialism (New York: Dover, 1962), p. 193.

<sup>2</sup>J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 134.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

significant thing. A human being exists only as being mortal. Being mortal is the very nature of our existence. Before going into Heidegger's special attitude towards death in greater detail the general basis common to all existential philosophers should briefly be described.

Sigmund Freud, though not strictly speaking an existential thinker, in his Thoughts for the Times on War and Death adumbrates this attitude:

We showed an unmistakable tendency to put death on one side, to eliminate it from life. We tried to hush it up ... But this attitude of ours toward death has a powerful effect on our lives. Life is impoverished, it loses in interest, when the highest stake in the game of living, life itself, may not be risked.<sup>1</sup>

Existentialists call this hushing-up of death a sign of cowardly flight from the problems of human existence. Shutting out death means robbing life of intensity.

Death is the one thing we can predict with absolute certainty. Not the exact date, but the fact that we will die. This knowledge of the inevitability of my personal death should, existentialism argues, make me regard death as a permanent present attribute of my life. To evade this is to lead a thoughtless and irresponsible life. The postulation of death's incorporation into the fabric of our existence is derived from the experience that "the actual present life of the individual receives its meaning and direction from its links with his past and future!"<sup>2</sup> Thus death, the final point of existence, is inextricably bound up with the individual's whole past, his existence.

Regarded under this aspect death is no longer an external event, an accident that happens to life; it becomes the "final challenge and supreme test of existence."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> quoted in R. G. Olson, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>K. F. Reinhardt, The Existentialist Revolt (New York: F. Ungar, 1960), p. 240.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

This new and, from the existentialist point of view, more responsible attitude implies a twofold result: first, the person who accepts death as being involved in his daily life finds himself set apart from the mass of his fellow men and in absolute isolation. The consciousness of death reveals to him the triviality of generally accepted values. He courageously accepts the knowledge that death robs him of the "whole condition of being-in-the-world."<sup>1</sup> Second, he should, according to existentialist philosophy, be proud of his isolation, because it makes him a true individual. The consciousness of death makes him free in the sense of absolute self-responsibility. The "one dies" or even "they die" has become "I shall die" or more precisely "I may die at any moment." There is nothing morbid about this consciousness of death. On the contrary, there is a vital moral claim implied. Under the aspect of the consciousness of death I have to arrange my existence in an absolutely responsible way.

With the exception of Jean-Paul Sartre practically all existentialist philosophers agree up to this point. And not only systematic philosophers but also artists reflect this general existentialist insight in their writings, as is shown by a wide range of literary products within Anglo-American and Continental literature. The short story seems to be particularly suited to convey this insight because in the course of its development it presents single concrete existential situations. This statement includes central Europe as well as European Russia and America. But whereas Europe shows a simultaneity of systematic existentialist philosophers and existentialist writers expressing their ideas through art, America, despite a great amount of fiction dealing with existential problems, is characterized by an amazing lack of existentialist

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<sup>1</sup>E. L. Allen, Existentialism from Within (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 36.

philosophers. Particular emphasis seems to be laid on Pragmatism, as is demonstrated by prominent philosophers such as John Dewey and William James. The latter is reported to have said that "no man is truly educated unless he toyed with the idea of suicide."<sup>1</sup> This experience, however, did not lead him to a more detailed philosophic argument about death.

One 20th-century American philosopher, Sidney Hook, may be mentioned here as representative of a group of thinkers who regard the philosophic preoccupation with death as a deplorable fashion among "some European existential philosophers."<sup>2</sup> Hook undertakes to criticize Sartre's and Heidegger's thorough achievements in a rather superficial way, when he says:

All this it seems to me expresses little more than a fear of death and a craving for immortality. It is a commonplace observation, however, that most human beings who desire immortality desire not unending life but unending youth or other desirable qualities which life makes possible.<sup>3</sup>

Such arguing is not on a very high philosophic level and does not do justice to existentialism.

Before approaching single existentialist attitudes differing in one or the other point from one another, it should be emphasized once more that these particular abstract conclusions will not be regarded as the basic philosophic material which artists adopt and employ in their writings. Both philosophers and writers may be independently original. But in a morphological study one has to look for certain 'pure' models to make a typology possible. In literature none of these abstract findings will appear in a pure form. We will always have to deal with mixed phenomena. But in all

<sup>1</sup> quoted in R. G. Olson, op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> quoted in P. Kurtz, American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 524.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

these mixed forms one can recognize splinters and traits of abstract thinking that in philosophy are organized into a system. Whether the concrete, artistically-created situation or the abstract philosophic system provides a more reliable interpretation of human existence is impossible to decide. Certainly both art and philosophy are valid ways of expressing human nature.

1. Sören Kierkegaard and Léon Schestov

Kierkegaard whom we know as the father of existentialism has not written extensively about death. In his Postscript<sup>1</sup> we find a short section entitled "For example, what it means to die."<sup>2</sup> It starts with the simple statement that the writer knows about death "just about what people in general know."<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard then enlarges upon different concrete possibilities of meeting one's death and concludes: "in spite of this almost exceptional knowledge or dexterity of knowledge, I cannot by any means regard death as something I have understood."<sup>4</sup> This not-having-understood the essence of death is the starting point of a series of arguments which imply the main attitude of the later existentialists towards the problems of existence: the great uncertainty of death, i.e. its certainty as a fact and our uncertainty as to when it will happen, death's inextricable involvement in our projects, and finally the impossibility of

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<sup>1</sup>Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Scraps. A Mimic-Pathetic-Dialectic Composition, An Existential Contribution. By Johannes Climacus. Published by S.Kierkegaard. Feb. 27, 1846. Quoted in W. Lowrie, Kierkegaard (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 295-346.

<sup>2</sup>W. Lowrie, op. cit., p. 341.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., p. 342.

grasping death as a general fact. Although Kierkegaard does not use the complex terminology of 20th century existentialism, we realize the close relationship.

It seems to me that it would be better to reflect about death, lest existence should hold me in derision if I became so learned as to forget to understand what one time shall happen to me and happen to every man. One time - but what am I saying; suppose death were to be so sly as to come to-morrow! Already this uncertainty, if it is to be understood and held fast by an exister, and just because it is an uncertainty, must be involved in everything that is thought ... I must make it clear to myself whether I am beginning something which is worth while beginning in case I die to-morrow - already this fact of uncertainty gives birth to unbelievable difficulties, which even the religious orator is unaware of when he intends to think the uncertainty of death and does not think it in and along with what he says about uncertainty, when with deep emotion he speaks movingly the uncertainty of death and ends by exhorting his hearers to make a resolution for the whole life, and so ends by forgetting essentially death's uncertainty, for if he were consistent, his enthusiastic resolution for the whole life must be made dialectical in relation to death's uncertainty. To think this uncertainty once for all, or once a year, on New Year's morning at the midnight service, is naturally mere nonsense and is not to think it at all ... If death is always uncertain and I am mortal, this means that this uncertainty cannot possibly be understood merely in general.<sup>1</sup>

Since these ideas were formulated, existentialism has split up into different groups of which the two main branches, Atheist and Christian, are the ones now most clearly distinguished. One of the criteria that enable us to decide to which one of the groups a particular thinker belongs is the question of transcendence.<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Marcel and Albert Camus may be regarded as the two extreme poles of these opposing attitudes. From Kierkegaard to Marcel all Christian existential philosophers, so agnostics and atheists argue, committed and are still committing a sacrificium intellectus. The absurdities

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 342f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., however, Karl Jaspers's special position.

of our existence and the most absurd phenomenon, death, leads Kierkegaard and his disciples to God. Camus calls this leap into religion the philosophic suicide.

Very similar in principle is Léon Schestov's concept of human existence and death. He is a great authority on Kierkegaard's philosophy<sup>1</sup> and lays particular stress on Kierkegaard's "credo quia absurdum."<sup>2</sup> Death, like the rest of the absurd phenomena which man has to face, is interpreted by Schestov as a limit to human reason and, at the same time, a threshold to belief.

## 2. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

Although Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be called merely aphoristic it yet evades the term systematic. There are no particular clearly marked sections in his work where Nietzsche's death concept is dealt with as a specific part of his philosophy. For simplicity's sake this chapter roughly follows Jaspers's analysis of Nietzsche's attitude towards death.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding existence as a life without transcendence, Nietzsche has to reject the traditional philosophic and religious attitudes which show signs of fear of what may happen after death. For him death is final and we have nothing to do with what comes afterwards.<sup>4</sup>

We can distinguish between two types of death in Nietzsche's thinking. The first type is the "natural death,"<sup>5</sup> the inevitable pending final

<sup>1</sup>Cf. his Kierkegaard et la Philosophie existentielle (Paris: 1936); quoted in Albert Camus, Der Mythos von Sisyphos, introduction by L. Richter (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1961), p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>Léon Schestov, op. cit., pp. 152f.

<sup>3</sup>K. Jaspers, Nietzsche, Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1950), pp. 323ff.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

event in our life. The second form is suicide, a death that is dependent upon our own free will.

"Natural death" has lost all its horror for Nietzsche. He deeply despises any form of fear of death. Fear of death is due either to a generally human fear which does not wish to accept the fact that we cannot go on living for ever, or it is the result of that "European disease,"<sup>1</sup> the expectation of the punishment of infinite hell. Fear of death is to Nietzsche the sign of a dependent and weak form of existence. This extreme negation of death's significance for life sets Nietzsche's death concept distinctly apart from those of any other of the existentialist philosophers. To him even a complete ignoring of death is a positive attitude:

It makes me happy to see that people do not at wish to think of death! I should like to undertake something to make the contemplation of life appear to them worth even a hundred times more.<sup>2</sup>

It is only when we come to the question of suicide, however, that we realize how utterly Nietzsche despises that "natural death." He preaches that the "natural death," a cowardly death, should be replaced by a voluntary dying, which he calls a "reasonable death" and continues that "one has to turn the stupid physiological fact into a moral necessity."<sup>3</sup>

This over-emphasis of human greatness in the act of suicide has to be seen in the full context of Nietzsche's idea of a proper existence. Life has to be something more-than-living, it has to be a completely self-responsible, absolutely independent existence. The limitations of human conventions as well as those thrown upon us by nature, such as illness and death, have to be mastered by the properly existing. Nietzsche wishes to overcome the "natural

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

death" by a free death, the result of a final independent decision.

Nietzsche's death concept can be understood as a necessary and logical consequence of his philosophy which is a philosophy without transcendence. Making life absolute means depriving death of depth and surrendering it to total indifference.

### 3. Karl Jaspers

One cannot call Jaspers a complete agnostic nor a proper Christian. His position within 20th century existentialism is a little vague and has met already with severe criticism. Jaspers's postulation of some kind of transcendence is regarded as mystic thinking by Camus.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the question of transcendence Jaspers develops his ideas of human existence similarly to Heidegger. We find the same contrast between inauthentic existence (being-there) and authentic existence (being-oneself). What gives Jaspers's thinking its characteristic quality is, besides other things, his emphasis on limit-situations. Life is burdened by the frightening insecurity aroused by Grenzsituationen such as illness, conflict, guilt, strife, suffering, and death.

Our empirical existence - existence as an objective fact in the world of being-there - always tries to escape the challenge of these situations, in particular the final limit-situation of death. But death, in Jaspers's philosophy, is a threat only to empirical existence, to the inauthentic state of being-there, and not to a transcendent

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Camus, op. cit., p. 26.

existence. Limit-situations and death in particular are the great challenges to our being-there. They are the frontiers where existence glimpses "being-in-itself."<sup>1</sup> Unless death becomes constitutive of my life "I am not living at the level of being-one-self."<sup>2</sup>

Jaspers calls the limit-situation of death our final existential test. Confronted with that test we are called upon to make decisions, decisions that are completely our own. We either take the existential risk and accept death in its entirety and, by this, gain a "glorious but also a frightening freedom"<sup>3</sup> or we fall back onto the level of the being-there and our life ends without having become an authentic existence restricted by responsible decisions made in limit-situations.

#### 4. Nicola Abbagnano

Nicola Abbagnano, in his Introduzione all'esistenzialismo<sup>4</sup>, understands death and time as included in Dasein (being-there). Through time and death Dasein is what it is. He demands that we have to accept both by trying to realize their essential meaning. Abbagnano's death concept can be characterized by the two peculiar phrases "death as

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<sup>1</sup>H. J. Blackham, Six Existentialist Thinkers (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>E. Breisach, Introduction to Modern Existentialism (New York: Gove Press, Inc., 1962), p.121.

<sup>4</sup>Quotations from a German edition, Philosophie des menschlichen Konflikts, Eine Einführung in den Existentialismus (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957).

a limiting possibility" and "faithfulness to death."<sup>1</sup> Like Heidegger, Nicola Abbagnano postulates that our existence should be essentially destined by the consciousness of death. He too interprets death not as an external inevitable fact belonging to a necessary order in the world but as a permanent constituent linked with every single act of our lives. The meaning of death is understood as the meaning of our problematic existence. For Abbagnano there is always the possibility of extinction. But, as long as death is one of our possibilities our existence is guaranteed. We have to realize and accept this possibility in order to be able to grasp our limited freedom. To exist fully and properly means to accept the fact that every single one of my possibilities may be extinguished at any time by the limiting possibility of my death.

From this basic experience Abbagnano derives his second statement, "faithfulness to death." "Faithfulness to death" embodies the actual genuineness of existence confirming man in his particular entity, i.e. in his necessary relation to being and to the community of being-with-one-another. "This faithfulness is the only attitude worthy of man."<sup>2</sup>

##### 5. Martin Heidegger

Heidegger's interpretation of death differs from the death concept offered in the Phaedo<sup>3</sup> in every respect. Heidegger does not regard man as consisting of different parts which are disintegrated by death. Man is seen under the aspect of his

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<sup>1</sup>Nicola Abbagnano, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. above, pp. 17of.

apparent unity and death, therefore, cannot dis-integrate but embraces man as a total entity. To Heidegger death is the uttermost possibility of human existence comprising all other human possibilities. Contrary to the Phaedo Heidegger does not conceive death metaphysically but phenomenologically. As Being-towards-death man is not seen under the aspect of what he has in common with animals and plants, but under what belongs to him alone. It is not natural organic processes in which Heidegger is interested; it is on man's understanding of his own personal death that he concentrates. Heidegger does not regard death as a final event cutting through the thread of life; he deals with death as a permanent attribute of human existence, as an existential determinant of life. This emphasis on death as a permanently present formative element of existence gives Heidegger's thinking a totally different direction from the traditional one. Heidegger thinks backwards, from death towards life. This reverse direction, having death, the uttermost possibility of existence, as a starting point, stresses death's relation with every single moment in the flux of life. Thus it lies outside Heidegger's scope to ask what may happen after death.

As many books of criticism and interpretations of Heidegger's theories - and this chapter is not at all an exception - tend to simplify and thereby falsify the original meaning, it is perhaps justifiable here to quote in translation a few passages from Sein und Zeit.

The full existential-ontological conception of death may now be defined as follows: death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility - non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein's end, in the Being of this entity towards its end.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 303.

Dasein may be understood as man's ability to project towards a future. Dasein is capable of comprehending itself as a self-extending being. Heidegger, step by step, penetrates into the meaning of his definition. Here, only a few explanatory remarks can be quoted. What is the gist of his first statement "death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility?"

Being towards this possibility discloses to Dasein its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, in which its very Being is the issue. Here it can become manifest to Dasein that in this distinctive possibility of its own self, it has been wrenched away from the 'they.' This means that in anticipation any Dasein can have wrenched itself away from the 'they' already. But when one understands that this is something which Dasein 'can' have done, this only reveals its factual lostness in the everydayness of the they-self.<sup>1</sup>

Resuming his second statement Heidegger continues:

The ownmost possibility is non-relational. Anticipation allows Dasein to understand that that potentiality-for-Being in which its ownmost Being is an issue, must be taken over by Dasein alone. Death does not just 'belong' to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death lays claim to it as an individual Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself.<sup>2</sup>

Heidegger then anticipates and enlarges upon the fifth statement.

The ownmost, non-relational possibility is not to be outstripped. Being towards this possibility enables Dasein to understand that giving itself up impends for it as the uttermost possibility of its existence. Anticipation, however, unlike inauthentic Being-towards-death, does not evade the fact that death is not to be outstripped; instead, anticipation frees itself for accepting this.<sup>3</sup>

Explanations of the certainty and the indefiniteness of death conclude this argument and lead up to the final statement about freedom towards death.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

The ownmost, non-relational possibility, which is not to be outstripped, is certain. ... We cannot compute the certainty of death by ascertaining how many cases of death we encounter. This certainty is by no means of the kind which maintains itself in the truth of the present-at-hand. ... Holding death for true (death is just one's own) shows another kind of certainty, and is more primordial than any certainty which relates to entities encountered within the world, or to formal objects; for it is certain of Being-in-the-world. As such, holding death for true does not demand just one definite kind of behaviour in Dasein, but demands Dasein itself in the full authenticity of its existence.<sup>1</sup>

and:

The ownmost possibility, which is non-relational, not to be outstripped, and certain, is indefinite as regards to its certainty. ... In anticipating ... the indefinite certainty of death, Dasein opens itself to a constant threat arising out of its own 'there.' In this very threat Being-towards-the-end must maintain itself.<sup>2</sup>

This threat arising out of Dasein's own "there" is the threat of inauthentic existing. Inauthentic and authentic existence are the two extreme poles within Heidegger's philosophic system. In an inauthentic existence death's ownmost character as a possibility gets veiled. "One knows about the certainty of death, and yet 'is' not authentically certain of one's own."<sup>3</sup> "Death," Heidegger goes on, "is deferred to 'some later time' and this is done by invoking the so-called 'general opinion.' Thus the 'they' covers up what is peculiar in death's certainty - that it is possible at any moment."<sup>4</sup>

The mere realization that somebody else dies is incapable of giving any special meaning to the present moment of my existence. I have to come to realize that every moment, every single act in my life is conditioned by the same all-dissolving death. "Holding death for true" in this way "does not demand just one definite kind of behaviour in

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 309f.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Dasein, but demands Dasein itself in the full authenticity of its existence."<sup>1</sup> Heidegger calls this an "existential projection of an authentic Being-towards-death."<sup>2</sup> This state of an authentic Being-towards-death renders a new kind of freedom to our existence, the freedom towards death. Heidegger at the end of the first part of his section "Dasein and Temporality" in Being and Time gives a concise summary of his characterization of authentic Being-towards-death:

Anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned freedom towards death - a freedom which has been released from the illusion of the 'they,' and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious.<sup>3</sup>

The anticipation of my death allows me to see the seemingly important event of the moment in proper proportion. It allows me to gain a certain distance from external influences. Thus anticipation of death permits the free projection of my being, free from any bondage, towards the future. From this newly acquired state, the freedom towards death, I can rearrange the details of my life with full self-responsibility in the light of that inevitable future event, my death.

## 6. Jean-Paul Sartre

Jean-Paul Sartre who, at one stage, was rather attracted by Heidegger's concept, protests in Being and Nothingness against the positive interpretation of death as man's greatest possibility.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 309f.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, trans. and introduced by H. E. Barnes (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1957).

Sartre understands death as an external event that cuts our life short and, far from making our personal projects possible, interrupts our projects and leaves us utterly dispossessed.

To make this point more lucid Sartre distinguishes between three different possible forms of death. First, there is the death chosen by a martyr or by someone who commits suicide. In neither case is death interesting in itself, as it is used as a means to reach a certain end, God's grace or escape from a hateful state or a life in despair. Death here is not a personal possibility as far as life goes, but only as far as an afterlife or the extinction of life is concerned.

The second type of death is that which can be foreseen by a man as about to happen to him within the near future, the death of a prisoner sentenced to capital punishment, the death of a man fatally ill or that of a man who knows that he soon will have to die of old age.

The third kind of death, finally, is that which comes suddenly and unexpectedly, such as in a fatal accident.

The second and third types of death, Sartre argues, cannot sui generis give any meaning to life. It is subjectivity alone that can give existence meaning.

We can no longer say that death confers a meaning on life from the outside; a meaning can come only from subjectivity. Since death does not appear on the foundation of our freedom, it can only remove all meaning from life.<sup>1</sup>

Death leaves our life meaningless, "because its problems receive no solution and because the very meaning of the problems remain undetermined."<sup>2</sup> Sartre regards waiting for death as "self-destructive."<sup>3</sup> The man condemned to death and the man who dies in an unexpected car accident are deprived of

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit., p. 539.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 539f.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 540.

the dimension of futurity and thus of all their possible future projects. Death not only prevents us from moulding our future life subjectively, it also leaves life's present and past in doubt. Through death our life becomes the prey of the Other. Death, Sartre continues, "is also the triumph of the point of the view of the Other over the point of view which I am toward myself."<sup>1</sup> Life is now a "dead" or "arrested life,"<sup>2</sup> a life that is either moulded by the Other or even fallen into complete oblivion. "The unique characteristic of a dead life is that it is a life of which the Other makes himself a guardian"<sup>3</sup> and "to be forgotten is to be made the object of an attitude of another, and of an implicit decision on the part of the Other."<sup>4</sup>

Contrasting life with death Jean-Paul Sartre states:

Life decides its own meaning because it is always in suspense; it possesses essentially a power of self-criticism and self-metamorphosis which causes it to define as 'not-yet' or, if you like, makes it be as the changing of what it is. The dead life does not thereby cease to change, and yet it is all done. This means that for it the chips are down and that it will henceforth undergo its changes without being in any way responsible for them.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to Heidegger's notion of death as one of our possibilities that may enrich our existence, Sartre's notion "represents a total dispossession."<sup>6</sup> Death does not make life more meaningful; it "alienates us wholly in our own life to the advantage of the Other."<sup>7</sup> Once dead we are "a prey for the living."<sup>8</sup> Thus if we try to understand the significance of our future death we must see our-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 541.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 541f.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 543.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

selves "as the future prey of others."<sup>1</sup>

Sartre concentrates very much on our understanding of death as an external event that interrupts the course of life. From this point of view death necessarily acquires a negative meaning for our existence. Heidegger, on the other hand, seems to stress more man's consciousness of death as a permanent attribute of his existence than the event itself. It is a positive moral claim, authenticity contrasted with inauthenticity, which he derives from death. Both attitudes, however contrary, appear to be significant not only as philosophical solutions but also, as will be shown later,<sup>2</sup> as basic human possibilities in fiction and particularly in the art of the short story.

#### 7. Albert Camus

As has been pointed out Camus regards himself more as an artist than as a philosopher. The majority of his works certainly justifies this view. There is, however, one book which should be called philosophic rather than artistic, Le Mythe de Sisyphe<sup>3</sup>. Camus rejects such a classification on the very first page, when he says that the following book will deal with a "feeling of the absurd" rather than a "philosophy of the absurd."<sup>4</sup> Significant here is the central question of his essay, whether life is worth living or not, the basic question of all philosophy, one could argue with Camus.

To Camus the whole world with all its seeming realities reveals itself as absolutely absurd

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, Part II, Chapter VIII.

<sup>3</sup> (1943)

<sup>4</sup> Albert Camus, op. cit., p. 8.

and meaningless. Man's existence is absurd because his contingency finds no external justification. His projects are absurd because they are directed towards an unattainable goal.<sup>1</sup> Shall we, he asks, remain in an absurd life and a meaningless world or leave it through suicide?

Camus finds that the thought of death through suicide inspires us with an instance of false hope. By committing suicide we hope to extinguish absurdity together with our life. But this decision would mean an utter surrendering to absurdity. Our absurd freedom allows us at least to find a new attitude towards the absurd facts of life and death through fully self-conscious and thus responsible decisions. Camus decides against suicide in favour of revolt.

Under this new aspect life does not need any significance in order to be lived. This leaves us free from any illusory conventions and prejudices. Quality in life is replaced now by quantity. Not to live best (vivre le mieux), but to live most (vivre le plus) is the aim.<sup>2</sup> Consequently Camus not only rejects suicide as an answer to the absurdity of our existence, but even postulates fighting a normal yet premature death.

The ideal which absurd man has to follow is exploitation of the present time and the sequence of moments perceived through a clear-sighted soul. Man should defeat death by disdain. The homo absurdus is no longer stung with remorse, as there are no longer guilty deeds but only responsible ones. One must be prepared, however, to take the consequences, even death, indifferently and without pathos.

Death puts an absurd end to our absurd life. There is nothing that comes after it. Transcendence, to Camus, is only one of our absurd illusions. We

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 629.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Camus, op. cit., p. 54.

have to live without that folding screen of eternity for it only hides absurdity.

Like one sentenced to death on the very morning of his execution, absurd man is free in an absurd way.<sup>1</sup> In this situation, in the face of certain death, he has gained new strength without any comfort and hope. He is indifferent to the future and to death, but at the same time resents his premature death as it cuts short his passion for quantitative living.

Death to Camus is the only reality.<sup>2</sup> It is the constant exception on which his world is based. A premature death is the only real obstacle that prevents us from living quantitatively and intensely (not qualitatively). Comparing absurd man with an actor, Camus stresses the irreparability of a premature death: "Nothing can compensate for all the faces and centuries which he would have passed through."<sup>3</sup> Thus death gains a particularly significant position within Camus's absurd world. Our confrontation with death is understood by him as the most concentrated form of our encounter with the absurd.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

PART II

DEATH IN THE MODERN SHORT STORY

## CHAPTER VI

### NICOLAI HARTMANN'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ART AND ITS VALUE FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SHORT STORY

#### 1. The Concept of Layers

Nicolai Hartmann, in his Ästhetik,<sup>1</sup> stresses as a significant peculiarity of aesthetic objects the fact that they present themselves as complex multi-layer structures. Hartmann distinguishes between a sensually real foremost layer and a varying number of others behind this surface layer in the different arts. Literature, he argues, offers a more complex structure of layers than for instance sculpture, painting, music, architecture, or decoration. Whereas the last discipline is little more than that sensually real front layer, literature reveals its significance in its middle and final layers.

The foremost layer in literature, Hartmann says, is the sensually visual layer of letters and words, the written language. He then distinguishes between four major middle layers, one which gives single gestures, fragments of movement, perceivable on an outer level, a second one which presents action, external conflicts and situations. Through these the observer is able to perceive, on a third layer, characters, moral peculiarities, inner conflicts and choices. On a fourth layer the single elements of the third are coordinated in a meaningful pattern of fate.

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<sup>1</sup>Nicolai Hartmann, Ästhetik (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1953).

These middle layers are followed, in most pieces of art, by the final layers of the revelation of an ideal individual personality and of the presentation of universal ideas.<sup>1</sup>

The first of the final layers giving the objectification of an ideal personality is often little more than a mere indication, whereas the second, providing the general ideas or abstraction of the content, is, at least in great art, the most important. It is justly called the final layer, as it is the one which is most remote from the more concrete foremost layers. But although it is the most abstract layer, it is, at the same time, the one which discloses most revealingly artistic failure or success. If a piece of fiction, to restrict the argument to our purpose, has too little of it, it appears to be flat, it tends to be a story of mere action or mere atmosphere. If the artist, on the other hand, overstresses his general ideas explicitly, the narrative becomes unpoetically dogmatic.<sup>2</sup>

Nicolai Hartmann lays some emphasis here on the paradox that the layer which is the most real, the layer of the actual written language, is of minor importance, whereas the final layer which only appears as a projection through all the other layers is the most significant one because it provides the piece of fiction with universal validity.

A very important fact here is the phenomenological insight that each layer of the middle and final section only appears through the foregoing one. In other words each layer becomes transparent to the sensitive reader and reveals to him the appearance of the following, more abstract, and, often, more meaningful layer.

To Hartmann a second surprising paradox is the fact that general ideas, religious beliefs and

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-108; 174-185.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

doubts, political ideas such as those of liberty or equality, metaphysical unrest, existential fears are presented more adequately by art and literature than by philosophy. Whereas philosophy has to eliminate in order to define objectively and thus meets with difficulties at the borderlines of the unspeakable, art, in presenting concrete individuals, implies, suggests, hints at and embraces the complexity of a general idea.

Hartmann appreciates as the greatest achievement of an artist his success in arranging his events, deeds, passions, characters, and fates in such away that the complexity of the general idea or ideas is objectified without destroying the concrete individuality of the world presented.

## 2. The Relevance of Nicolai Hartmann's Phenomenological Approach for the Modern Short Story

Nicolai Hartmann does not refer discriminatingly to particular literary genres and types. His argument is developed generally enough to allow the literary critic to fit the modern short story in as well. A few comments concerning the particular nature of the modern short story and Hartmann's phenomenological approach should, however, be made.

As the modern short story has a tendency to concentrate on singularity of action, situation, and personage, it is evident that this fact will appear in the middle layers as a constituent element. Here it is not a character as such, but one particularly marked trait or a few outstanding features of a character that will be revealed. There will be no apparent complex pattern of interrelated fates but a particular moment of the behaviour of an individual revealing a fragment of fate. Hartmann's fourth layer of the middle section on which

the reader can see in longer fiction an interwoven net of fates is, generally speaking, absent in the modern short story. Fate nevertheless appears in the short story as an implied 'enveloping fate'<sup>1</sup> reconstructable from the immediately provided splinter of fate. On this third middle layer the practised reader will discover instead of choices, decisions, and experiences, a tendency towards a restriction to a single choice, a single decision, a single experience. This general emphasis on singularity instead of the complexity of the presented reality has a distinct parallel in the appearance of the general ideas in the final layer.

The system of general ideas that may be found in long narrative works is replaced in the modern short story by the suggestion of perhaps only a single, yet valid, general idea. The reader may feel the restriction in complexity as a disadvantage of the short story form. On the other hand the successful modern short story may let its less complex general idea appear as more pointed and piercing and, thus, as equally revealing.

For an adequate appreciation of the final layers it is necessary to pay particular attention to the middle layers. This applies to the modern short story even more than to the long epic forms (classical epic poems or the modern novel for example), for here, as in the lyrical poem, the artist depends far more on the concentration of a homogeneous impression. As a result of the dense brevity of the artistically successful modern short story the 'literary scientist' has to analyse with exceptional care the presented fictional world as well as the techniques of representation as they appear in the middle layers.

The structural elements of action and the

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<sup>1</sup>The term 'enveloping fate' has been introduced as analogous to the term 'enveloping action' used by Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate in The House of Fiction, An Anthology of the Short Story with Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), pp. 451f.

media by which they are presented, time and space treatment, the handling of point-of-view which often appears as a multi-meaningful way of presenting a particular fictional reality, the tone, characters, and symbols, all strike the experienced reader as more purposefully correlated and more inextricably interwoven in the satisfactorily dense modern short story than in the looser structural patterns of longer forms.<sup>1</sup> The major elements of presented reality and their techniques will be discussed together in the following chapter. A series of modern short stories, thematically selected according to their use of the death situation, will serve as aesthetic objects for this discussion.

An attempt will be made to show in how far the functions of the different structural elements are determined by the death incident. The hypothesis is being put forward here that the artist's concentration on a single death incident is reflected in a concentration of time and space and, thus, on action and character. Such a concentration should be understood, however, as a tendency rather than a strict law.

Contrary to Nicolai Hartmann's stricter concept of a succession of a limited number of layers the following sections will employ the phenomenological approach as flexibly as possible to allow the individual piece of art a maximum of weight before general formalistic conclusions will be drawn. To be fair we must assume that Hartmann's individual interpretations were reached before and outside his work of pure aesthetics. Because he is dealing with art in general there is little room, except for a few marked examples, for a multitude of individual pieces of art in his book. The narrower focus of this thesis, however, allows and demands a closer examination and more detailed application of a few of Hartmann's phenomenological insights.

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<sup>1</sup>Exceptions are, of course, Joyce's later novels, especially Finnegans Wake, where the complexity of correlation reaches the boundaries of inextricability.

## CHAPTER VII

### DEATH AND THE MIDDLE LAYERS IN THE MODERN SHORT STORY

#### 1. Death and the Function of Time

##### a. Case Studies

An excellent modern short story whose title suggests a long rather than a brief piece of fiction is Katherine Mansfield's Life of Ma Parker.<sup>1</sup> Although the story cannot possibly provide the complexity which the reader would expect of a life-story, the title, on closer examination appears to be adequately chosen. That the essence of Ma Parker's tragic life is brought home to the reader effectively despite the story's outer limitations is mainly due to the delicately complicated time-handling the author employs.

The narrated present is restricted to the short period of a Tuesday morning after the burial of Ma Parker's grandson Lennie. Within the short span of time very little outer action is provided. The significant action happens within the stream of consciousness of the old woman. In her mind there appear past events presented in the form of report or dialogue and her present feelings and thoughts are presented in the form of report, interior monologue ("Why must it all happen to me?"), or 'style indirect libre' ("She shouldn't go home. ... Ethel was there. ... Wasn't there anywhere in

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<sup>1</sup>(1922), in Katherine Mansfield, The Garden Party and Other Stories (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1966), pp. 143-153.

the world where she could have her cry out - at last.").

Four times the narrated present is interrupted by flash-backs going back to different time levels in the past. The first, in scenic presentation, recalls a happy incident which happened between Ma Parker and her gay and healthy little grandson. The second flash-back leaps back to the time when Ma Parker was sixteen years old starting her burdened life of helping other people. In a chronological sequence her marriage, her husband's death, the deaths of seven out of thirteen children are recalled. When all the others had grown up and left her, only her youngest daughter whose good-for-nothing husband has died, comes back to her with a little fragile boy who now has died as well. The third flash-back gives Ma Parker's memory of a rather weak and sick yet still gay Lennie, while the last leaps back onto a last level of time and presents a vivid impression of the old woman's reflections on the fatally ill boy. Ending with the thought, "but at last ...," this last flash-back flows into Ma Parker's remark, "' We buried 'im yesterday,'" at the beginning of the story.

The rest of the action happens on the level of the narrated present and gives the full impact of the old woman's despair.

The critic has to ask himself, of course, where the aesthetic effect and artistic value of this particular arrangement of narrative phases and time levels lies. Through the author's interspersing into the narrated present of splinters of different time levels from the past the chronology is broken in favour of a strong emphasis on theme. With the help of a complicated technique of time-handling Ma Parker's whole tragic past, the essence of her life, is incorporated in the short span of time of a Tuesday morning. It is not a complex and detailed life that the reader is offered. By means of a careful selection Katherine Mansfield

arranges different bits of Ma Parker's past and present life in such a way that they form a homogeneous and meaningful unity. This is achieved by relating all narrative phases to the one death incident which Ma Parker is made to mention at the beginning of the story. By this the effect of Lennie's death is considerably enhanced and Ma Parker's final despair rendered movingly and convincingly.

Understood in this way the flash-backs in Life of Ma Parker are never digressions or deviations from a narrative course taken at the beginning. Through their appearance within the stream of consciousness and their close thematic interrelation with the main death incident they reveal themselves in fact as enriched present. The flash-backs are not felt to retard the action or distract from the actual narrative process, as is often the case in long fiction, but rather to intensify the narrative present by keeping up and even heightening the tension which exists between Ma Parker's mentioning her grandson's burial and her final state of utter despair.

Outer action is replaced here by a dominant inner action. The main action in Katherine Mansfield's story is Ma Parker's becoming aware of the meaning of her past in the objective span of time of the narrated present. Concentrating on a major death incident the author puts in the memory of her heroine a series of strokes of fate. They make the old woman understand her life as a chain of misfortunes which culminates in her grandson's death. The flash-backs are arranged in such a way that Lennie's anticipated death gains enormous thematic weight. It appears as the impulse for and acme of Ma Parker's viewing of her own tragic life.

Past, in Life of Ma Parker, loses its typical character of having happened, it gains supratemporal significance. This is convincingly shown in the montage of different time levels of the past in the

one level of the narrated present giving Ma Parker's stream of consciousness. Different time levels are condensed in the one experience of her grandson's death. Different moments of her individual fate find their compact expression in the one final stroke. In the experience of Lennie's death past and present flow together and appear to the old woman as a shattering fate.

In concentrating on one main death incident the author, thematically and formally, achieves a modern short story whose literary rank is beyond question.<sup>1</sup> The loneliness and despair of Ma Parker is movingly evoked by her experiencing the shattering weight of her hard past and life in the death of her beloved grandchild. The dense brevity of Life of Ma Parker is due, to a considerable degree, to the author's concentration on a short span of time, the morning following Lennie's burial, and to the subordination of the flash-back elements to the experience of the one significant death incident.

Although differing very much in theme from Katherine Mansfield's story, Wolfgang Borchert's Mein bleicher Bruder<sup>2</sup> (My Pale Brother) is related to Life of Ma Parker through its use of a similar section of time, the fact that a significant death incident stands at the beginning, and that it deals primarily with the reaction of one main character to that death.

By means of a complicated and veiled treatment of time Borchert, in this war story, provides a minimum of outer action to create the illusion of reality and a relatively complex picture of the main character's inner world to reveal the significance of this limit-situation convincingly. In five narrative phases the reader is given the image

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that her story may have been directly influenced by Chekhov's Lament.

<sup>2</sup> (1947), in Wolfgang Borchert, Das Gesamtwerk (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958), pp. 188-190.

of a flawless Sunday morning with a dead soldier lying contorted in the snow and a living one standing before him, the interior monologue, the "silent speech" of the standing lieutenant, a short report of the lieutenant's coming back into the dugout, a second phase of the main character's stream of thought, and a final report of the lieutenant de-lousing himself. Three of these narrative phases are given in the narrated present, the introductory image, the short report connecting the two stream-of-consciousness phases, and the final report of the officer scratching himself and its concluding with the symbolic image of a dead louse leaving a stain of blood on the lieutenant's forehead.

The span of time presented on the level of the narrated present is not exactly determinable. One can conclude, however, from the given outer action that it covers only a short part of one morning. Within this narrow frame of time the reader learns the essential outer and inner causes of Heller's death and, at the same time, receives a surprisingly plastic idea of an essential part of the lieutenant's character. In addition to this the author succeeds in overlaying his fictional reality with a subtle symbolic cover which heightens considerably the story's universality.

"Never had anything been as white as this snow," is the introduction to the apparently flawless nature of that Sunday morning. The static quality of this first statement indicates the consistent tone of the first narrative phase. It stands in strong contrast with the fact that the flawless white cover is described as being interrupted by a bundle of rags, a dead soldier, and anticipates as far as narrative pace is concerned the slow-moving time in the interior monologue of the second phase. In front of the dead soldier, the "torn-off marionette," there stands another,

one that still "functions."

The transition from the first static image in the narrated present to the second phase is technically accomplished by the announcement that the standing figure is going to address the dead with the "following terribly silent speech: Yes, yes, yes ... now your high spirits are gone, my dear." With this the reader is given, in the second narrative phase, the beginning of the lieutenant's stream of consciousness, "the terribly silent speech," filtering past, present, and future, and combining them under the theme of the 'no longer.' From the present situation of the dead soldier at his feet the lieutenant's thoughts go back recalling Corporal Heller's past and connecting it with the future: "You don't laugh any more ... If your girls knew how miserable you are looking now." The lieutenant compares the dead man's blood-stained uniform with Heller's former habit of being very particular with his outer appearance. Remembering his formerly polished shoes the lieutenant sarcastically comments in his interior monologue that the corporal cannot even walk any more. With "but that is alright" the lieutenant looks from the past into the future addressing the dead with the following bitter words: "You'll never again say to me 'My Pale Brother Drooping Lid.' The others will never again cheer you for it. The others will never laugh at me again ..."

Through this device of mixing past, present, and future the reader is provided with essential bits of knowledge about some of the dead soldier's habits, their effect on the lieutenant, and the latter's enjoying the terrible present situation.

From his near past the lieutenant's thoughts go back to his childhood days, when the "others" used to tease him because of his "drooping eyelid." Thus Heller's death means the extinction of everything that hurt his pride in the past and could have hurt him in the present and future.

The outstanding characteristic of the lieutenant's nature is hatred even in the face of death. His revealing interior monologue is closed with the cynical question, "Who is now 'My pale brother Drooping Lid,' you or me?" With this last direct address on the level of the narrated present the second narrative phase leads over to a short dynamic section of report and dialogue.

The lieutenant enters the dugout and the rest of the soldiers leave to fetch their dead comrade. The inexperienced reader may have difficulties on a first reading when the narrative phases change between the different time levels. The narrative flow is never interrupted, and the reader may suddenly find himself in the narrative past when he was quite sure to move on the level of the narrated present. The third phase, for instance, ends with "the lieutenant was sitting near the iron stove lousing himself. Just like yesterday. Yesterday he had also been lousing himself." In a smooth transition the fourth narrative phase follows with, "Somebody was supposed to contact the battalion ..." and the lieutenant recalls the details of "yesterday." Unlike the first phase which gives the lieutenant's stream of thought this fourth part is clearly restricted to the one level of the past (yesterday).

While the lieutenant was listening to the heavy fire in the dark, scared to go out there, Heller was singing. The lieutenant remembers how Heller had been teasing him, "I wouldn't go to the battalion. First I would ask for double rations. One can play xylophone on your ribs. It's a pity how you look." Then the officer had ordered Heller to go to the battalion and cool off his high spirits a bit. Heller had said, "Jawohl," and had not come back. The lieutenant's stream of consciousness is interrupted by the soldiers bringing back the dead. This is given in the narrated present as well as the lieutenant's final whisper, "He'll never again say 'My pale brother Drooping Lid.'"

Parallel to the beginning of the story there is a static image, a 'timeless narrative phase,' at the end of Borchert's My Pale Brother. After the lieutenant's attitude has been revealed through his own thoughts passing through different layers of time the whole story is symbolically heightened by the final image: a cracked louse leaves the sign of the brother murderer Cain on the officer's forehead. The introductory image of the flawless Sunday morning is ironically contrasted with this image of a stain of blood on a guilty man's brow. It lifts the story convincingly onto a level of great universal validity.

The treatment of time is rigorously concentrated on the death incident which had occurred before the story begins, and functions as connecting the facts of outer action with those of inner action to one structural and thematic unity. The complex interplay of different time levels allows the author to reveal with a stunning impact the significance of the main character as a modern Cain figure.

Another German modern short story which has as its main theme a man's attitude towards the death of another is Gerd Gaiser's Der Mensch, den ich erlegt hatte<sup>1</sup> (The Man Whom I Killed). A policeman participates in the hunt for three young criminals. One of them had shot down a colleague who was checking their identity papers. He corners two of the young men and wounds one of them fatally in a gun-fight. While the other policemen take two of the gang away, the sergeant-major stays behind with the wounded man and waits for the arrival of the ambulance.

The narrow span of time, the objectively presented period between the departure of the colleagues with their prisoners and the death of the wounded, provides the actual temporal frame of

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<sup>1</sup>(1956), in Gerd Gaiser, Revanche, Erzählungen (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1963), pp. 5-15.

the action. It is subdivided into five narrative phases clearly separated by their use of different time levels. The time-treatment in The Man Whom I Killed is of particular interest, as the five narrative phases are arranged exactly and symmetrically, so that the first and the last, the second and the fourth, and, as a middle part, the third, form three unities not only as far as the levels of time are concerned, but also as to their thematic presentation.

The first phase is in the narrative present and presents the situation of the sergeant-major sitting next to a wounded young man in a forest. Without obvious transition the reader, through the thoughts of the policeman, learns in a second narrative phase and on the level of the immediate past about the chase that is to result in the fatal accident. Within this flashback in the policeman's mind there is presented a further flash-back which gives, on the time level of an earlier past, the actual cause of the man hunt.

The three young men had been stopped in their stolen car by the policeman Jakubek. While he was checking their papers one of the men suddenly drew a pistol and shot him. In addition to this accident the reader is given a few facts about Jakubek's likeable character and past. The sergeant-major's thoughts then return to the immediate past and recall the end of the chase and the surrender.

In the last phase the reader sees the policeman again sitting beside the dying young man. He offers him a cigarette. The outer action of the last words and movement of the dying is accompanied, contrapuntally one could perhaps say, by the policeman's reflections on what had happened.

The symmetry of the different narrative phases is conspicuous. It would, however, be of little value for the understanding of the story's meaning, if the critic were not to venture beyond the mere statement of a technical fact. The symmetry

here, besides providing the story with an attractive frame, also serves powerfully to emphasize the main theme.

The middle part gives the actual cause for the man hunt and serves mainly as the motivation of the outer action. Its time level and, at the same time, its thematic significance are kept remote from the one, all-important situation. The second and fourth phases are both recalled within the policeman's stream of thought on the time level of the immediate past. The greater proximity of this group to the actual situation in time-handling finds two parallels in the greater proximity as far as the merely structural arrangement of narrative phases is concerned as well as in its greater proximity as to its thematic significance. Phases two and four stand in immediate structural proximity to the first and fifth phases, and it is in the second and fourth phases that the policeman prepares for and finally fires the fatal shot.

It is evident then that all these narrative parts function mainly as support of the most significant phases, those which are presented in the narrative present. It is not by mere chance that they form the introductory and concluding sections of the story. They function as the frame in which the outer conflict takes place and, at the same time, provide the crucial thematic points, the inner conflict of the story's hero.

It is on this level of narrated present that the police sergeant-major is made to face the situation he is in as being fundamentally important to himself. Although he tries to shirk the personal meaning of the accident, there is something within him which forces him to see the link between the dying man and himself, to become aware of his guilt which is not expressed by the official code of his profession.

The very first sentence of the story gives the inner conflict in which the policeman finds

himself. "It needn't have worried me ... it had been an official action ... somebody else would have made an end of it," he thinks. This attempt at a self-justification is, however, conspicuously interrupted by a "but." "But now I was sitting ... and had to endure staying with the man I had gunned down," his thoughts move on. This antithesis of self-justification and admitting the personal involvement in the "official action" finds a distinct parallel at the end of the story.

After the young man has died the policeman again resorts to the thought that "it had only happened on duty," that the dead couldn't blame him. And again the thought emerges in his mind, "nobody could blame me, not even myself ... someone else had had to act just the same; but someone else, strangely, would have been someone else." This time the hero does not fall back on attempting to find a convenient self-justification. He realizes that "the swop between oneself and someone else isn't as easy as that," and at the end faces the hard fact that "if you had to be the one, nobody will take that burden from you."

Quite obviously the important part of the story is that which presents the policeman's loneliness and inner conflict. It is the conflict between his attempt at finding a justification for having shot the young man, a justification he is in fact officially entitled to, and his honest admission to himself that he is personally guilty beyond the question of official duty and regulations.

The symmetrical arrangement of the different narrative phases on different yet corresponding time levels emphasizes and heightens structurally this thematic aim. Within the narrow limitations of time which the given situation provides the hero proceeds from a position of partly admitting yet partly shirking his responsibility to a position of fully realizing his personal involvement in and responsibility for the young man's death.

This process towards full recognition is technically achieved by presenting the hero's stream of consciousness in the form of instances of recollection on different, meaningfully arranged, time levels.

In Katherine Anne Porter's The Jilting of Granny Weatherall<sup>1</sup> the time frame is given in the form of a death-bed situation. Granny Weatherall, nearly eighty years of age, is dying. The section of her life presented objectively embraces only the short span of a few conscious moments on her last day. Within this narrow frame the author, by means of the heroine's flash-backs, has the old woman reveal essential parts of her life.

On the level of the narrated present, the time level of the objectively given situation, the reader learns about Doctor Harry's visit, the old woman's being awake, half asleep, or unconscious until she dies. The situation is limited by Doctor Harry's visit in the morning and the authorial comment, "she stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light," which establishes her death in the evening.

The reader can reconstruct from a few hints that the whole outer action takes place within one day from morning to evening. "Tomorrow was far away," muses Granny Weatherall, and the progress from day towards night is indicated realistically as well as symbolically by the old woman's growing realization of approaching darkness. The main action, however, is not given through the hard outer facts of the death-bed situation. It is presented as inner action in old Granny Weatherall's stream of consciousness in which reminiscences of the past and the experience of her present situation merge into a single disillusioning experience.

On the level of the past there is one dominant event which had happened sixty years ago: the

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<sup>1</sup>(1930), in Jarvis A. Thurston, Reading Modern Short Stories (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1955), pp. 271-280.

jilting of the woman as a young bride by her fiancé' George on the day of their wedding. "For sixty years," Granny Weatherall admits to herself, "she had prayed against remembering" that event. She still tries to render it less important by juxtaposing to it the full life which she had led afterwards. She had had another husband, five children, and a house of her own. Yet in her last hours she has to realize that all she had achieved is not capable of preventing her from feeling the wound which George had left.

This experience mixes with the growing awareness of her approaching death. The two levels of time, the level of her present act of remembering and experiencing and that on which the remembered things actually took place, are unified in the significant moment of the old woman's trying to find her peace in her last hour.

Towards the end of the story the figure of George is given a parallel in the figure of Christ. While Granny Weatherall's thoughts are leaping back to that crucial situation in her youth, when she was left alone with the priest and no bridegroom in the house, she prays to God that he may give her a sign. But God, like her first fiancé', is jilting her. "Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house," she thinks, and feels that "there's nothing more cruel than this." Her expectation of the bridegroom is answered only by darkness and cruel disillusionment. With the thought that she'll "never forgive it" she dies.

Through incorporating essentially significant parts of the old woman's past in the narrated present the author succeeds in giving poignant meaning to Granny Weatherall's earlier jilting and her final futile expectation of God. By means of presenting artistically selected flash-backs and thoughts dealing with the immediate death situation as one single experience, the jilting George of Granny Weatherall's past is understood as a pre-figuration of the jilting God in the dying woman's present. Past and present merge and form the woman's last bitter experience of having to die without God.

Ambrose Bierce's famous An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge<sup>1</sup>, though belonging to the late 19th century, approaches in its structural elaboration the type of the modern short story. Its modern presentation of a limited yet significant 'slice of life,' a man's attitude in the face of certain death, can be illustrated best by analysing the treatment of time employed by the author.

The story is subdivided, externally and internally, into three major parts. The first part is recorded by an omniscient author-narrator in the narrated present giving the preparations of a hanging. The Southern planter Peyton Farquhar is condemned by Northern troops to be hanged from the bridge which he attempted to destroy.

The second section is a flash-back. But, unlike the previously discussed stories, it is the narrator, not the main character who presents the past events. The reader is given in this part the circumstances leading to the main character's capture.

The third part consists mainly of Peyton Farquhar's hallucination in which the doomed man experiences, during the instant of his fall, his imaginary rescue and flight home. It is in the very last sentence of this final part that the narrator returns from Peyton Farquhar's flight into the future and records in a harsh matter-of-fact way the death of the planter.

Besides this more obvious use of different levels of time, the narrated present in the first, the narrated past in the middle, and the imagined future in the third part, the author employs a more subtle time-treatment which, beyond the display of merely technical competence, serves the thematic aim of the story.

The situation of impending death in the

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<sup>1</sup>(1891), in L. F. Bleiler, Ghost and Horror Stories of Ambrose Bierce (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964), pp. 50-58.

first part of An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge is given as harsh reality. While the reader learns about the facts of outer action ("A man stood upon a railroad bridge ... A rope closely encircled his neck ..."), he realizes at the same time that the doomed man's perception of reality gradually changes towards a strange and preternatural sensitivity. This appears most conspicuously in his changed sense of time.

Within the narrow lapse of time, from the moment Peyton Farquhar has the rope around his neck at the beginning till the command is given to the sergeant to step aside at the end of the first part, the doomed man experiences a slowing down of time which prepares the reader for the final part of the story. There is a strong contrast between the narrator's rendering "the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his [Peyton Farquhar's] feet" and the hero's experiencing the same phenomenon in a completely different way. "How slowly it appeared to move," his thoughts go, and the racing creek becomes, in his mind, "a sluggish stream."

The closer death approaches the more Peyton Farquhar's senses become disturbed, the slower time runs in his mind. While he is trying hard to concentrate in his last minute on the thought of his family at home there is a disturbing sound, "a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil ... [whose] recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell." To the supernaturally awake prisoner "the intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening." The sounds "hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife."

In this short passage towards the close of the first part there is a structural and thematic preparation of the reader for the third part of the story. Structurally the slow-moving time in Peyton Farquhar's mind introduces the almost incredible

stretching of time in the slow-motion phase of the last part.

Thematically the hero's death is foreshadowed by the similes "as slow as the tolling of the death knell" and "like the thrust of a knife!" The last sentence of this first part, "the sergeant stepped aside," finds an answer in the last sentence of the story which, with the effect of a shock on the reader, records Peyton Farquhar's death: "Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body . . . ." Between these two bits or report the reader is given the narrator's flash-back and the prisoner's hallucinations.

The time level of the middle part is that of the immediate past. The narrator records the circumstances which led to the planter's capture. Peyton Farquhar had been deceived by a Federal Scout and trapped by Northern troops. Besides the outer causes of the main situation the narrator also hints at the inner motivation of the planter's action. Farquhar is characterized as a man who is ready to make sacrifices for his ideals, the Southern cause. However rough, this characterization prepares the reader for the thematic contrast between actual and imagined reality in the story. This contrast finds an equivalent in the handling of time. There is a marked discrepancy between the narrated present which provides the harsh reality of the preparations for the hanging and the hero's death on the one hand and the imagined future dealing with the planter's hallucinatory flight and rescue.

The illusionary third part is framed by two disillusioning remarks, "he was a Federal Scout" and "Peyton Farquhar was dead." Between these two realistic statements there is unrolled before the reader's eyes the dream result of the falling man's wishful thinking. The strong contrast between the fragment of a second it takes him to fall to death and the wide span of time, one day and one night, it takes him to reach his home is paralleled by

the contrast between the fictional 'realities' represented. On the one hand there is the harsh reality of the hanging procedure, on the other hand there is the dream-like world of a man equipped with supernatural strength, a fantastic scenery with unreal trees, and the hallucinatory image of Peyton Farquhar's wife.

At the moment of greatest bliss, while he is extending his arms to clasp her, Peyton Farquhar feels "a stunning blow" which ends everything. The poignancy of this moment is heightened by the author's handling of time. The point which is furthest away from the level of the narrated present, the imagined embrace of the hero and his wife in the future, is conspicuously juxtaposed to the moment of harsh reality, when Peyton Farquhar breaks his neck.

Time-treatment here is functional in a multiple way. On the level of narrative structure or, to speak in terms of Nicolai Hartmann's aesthetic concept, in the scope of the middle layers the author has the first part, which is given in the narrated present, mainly deal with the present outer action. The past employed in the second narrative phase gives the causes of the present outer action as well as a rough characterization of the main character. The third phase, the suspended moment of Peyton Farquhar's fall, gives imaginary action in an imagined future.

All three parts, at the same time, display harsh reality as well as imagined reality. Farquhar's disturbed senses and his subjective experience of a slowing down of the flux of time in the first section introduce the imagined reality of the planter's expectations. In the final section the laconic statement of Peyton Farquhar's death brings the hallucinatory world in the doomed man's mind to an abrupt end.

On the level of ideas there appears, through the transparent middle layers and in particular through the layer of time-treatment, the contrast between two basically opposing Weltanschauungen: one

which is mainly rooted in reality and one which is rooted in wishful thinking and impracticable ideals. The narrated past and present at least imply with their presentation of harsh reality the cause of the progressing North, whereas the imagined future of Peyton Farquhar's wishful thinking hints at the lost cause of the South. It is in this scope of ideas that Ambrose Bierce's An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge to Faulkner's brilliant A Rose for Emily.<sup>1</sup>

More than any one of the stories discussed up to now Ilse Aichinger's Spiegelgeschichte<sup>2</sup> (Mirror Story) gives shape to the inner reality of the central character as the all-important element restricting the objectively presented outer reality to a few lines. Time in this strongly lyrical modern short story is just as important as in Bierce's older story, but handled with greater subtlety.

A dying girl sees before her inner eyes her own life, future, present, and past, like a film running backwards. The important events in the girl's life, from her imagined burial back to her birth, are given in reverse chronological order as a continuous stream of consciousness. The inner action is given from the point of view of the dying girl's consciousness addressing the girl, as if her mind were already separated from her body.

The limitations of the objective time are constituted by the narrow span of time immediately preceding the girl's death. The subjective time or mind time oversteps these limitations in two directions by the girl's imagining her future burial and

<sup>1</sup>Cf. below, Part II, Chapter VII, 4. "Death and the Function of Point-of-View."

<sup>2</sup>(1952), in Benno von Wiese (ed.), Deutschland erzählt. Von Arthur Schnitzler bis Uwe Johnson (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Bücherei, 1962), pp. 238-245.

remembering the whole of her past life.

As the central event providing the motivation for the outer and inner action the reader is given the pregnant girl's visit to an old dirty woman who procures an abortion finally resulting in the heroine's death. In the woman's house there is a "blind mirror" in which the delirious girl sees her life reflected. From her burial and death and her present situation her thoughts go back beyond the dull mirror and recall the happy life which she had lived before.

Four sections of inner action correspond to four short phases giving the objective outer action. The first narrative phase with the girl's imagining her burial, being brought back to the morgue, her boy friend's returning the wreath, and her lying in the hospital again is interrupted by the words of a sister, "the fever dreams cease ... the death agony begins." The sister's interpretation of the girl's state is reciprocal to the imagined state in the mind of the dying girl. The burial is related to fever dreams, whereas the remembered past life corresponds to the girl's death agony. Whereas the mind-time moves from burial to birth, the objective or clock-time moves from fever dreams over death agony to death.

The second part of the girl's stream of thought deals with the central event which turned her life into death. Her own thoughts are addressing her, "Go now! ... go home ... On the seventh day ... you'll go away. The pains are chasing you, you'll surely find the way." She sees "children playing with marbles in the street" and her thoughts moan, "and none is your child. How should one of them be your child, since you are going to the old woman living near the tavern." In front of the tarnished mirror "with the stains of dirt-fly on it" she sees herself demanding "what no girl has demanded before:" "Make my child alive again!"

Beyond the mirror the girl's memories become happier. She recalls the reverse development of her

love in the third narrative phase.

The fourth phase, introduced by the sister's comment, "it won't take much longer ... the end is approaching," gives the beginning of the girl's love, her childhood days, and her birth. "A day will come," her thoughts address her, "when you will see him for the first time ... the first time, that is: never again." School and childhood are being passed through as different stages of forgetting till the point is reached where the language becomes a stammering.

The girl's death is foreshadowed by her last thoughts, "... be patient. Soon everything will be well ... It is the day of birth ... The light is warming your limbs, you are stirring in the sun. You are there, you live. Your father is bowing over you." The sister's remark, "it is over ... she is dead!" is followed by the spark in the dying girl's consciousness, "Quiet! Let them talk!"

Obviously the father leaning over her after her birth is a symbol of the eternal Father accepting his dying child. By a subtle arrangement of inner and outer time levels birth and death are unified in a final moment of peace. By restricting the harsh reality of the death-bed situation to a few lines the lyrical tone of the stream of thought becomes the dominant atmospheric quality in the story. It anticipates in a subtle way the peaceful going out of the girl's flame of life. On the level of mind-time the elements of death, pain, and guilt lose the harsh reality they have on the level of the clock time. In the reverse flux of subjective time the cruel events of the girl's young life are led back beyond the mirror and unified with the memory of a happy childhood and finally extinguished in the imagined moment of birth. With this moment the protagonist has regained the unburdened mind of a little child and a state of absolute peace.

Ernest Hemingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro<sup>1</sup>, a modern short story generally praised for its outstanding literary qualities, is based on the polarity of the two time levels, the narrated present and the past with the hero's delirious reminiscences. These two polaric elements are made clearly recognizable on the foremost visual layer through different types of print. Present outer and inner action including Harry's flashback thoughts while he is fully awake are given in normal print, whereas the hero's delirious reminiscences of his past are printed in italics.

Within the narrow span of time before Harry's death, comprising a few hours by clock time, the reader is shown, in a condensed form, the essential tragedy of the hero's life. On the time level of the narrated present the hero reveals, by means of his statements in the conversation with his wife and through his stream of consciousness, that he has betrayed his talents as an artist and that his approaching physical death will only be an outer sign of the inner corruption which had spoilt the essence of his life long ago.

The level of the present outer and inner action is interrupted irregularly by five narrative phases dealing with past events which the hero is able to recall in delirious images. The five phases are unified by the fact that they contain fragments of the valuable material to which Harry had always wanted to give artistic form. In the face of his death the writer realizes that it is these experiences that contained the truth which he had always avoided tackling as an artist: his leaving Thrace as a soldier, a few experiences in the snow-covered Alps, his stay in Constantinople and that nostalgic letter to his first wife, the memory of

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<sup>1</sup>(1936), in The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway. The First Forty-Nine Stories and the Play The Fifth Column (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), pp. 150-175.

the log-house near the lake of his childhood days, a troutstream in the Black Forest, a "half-wit chore boy" shooting an old man, and finally the death of "Williamson, the bombing officer" whose bowels "spilled out into the wire" and who wanted his comrades to shoot him.

All these experiences had a deep effect on Harry's sensitive mind. But money and women, the easy way of living on his physical vitality, had choked and silenced his better qualities. In the face of his approaching death the corrupted artist realizes the irrevocable loss of an essential part of his being. It is the narrow span of time left to him that forces him to admit to himself without any restrictions and in absolute honesty his spiritual condition. In presenting to the reader the contrast between Harry's actual corruption and the potential abilities as revealed in the dying man's delirium the author at least implies what Nicolai Hartmann categorizes as the first in the final layers, the layer of the ideal individual personality.

The time level rendering Harry's unexploited past finds its final answer on the level of harsh reality, corruption, dishonesty, and death. The death symbols, the vultures and the hyena, not only foreshadow, to the hero as well as to the reader, Harry's impending death, but as scavengers they also function as symbols of the writer's corruption.

However, Harry at least partially rediscovers his lost honesty when he lives his last hours in the full consciousness of death. It is only when the woman finds her husband dead in his cot that she too is able to accept the finality of his fate. His attempt at an authentic existence in the face of his death sets the hero clearly apart from his wife. It is when he looks at her attractive smile and pleasant figure that he feels his death coming closer and closer. In the final phase of Harry's imagined flight the author once more juxtaposes wishful thinking - the plane's

flight to Nairobi - to the acceptance of an inevitable death.

With the hero's delirious epiphany of Kilimanjaro the author has come back to his introductory image of the "'Ngàie Ngài,' the House of God." This image of snow-covered Kilimanjaro stands outside the two basic time levels. Its timelessness, its indifferent stasis, is strongly contrasted with the human bustle of quarreling, suffering, hoping, remembering, and dying. When Harry gives up the ghost, he realizes in a last flash of his dreaming mind that he is about to join the endlessly clear and timeless peace of Kilimanjaro.

The late 19th-century German short story Ein Tod<sup>1</sup> (A Death) is in many technical aspects similar to Hemingway's story. Like The Snows of Kilimanjaro, A Death presents the last hours in the life of a young man. The outer cause of the story's action has happened before the actual story begins. Martin, a student, has been shot and mortally wounded in a duel. The action takes place within the time frame of one night. It consists mainly of the nocturnal watch of Martin's two friends in the dying man's room and Martin's delirious monologues.

The narrow frame of time is filled with fragments of dialogue between Martin's friends, small bits of report linking the pieces of scenic presentation and relating them to the actual situation, and fragments of Martin's delirious monologue. Through this technique the authors are able to reveal parts of Martin's everyday life and the circumstances leading to the fatal shooting. The reader learns about Martin's landlady and fellow students and, above all, about the two friends' attitude towards death.

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<sup>1</sup>By Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf (1889), in Arno Holz und Johannes Schlaf, Papa Hamlet und Ein Tod (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jr., 1966), pp. 65-82.

Again there is the contrast between the clock time and the subjective or mind-time. The clock time in A Death is in fact represented by a clock indicating the span of time which has to be overcome until morning and rescue. By means of time montage the past is forced onto the level of the present, thus, filling and expanding the narrow frame of the night. At the same time the authors can show how Martin's two friends are forced by their consciousness of death to experience these last hours before Martin dies as immensely dense and meaningful. The minutely observed experience of the single event of a man's approaching death underlines the slow-moving time and the unbridgeable gap which the two students pray to overcome till help can be called in the morning.

Compared with Hemingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro the flash-backs and pieces of dialogue presented in A Death are more fragmentary, thus reflecting convincingly the greater helplessness of the students in the face of death as contrasted with Harry's more mature attitude. The change between different levels of time is much more controlled in Hemingway's story and much more regular than it is in A Death. Whereas Harry is able to understand his death as the result of an absurd little accident and, on a more meaningful level, as symbolic expression of his inner corruption, the younger men in A Death, although they consciously challenged death, are hit by Martin's death with the shock of terrible despair.

The great tension which results from the discrepancy between the students' expectation of daylight and the slowly crawling time of the clock illustrates how effectively the structural elements of psychological and physical time can be exploited.

Like Katherine Mansfield in Life of Ma Parker Chekhov, in his short story Lament<sup>1</sup>, has chosen as a frame the span of time immediately preceding an outbreak of utter despair. Just as Ma Parker's grief has added up through all those years of hardship and strokes and finds an unbearable culmination in the experience of her grandson's death, so does old Iona's anguish over the loss of his son force the lonely man to disburden his heavy heart. In both cases the authors have restricted their narrated time to the single situation of man in utter despair. But whereas Katherine Mansfield heightens the effect of Ma Parker's loneliness and grief by a subtle technique of flash-backs within the heroine's stream of thought, Chekhov achieves a deeply moving story through astonishing simplicity.

The past with its shattering death incident very rarely interrupts the level of the narrated present. Only now and then old Iona Potapov mentions that his son "died this week." The impression of the old man's grief is convincingly stressed by the contrast between his own slowness and the hurry with which the other characters move. To the old man time has stopped with his son's death. He drives too slowly for his customers, he wishes to tell his story "slowly and carefully," and he stops and "abandons himself to his grief," whereas "the crowds hurry by without noticing him or his trouble." Iona's futile attempts to find somebody willing to listen to him finds a deeply moving answer in the final situation of the little horse "breathing over his master's hand" and listening to the desperate old man's story.

By restricting the outer time frame to the existential situation of a man's despair Chekhov gives his short story dense homogeneity and poignancy. The contrast between the slow-moving time

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, Part I, Chapter IV, 2.

or almost stand-still of time in Iona's mind and the fast-moving time as it appears in the people rushing through the streets underlines effectively the discrepancy between the old man's involvement in death and the people's indifference to it.

A rigorous limitation of time and space is employed in the German Gerd Gaiser's Laß dich doch einmal hinauf<sup>1</sup> (The Pot-Hole). A young student at a teachers' training college decides to explore a pot-hole while on his way home at the beginning of his holidays. He lowers himself into the pit and, after having discovered nothing of scientific interest, realizes with gradually increasing despair that there is little hope of getting out again.

At first he is optimistic and tries to apply all the technical devices which his educated mind can think of. Then he starts to shout in order to attract attention. For a while he is quite certain that somebody will miss him and organize a search. But a few days pass and nothing of the kind happens, and gradually the student has to admit to himself that he will most probably have to die. His shouting becomes sporadic and weaker, his thoughts begin to get out of control, the feelings of thirst and hunger make fantastic pictures and scenes appear before his eyes. Now and then he loses consciousness, knows less and less what is happening and finally dies.

It takes the hero of the story a while till he admits that the situation in which he finds himself is his death situation. As long as there is the slightest possibility of rescue his hope keeps off the threatening thoughts of death. For a considerable time he tries to remember all the laws of science which he had learned and their

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<sup>1</sup>(1955), in Erika Essen, Moderne Deutsche Kurzgeschichten (Sein und Sagen, Texte für den Deutschunterricht, v.I, Frankfurt am Main: Hirschgraben Verlag, 1960), pp. 7-15.

possible application. Then he loses confidence and begins calling for help. Only when he realizes with a shock that there is no help coming from outside and no possibility of rescue through his own power, does he suddenly become aware of the total meaning of his predicament.

Although the young man does not give up calling for help now and then until he falls asleep or loses consciousness, he knows from this point of recognition onwards that the time that is left to him is, in all probability, just the span of time it takes a man to starve.

This terrifying prospect makes him observe his position in a completely new way. The narrow limitations of time, the threat of death, force him to look through his own and, generally, man's existence with a clairvoyance which he had never experienced before. He sees himself crawl helplessly like an insect which has been caught in some slippery trap. He sees himself go on crawling like this insect until death cuts short this hopeless undertaking. The whole earth suddenly appears to him to be covered with traps in which something or somebody is crawling, not understanding, until death. The absurdity of this vision makes him tremble. The shock of his experiencing the absurd inevitability of his death leaves the young man completely broken. He loses his faith in God, at least temporarily, starts to swear blasphemously and utters obscenities which he had not even been aware of knowing.

The closer he approaches his end, in the periods of consciousness, the more and more quietly does he accept the inevitable. But he feels a little bit ashamed that he has to die in such an absurd way: "simply having gone for a walk, jumped into a pot-hole, and nothing more and that's all." Finally he finds his way back to a faith in God's unexplorable will. He accepts his fate as part of a divine plan even without being able to discover any meaning in his approaching death.

By presenting the hero in a strictly limited span of time, immediately preceding his death, the author is able to reveal attitudes which would not appear credible under normal circumstances. The nearer death comes, the more distinctly is the student's innermost condition revealed. The narrower the time gap becomes, the closer does the student approach an authentic spiritual position. From refusal to accept the immediacy of death he comes to perceive the absurdity of his own and man's existence, then to loss of faith in God, and finally moves towards an acceptance of his fate and the will of God. The reader is provided, in this extreme situation of approaching death, with a spiritual development which may normally happen during a life-time.

William Saroyan's masterpiece, The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze<sup>1</sup>, presents a young writer in a similar predicament. Saroyan's hero dies of starvation in a time of unemployment. The section of time which the author has chosen for his purpose is a "gray, cold, and cheerless ... morning" and early afternoon, the last few hours before the protagonist's death.

In two clearly separated parts William Saroyan allows the reader glimpses of the hero's inner and outer state. In the first part, entitled "Sleep" the reader is confronted with the seemingly unorganized multitude of details in the hero's subconscious stream of thought. The second part, called "Wakefulness," provides the central character's last and futile attempts at finding a job and finally his death. The last literary work he begins before dying is "An Application for Permission to Live", an essay which he is, however, unable to complete.

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<sup>1</sup>(1934), in Current-Garcia and Patrick, What is the Short Story?, pp. 390-395.

In accordance with the bitter irony underlying this modern short story the two parts, "Sleep" and "Wakefulness", take on different meanings to what their titles may suggest at first glance. At the end of part one the author gives the first hint of how he wishes this introduction to be understood. He calls it a "swift moment of life" with waking up as its end. With this clue in mind the reader immediately relates to that first part the young writer's sudden recognition in part two:

It is only in sleep that we may know that we live. There only, in that living death, do we meet ourselves and the far earth, God and the saints, the names of our fathers, the substance of remote moments; it is there that the centuries merge in the moment, that the vast becomes the tiny, tangible atom of eternity.

During these last hours before his death, half starved, and his mind already half separated from his body, the young artist experiences deep moments of absolute clear-sightedness. He understands the absurdity of his attempts to postpone the inevitable. His state of wakefulness becomes to him the consciousness of his death.

When his mind finally leaves his starved body, there is again a contraction of a multitude of things in one "eternal moment." This conspectus, the dying man's ability to see many apparently unrelated things in a strange harmony, is ironically contrasted with his physical disintegration. Within the narrow span of time immediately before death Saroyan's young writer, besides his obvious moral integrity, is endowed with moments of insight into his existence beyond normal human understanding.

Shirley Jackson, in The Lottery<sup>1</sup>, disguises in a matter-of-fact presentation of an annual summer ritual a parable for the release of inhibited and dammed-up drives for violence still

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<sup>1</sup>(1948), in Adrian H. Jaffe and Virgil Scott (eds.), Studies in the Short Story (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp. 232-240.

alive in modern societies.

The inhabitants of an American village gather for an annual lottery. Every grown-up man of the community draws a slip of paper from a black box. Bill Hutchinson draws the one slip with a black mark. When the members of his family now have to choose a lot, Bill's wife gets the slip with the black mark. Despite her desperate protests all the villagers turn on her and stone her to death.

At a first reading it may happen that the credibility of the situation prevents the reader from seeing through the layer of realism to the story's full meaning as a fantasy-parable. The reversal of the story's final part, then, would appear to be designed merely to give a powerful shock. To the more experienced reader, however, many of the credible, realistic details reveal themselves as symbolically meaningful long before he reaches the actual stoning.

From among a number of possible and fruitful approaches the handling of time has been chosen here for tackling the crucial questions inherent in the story. There are four major groups of time hints relevant to the parable's meaning.

The reader is told on several occasions that the lottery is a time-honoured ritual. Old Man Warner, who apparently represents the older generation and strict conservatism, rejects doubts about the justification of a lottery in modern times by arguing, "there's always been a lottery," and, "seventy-seventh year I been in the lottery ... seventy-seventh time." The black box in which the paper slips are kept has been "used for generations," and, "the people had done it [the lottery] so many times ..." that the procedure moves on towards its climax without any delay. This quality of the lottery as a community-sanctioned and time-honoured ritual heightens the effect of discrepancy between the apparent normality of the situation and its shocking ending.

The normality of the situation is stressed

by the smooth procedure and by its matter-of-fact presentation. As far as time-treatment is concerned the author has applied a simple and regular chronological sequence of incidents and utterances. This gives the impression of normality as well of inevitability. Once the procedure has started, once the community moves according to certain accepted regulations and in a certain direction, there is nothing that can stop it.

There is, however, an element of doubt in the community as to whether the ritual was not to be regarded as an anachronism and should not, as in some other villages, be abolished. This concept of the lottery being, perhaps, out of time, is voiced by Mr. Adams when he mentions that "some places have already quit lotteries."

A last group of incidents dealing with the relationship between the lottery and time is the one which can be characterized by the author's comment, "although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones." At this point the symbolic layer becomes clearly visible behind the surface layer of the matter-of-fact reality. The villagers dimly remember that "there had been a recital of some sort" and "a ritual salute," but all these details "had changed with time." The only thing that is still very vivid in the people's minds is the act of stoning somebody. The strong emphasis on time, on what falls into oblivion, and what is still being remembered without any clear relation to its origin, underlines the author's thematic aim: to present in a realistic disguise the submerged urge for violence and bloodshed in modern society. Shirley Jackson herself comments on the meaning of her story: "I would explain it as an attempt to define a present-day state of mind by a ritual of blood sacrifice still dormant in our minds."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jaffe and Scott, op. cit., p. 241

By using the many time indications in the particular way she does and by presenting the whole action on the time level of the immediate past of our time the character of The Lottery is convincingly revealed as a fantasy-parable.

Although no actual death incident takes place in Hemingway's much-anthologized and widely discussed story The Killers<sup>1</sup>, death seems to be so conspicuously implied - the reader is sure it will happen soon after Nick has left the town - that it may justifiably be included in this thesis. It is generally accepted that the story's theme is young Nick's introduction into the secret knowledge of evil and the threat of death, in short, an initiation. This theme can be traced in a number of structural elements. Yet it appears to reveal itself most convincingly in the different ways in which the element of time has been treated by the author.

There is the extremely narrow frame of the narrated time which spans about two hours. Within this short period the reader learns, on the level of realism, about two killers attempting to kill somebody and about the victim who refuses to do anything against this threat. On a symbolic level the reader is presented with an immediately impending deadly confrontation between man and some preterhuman force. In addition to this there is the recognition and acceptance of this force. The sudden appearance and manifestation of a deadly threat within a small section of life adds to the power and shock this experience leaves with the story's hero and the reader.

The element of time-symbolism in The Killers appears in the object of a fast-moving clock. As far as the narrative structure is concerned this time-symbol adds considerably to the story's suspense:

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<sup>1</sup>(1926), in Gordon and Tate, op. cit., pp. 394-401.

the reader, like George, has the clock in mind while the two killers are waiting for Ole Andreson to come. That the clock is fast may be understood as a parallel to the fact that the killers anticipate the Swede's death. Thematically it suggests that the world is out of order. It may also suggest the discrepancy between appearance and reality as revealed in the person Ole Andreson. In appearance a heavy-weight boxing champion, he is unable and unwilling to defend himself against his murderers. To Nick the whole town suddenly appears to be something completely different in essence from what it had seemed to him before. After his "awful" experience Nick is going to leave the town, which the author has ironically endowed with the name "Summit."

The immediacy of the deadly threat is also reflected and underscored by the story's scenic presentation. By giving clear preference to dialogue the author has his narrating-time approach the narrated time. The ideal of concentration on one significant single human situation and its artistically dense presentation is brought here as near to perfection as seems possible. Neither hero nor reader is allowed to reflect much on what happens; they are both bound to follow a prescribed course with an inevitability that suggests the very nature of approaching death. And Nick, by attempting to prevent death, only realizes, with a shock greater than the threat of murder, the shattering fact of death's inevitability. Young, not yet corrupt and not having "double-crossed" anybody, Nick Adams is allowed to escape. Like the heroes of other Hemingway stories.<sup>1</sup> He carries with him, however, the wound which the knowledge of evil and death has left in him.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. e.g. Indian Camp, My Old Man, Ten Indians.

Katherine Mansfield's The Fly<sup>1</sup> would, perhaps, have received less controversial interpretations if the critics had concentrated more on the story itself and the particular structural arrangement instead of attempting to understand it in the light of the author's autobiography<sup>2</sup> or overemphasizing the story's possible connections with Shakespeare's King Lear.<sup>3</sup>

However useful linking a piece of art with other works of art or with extra-literary phenomena may be for a fuller understanding of its meaning, the linkage should be based on a thorough investigation of the work itself. The conclusion that "the central symbolism is confused"<sup>4</sup> can be drawn only if the preconceived idea of what the symbolism should mean is not fulfilled on a closer, yet still insufficient, analysis.

It seems that approaching the story under the aspect of time-treatment promises a sound and testable basis of appreciation from which further directions of interpretation may be followed. As in Hemingway's The Killers, the narrated time in Katherine Mansfield's story embraces an extremely short period. Unlike in The Killers, however, the narrow span of time on the level of the narrated present is enlarged by means of flash-backs in the hero's mind. On a closer look the reader will find that within this narrow frame of about an hour of narrated time there is an inner structure of time which is arranged in a roughly symmetrical way. Two main parts, the one which deals with senile Mr. Woodifield's visit to his former boss and the other with the boss alone after the old man has left, are divided into two subgroups each.

<sup>1</sup>(1922), in Current-Garcia and Patrick, What is the Short Story?, pp. 352-356.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Celeste T. Wright, "Genesis of a Short Story," Philological Quarterly, XXXIV (1955), 91-96.

<sup>3</sup>Sylvia Berkman, Katherine Mansfield: A Critical Study (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 137-140.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

These four narrative phases are arranged symmetrically in as far as the first and the last present action on the level of the narrated present, whereas the two middle parts deal with past events in the form of flash-backs.

At the beginning of the story "old Mr. Woodfield" is sitting in his boss' snug office, "peering out of the great, green leather armchair." The two men are talking, smoking cigars, and having a drink. The boss is characterized by his "flipping the Financial Times with a paper knife, " complacently enjoying the "poor old chap's" admiration for his achievements. After the old man has swallowed his drink with some difficulty he remembers what he had actually wanted to say.

The old visitor records his daughters' visit to his son's grave in Belgium and their coming across the grave of the boss' son. This time level of the near past implies also the level of an earlier past, when the two young soldiers had been killed in action. While old Mr. Woodfield is still chatting away, the boss is recalling his son's death. This motive is employed again in the next narrative phase in which, after his old visitor is gone, the boss makes an attempt at abandoning himself to his grief.

When the boss tries hard to shed tears over the loss of his only and promising son, he becomes vaguely aware of the fact that time must have affected his ability to mourn. Despite his attempts to re-evoked the past with his son's promising career, the painful experience of his son's death, and the first years of mourning, the boss is unable to "feel as he wanted to feel." Not even a look at the boy's photograph is capable of evoking within him the grief which he thought apt for the occasion. Suddenly the sight of a fly which had fallen into his inkpot catches his imagination.

The level of the flash-back past is replaced, in the last narrative phase, by the narrated present. Here the author dramatizes with a sharp

eye for realistic detail how a single fly is able to distract a man's thoughts from the mourning about his son's death. The boss is impressed by the spirit the fly shows when she struggles on a piece of blotting paper to clean the ink from its tiny body. Three times the boss shakes a blot of ink on the freshly cleaned insect. Twice it recovers, the third drop kills the tiny animal. The boss flings the corpse into the waste-paper basket and "a grinding feeling of wretchedness seizes him." After he has ordered fresh blotting paper he is unable to remember what he had been thinking about before.

The fly's getting weaker and weaker till it finally dies apparently symbolizes the boss' diminishing grief. Just as he tells the dead animal to "come on" and "look sharp" he tries to wake up his dead son's memory. He believes that he can manipulate his grief just the same way in which he experiments with the fly's life and death. But as he has to admit in the end that the fly is dead, he experiences, at least unconsciously, that his "wanting," "intending," or "arranging to weep" can no longer hide the fact that his grief is as dead as his son.

Quite clearly the boss is not willing to face the inevitable destruction of death. This aspect is confirmed by the fact that he had "never thought of the boy except as lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform, asleep forever." The boss enjoys old Mr. Woodfield's admiration for his health and firm position in life, and the thought does not even occur to him that soon, perhaps, he himself may be as senile and close to death.

The boss' insight into his own spiritual condition remains extremely limited throughout the whole story. Even the negative outcome of his experiment with the fly is not capable of making him aware of his sterile existence. The momentary feeling of wretchedness is immediately swept away

by the routine of orders, and he is not able to remember that he had been trying to mourn over his son's death. Time which had long ago killed his grief has now even killed the boss' cliché worship of a sad memory.

b. Time in the Modern Short Story  
Tends to Be a Significantly  
Limited Time

Time-treatment in modern fiction appears to be managed in three ways.

There is the a priori concept of the human experience of time which was systematically analysed for the first time by Immanuel Kant in his Kritik der reinen Vernunft (1781).<sup>1</sup> According to Kant time, like space, is given as an a priori element to the human mind. Everything man observes - within himself as well as without - he experiences as phenomena in a succession of time. Time is the primal condition without which man cannot experience phenomena. Time is general and necessary; it is the a priori form of our inner experience. All phenomena are by necessity related to this inner form. Kant further distinguishes between time's empirical reality and transcendental ideality. Time has empirical reality, as it is universally valid for our experience of all internal and external phenomena; it has transcendental ideality in as far as it exists beside phenomena as an a priori form of order in human experience.<sup>2</sup>

Although this concept of time was enriched in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by a new

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<sup>1</sup>Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan and Co., 1929), e.g. pp. 74-91.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Kant's concept of mathematical judgements, ibid., pp. 52-54.

emphasis on the simultaneity of human experiences, it is still valid as a basic law in fictional reality as well as in the reader's experience of literature. Due to the technical limitation in the presentation of the fictional world, time as succession has been only partly replaced by Bergson's concept of "la durée réelle."<sup>1</sup>

Henri Bergson's "durée, or duration ... is a state in which we do not part the present from the past or from the future."<sup>2</sup> He argues that man does not "set up time in any order; rather all states melt into one" in his mind. These thoughts from Matter and Memory<sup>3</sup> are enlarged later in his work Creative Evolution<sup>4</sup>, whereas duration is seen as "synonymous with life"<sup>5</sup> itself: "Duration is the continuous progress of all past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances."<sup>6</sup>

This idea of duration as a continuous progress in our minds embraces all levels and anticipates what Hemingway calls the "fifth dimension" in The Green Hills of Africa.<sup>7</sup> The "fifth dimension" is understood as a line of an eternal Now. Without their necessarily being noticeable the states of mind from other times are permanently penetrating our consciousness. The "fifth dimension" could be understood as a "circular movement" or a permanent repetition.

The three major concepts governing man's experience of time are reflected in the act of

<sup>1</sup>Margaret Church, Time and Reality, Studies in Contemporary Fiction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), e.g. pp. 3, 5ff.

<sup>2</sup>Margaret Church, Time and Reality, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in ibid., p. 8f.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ernest Hemingway, The Green Hills of Africa (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), p. 33.

reading as well as in the technique of fiction writing itself. On a surface level the reader experiences fictionally created phenomena in the form of succession. On a deeper level he appreciates - emotionally and intellectually - every single step in this succession as related to earlier steps. In the ideal case all fictional phenomena accompany his process of reading in a circular movement or permanent repetition. It is this form of reading alone which enables us to appreciate fully dense works such as James Joyce's Ulysses.

In the technique of fiction writing the three basic concepts find expression in successive reports and chronological sequences of events on the one hand and, on the other, in the subjective arrangement of different time phases by the technique of time-montage.

Up to this point of the argument what has been said applies not only to the modern short story, but also to modern fiction in general.<sup>1</sup> It seems now that the modern techniques of handling fictional time provide a basis on which essential differences between modern long narrative forms and the modern short story can be pointed out. The incident of death as it appears in a number of representative modern short stories helps to illustrate these differences in a pointed and, at the same time, typical way.

The stories discussed in this chapter all have in common the fact that they present a significantly limited section of time. Chronological arrangement of thoughts, words, and actions, flashbacks and anticipations of possible future levels of time, in short, time-montage, are subject to the artistic aim of meaningfully creating that one limited span of time. The death incident is either the final pivot of the story towards which the

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<sup>1</sup>An older work which shows this 'modern' time consciousness is for example Laurence Sterne's Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent. (1759-1767).

whole material is constructed or the short story's initial pivot functioning as a centre of gravity for the subsequent phases. The technique of time-montage enables the modern writer to expand his narrow frame of the death situation by filling in events from different levels of time, mainly of the past<sup>1</sup>, which have a bearing on the story's thematic aim. Unlike the novelist, however, the short story writer apparently has to stick to Poe's insight that he cannot stretch his significant situation unduly without spoiling his aesthetic effect.

The main device of time-montage, the flashback, serves a multiple function in the modern short story. Through it the main action is no longer what happens on the level of the narrated present, the actual level of the story, but the hero's and the reader's becoming aware of the importance of significant sections of the character's past life for the present. The present event is understood beyond its significance in itself as a or the culmination of the past. Ma Parker realizes her grandchild's death as the shattering peak of her tragic life, Harry in The Snows of Kilimanjaro sees his approaching death as the external expression of and answer to his life of missed chances and his corruption. The strict organization of these selected events is due to the writer's concentration on an external and an internal, or more precisely perhaps, on an explicit and implicit pivot, the death incident and the final thematic aim or general idea.

Flash-backs, one could say, become action themselves. Their main function is to allow the hero and the reader, sometimes only the reader, a synopsis of past and present events as the main character's fate. They are usually arranged in such a way that a death incident at the beginning of a

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. however Bierce's An Occurrence at Owl Bridge where the imagined future plays a prominent structural role.

story is gradually given more significance and weight as the story proceeds, and a final death incident coincides with the greatest effect which the preceding flash-backs have on the reader. In both cases the death incident is the cause and culmination of the view presented of the hero's life.

By the incorporation of flash-backs in the limited situation given, the past can gain pretertemporal importance. Beyond its meaning as past it becomes meaningful as a present memory and bears interpretatively on the narrated present. Different levels of time are condensed to form one present experience within the stream of thought of the hero. Incidents such as deaths make the main character see a series of events of his past life as a meaningful chain.

Such a series of thematically linked events from different time levels must not be thought of in the stories discussed as distracting from the unity of the main situation. Although this technique poses the danger of structural disintegration to a minor writer, time-montage, as has been illustrated in this chapter, has been used very efficiently by great writers. Flash-backs need not retard the action or distract from the actual narrative process. Skillfully employed they are able to enrich the narrated present and heighten the complexity and literary quality of the story.

The presentation of different levels of time in the stream of consciousness of the hero takes place within the narrow limits of time which the death situation provides. A vast stretching of such a situation towards the volume of longer fictional forms would be technically possible, yet aesthetically dissatisfying. Shattering grief and deep despair demand an emotional density and tension that cannot possibly be kept up over a long period without losing impact and credibility. In this respect Poe's insight is still valid for the modern short story.

The task of an aesthetically effective presentation of fictional reality essentially linked with and concentrating on a single death situation forces the writer of the modern short story to arrange his phases of different time levels structurally and thematically towards or from his presented death incident. Such a rigorous artistic control tends necessarily towards brevity.

## 2. Death and the Function of Space

### a. Case Studies

The artistic coordination of structural elements to the end of dense unity is revealed in a great number of modern short stories by the treatment of space rather than the handling of time or any other technical aspect. Often, spatial and temporal structures are so inextricably interwoven and of equal importance that both approaches, the one which uses the element of time as an interpretive foothold in order to reveal the story's meaning and the other which concentrates more on the function of space, are promising and fruitful.

From the examination of a series of modern short stories the function of space will be discussed in this section and an attempt will be made to relate the structural significance of the death incident to the more or less controlled presentation of space.

In 1911 H. G. Wells published The Country of the Blind<sup>1</sup>, a story which, despite its structural relationship to the type of the nouvelle,

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<sup>1</sup>in H. G. Wells, The Complete Short Stories (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1965), pp. 167-192.

is short and dense enough to be regarded as belonging, to a significant degree, to the genre of the modern short story.

The mountaineer Nunez falls from a high mountain in the Peruvian Andes down into the "valley of the blind," the inhabitants of which had lost their eyesight generations ago. Remembering that old proverb, "In the Country of the Blind the One-eyed Man is King," Nunez feels certain to become the ruler of these handicapped people. Having lost, however, the memory of all that is connected with the ability to see the Blind not only do not accept him as their leader, but imprison him and whip him. When Nunez falls in love with the daughter of one of the Blind, the community is willing to accept his suit under the condition that he allows himself to be blinded in order to be cured of his obvious idiocy, Nunez rebels and flees, climbing up towards the light of the mountain peaks surrounding the "Country of the Blind." Although his escape means death he prefers dying "under the cold clear stars" to living the dark life of the Blind.

The parabolic meaning of the story is achieved by the device of having a normal person enter a secluded space in which an essentially different life from his is being led. This act of entering a particular space is presented by having Nunez, the mountaineer, survive his "fall from an enormous height in a cloud of snow." Between this miraculous survival of a normally deadly fall and his ultimate death the parabolically meaningful action takes place. The reader having the story's outcome in mind may interpret Nunez's survival as a kind of postponed death.

The space in which the hero finds himself is significantly limited by high mountains leading up to clear heights and unsurpassable by, and even invisible to, the blinded inhabitants of the valley. The limitations of space are an obvious reflection of the limitations of its people.

This narrow space is contrasted throughout the story with the spatial reality of the outside world. The contrast, however, appears only in the seeing man's mind and has no bearing on the Blinds' understanding of their own position. Nunez sees the space of the Blind as narrow, flat, with as few obstacles as possible, a space which is easily conceivable given the limited senses of the valley's people. The bare essentials of life are provided for, there is enough food and clothes, and adequate warmth. The Blind walk on straight paths and live a smooth life in a sheltered environment.

Due to their long blindness the other senses of these people have become acutely sharp, so that they are able to perceive certain close spatial details extremely clearly. Their vision of space on the whole, however, is blurred and perverted. Nunez who is able to grasp this narrow secluded space as contrasted with the reality of an outer space has to realize that these two worlds are incompatible.

The two different kinds of space reflect interpretively the two represented kinds of human existence, the limited existence of a majority of limited people and the enlightened existence of a very few.

The figure of the mountaineer falling into the limited space of the Blind obviously presents, in a symbolic way, the figure of a redeeming saviour or philosopher. Nunez's desire to enlighten, to rule the Blind, his futile attempt to give them an idea of a world beyond their boundaries clearly resembles the figure of Christ who is rejected by mankind. Nunez also symbolizes the figure of a philosopher who is regarded as inferior and is rejected, because people are incapable of grasping what he wishes to convey. The ability of seeing things the others cannot see is regarded by the Blind as a folly, a disease, and an idiocy instead of as a superior gift. The proverb, "In the Country

of the Blind the One-eyed Man is King," which functions as a leitmotif throughout the story, is thus sarcastically reversed and proved irrelevant in the wider sense of its meaning.

Besides the obvious theme of rejection of the courageous messenger of truth by limited man there is an interesting side theme in Wells's story concerning man's attitude towards death.

Death is deliberately eliminated in the "Country of the Blind." The author has carefully avoided mentioning anything that might hint at the existence of the ultimate force of destruction. This fact is the consistent consequence of avoiding hardship and difficulties in life. The life of the Blind is the smooth unreal life without death. It is, perhaps, significant to note here that Nunez does not die in the valley. At the beginning of the story he miraculously survives his enormous fall and later he faces death, when he is "very far and high."

The dualistic groundwork which pervades all structural aspects of the story appears here as the contrast between the space with and the space without death. The Blinds' limited insight into their position is emphasized by their lack of consciousness of death. On the other hand, Nunez, the daring mountaineer of light and truth, is able to grasp fully his possibilities. In attempting to flee from the darkness of the ordinary, the mediocre, and to reach the clear heights of truth he faces death rather than live the smooth yet darkened existence of those who reject authenticity.

Pointing out some stylistic weaknesses and the story's "incoherent performance" Albert J. Guerard,<sup>1</sup> in a brief comment, calls Joseph Conrad's

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<sup>1</sup>Albert J. Guerard, "Conrad's 'The Lagoon,'" in Story and Critic, ed. by Myron Batlaw and Leonard Lief (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), pp. 271-273.

The Lagoon<sup>1</sup> a "confused dream."<sup>2</sup> Although The Lagoon certainly does not rank among Conrad's masterpieces, to call it "confused" seems to be exaggerated. One could call it a "dream," even a "dream voyage" towards the revelation of death and evil. As in Heart of Darkness, though with less artistic success, the author has a white man intrude into the jungle landscape to learn about some secret crime. A brief analysis of the arrangement of spatial elements in the story will show quite clearly that there is much less "confusion" in The Lagoon than Albert J. Guerard's criticism would suggest.

A white man approaches the significantly limited space of a lagoon on a "narrow creek" and through the Malayan jungle. With the statement, "we will pass the night in Arsat's clearing. It is late," the reader is given the time and location of the story. Obviously the words "night," "clearing," and "late" have meaningful bearing on the fictional reality to be presented. "Night," on the surface level of realism, indicates the span of time, the period of narrated present, which the reader is offered. On a symbolic level it anticipates Diamelen's death. "Clearing," besides its obvious descriptive function, may hint at the process of Arat's purification that will accompany his wife's death agony. "Late," like "night," seems to foreshadow the situation with which the white man will be confronted.

While accompanying the white man's progress towards the lagoon, he realizes Conrad's conscious and, one has to admit, at times too conspicuous use of spatial symbolism. There is the blackness of the water, a "root" which looks like "an arrested snake" and the "darkness, mysterious and invincible."

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<sup>1</sup>(1898), in M. Matlaw and L. Lief, op. cit., pp. 250-271.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

Death and some secret evil are foreshadowed here in the use of the setting.

After the white man's boat with its native crew has entered the "stagnant lagoon" the reader accompanies the unnamed white into Arsat's "little house, perched on high piles," where the Malay's wife is lying, on her face the "contemplating expression of the unconscious who are going to die." Her death agony lasts until the morning, when Arsat with resignation tells his white friend that "she burns no more."

Diamelen's death agony is counterpointed by the, perhaps too obviously, symbolic presentation of space. When the white man leaves the hut, he sees the "enormous conflagration of the sunset." The woman's movement towards death is paralleled by the darkness of the night; her death by the rising sun. Similar to his use of space in The Nigger of the Narcissus is Conrad's emphasis on the main death incident in The Lagoon through the descriptive comment that "the breeze freshened" and that "a great brilliance burst upon the clear shadows."

Within this narrow frame of time, the death agony of his wife, in the face of death, and under the atmospheric influence of space, Arsat reveals to the white man, as to a father confessor, the crime of his life, the desertion of his brother. The moment of the sunrise coincides with the end of Arsat's confession and with Diamelen's death. But the rising sun does not yet bring light to Arsat; he can see nothing "except of darkness," the "darkness of a world of illusions." Arsat's attempt to find a country "where death is forgotten - where death is unknown!" is bound to fail. The price which he has to pay for escaping with his beautiful bride and being able to build an unreal life "perched on high piles" is that of his brave and faithful brother's life. The happiness built on this sacrifice ends with the loss of his wife for the sake of whom Arsat had committed the crime of desertion.

Leaving Arsat in the "searching sunshine," the white man "passes out of the lagoon into the creek," from the stagnant into the flowing water of life. Arsat's stay in the lagoon symbolizes the stagnant phase of his life built on treason. His wife's death appears as the atonement for his crime. Now he is free to live again according to his moral code and revenge his brother's death.

Although one will generally agree with Bates's statement that "Conrad stands outside the main English short story"<sup>1</sup> and despite the story-within-the-story structure of The Lagoon, it is obvious that the author here has closely approached the type of the modern short story. A significant fragment of a character's life is presented within which the meaning of his past and present is revealed to him as his fate. To the reader, through all the many layers of the story and beyond Arsat's understanding of his individual position, the story presents man's cognition of past failures in a moment of shattering truth.

Conrad's counterpart to this story is his famous Heart of Darkness.<sup>2</sup> It certainly does not belong to the genre of the modern short story and would, perhaps, be characterized most adequately by the term nouvelle. Heart of Darkness, nevertheless, seems to be of some interest for this section, as it can serve as an example of an author's intense exploitation of spatial presentation. Only a small part of its complex structure, however, can be discussed here.

Space, in Heart of Darkness, serves primarily as symbolic counterpoint to the progressing action and as background creating a nightmarish, intense atmosphere. The River Congo which Marlow sees on a map as a young boy reminds him of a snake.

<sup>1</sup>H. E. Bates, The Modern Short Story, A Critical Survey (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1945), p. 142.

<sup>2</sup>(1902), in Joseph Conrad, Youth, A Narrative and Two Other Stories (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1923), pp. 45-162.

Like the image of the "root ... writhing and motionless, like and arrested snake" in The Lagoon the biblical metaphor suggests the presence of evil. This must not lead the reader to the assumption, however, that Conrad restricts himself to Christian symbolism. It is significant that it is the young boy, not the grown-up narrator, who has the experience.

During Marlow's progressive intrusion into the darkness of the jungle, the river is never named. This obviously adds to the story's quality of universality. More and more the fictional space acquires the intensity of a dream world. There are the clear contours of a sharply conceived reality, yet, the closer the narrator approaches his aim, the stronger becomes the nightmare quality of what Marlow sees. The growing intensity of the jungle, the wilderness and the darkness parallels, contrapuntally, Marlow's movement towards the dark secret of Kurtz. When the narrator meets that "universal genius Kurtz, he and the reader realize with a shock that the dark space of the wilderness has absorbed him. Kurtz is master and, at the same time, slave of his dark environment. The final conflict in Kurtz's soul, the opposing poles of his desires, are reflected in spatial terms by the white men's ship and his camp in the jungle.

The intensity of Kurtz's experience of horror in his own soul is reflected in the depressing atmosphere which the surrounding jungle exerts upon the narrator. Kurtz is physically and spiritually too far disintegrated to survive. And even Marlow himself is hardly able to escape from the dark space which fascinated and corrupted Kurtz. Dangerously ill the narrator hardly survives the "forbidden adventure."

Kurtz's death is a realistic and, at the same time, symbolic culmination of a process in the course of which a man's intention of bringing a "mission" into the darkness has been perverted into unspeakable and unspoken excesses of corruption. The

cut-off human heads stuck on poles in front of Kurtz's hut and the wildly beautiful native woman on the river bank indicate to the reader the degree of the dying man's disintegration. Marlow's discovery of this "Heart of Darkness" is presented, unlike the more short-story like structure of The Lagoon, by means of a careful step-by-step revelation, a slow and gradual intrusion into dark space.

Among other features this complex presentation of a searching progress and the densely symbolic exploitation of spatial elements gives Heart of Darkness its relatively long form and sets it distinctly apart from the modern short story. At the same time it adds to its unique artistic quality and its high literary rank.

A completely different use of space is to be found in Luigi Pirandello's War.<sup>1</sup> The main theme of the story is the revelation of different attitudes towards the loss of a son in the war. To achieve his artistic aim the author restricts himself to a strictly singular situation. Time, space, and action are subject to a rigorously limited unity. The span of time is roughly the period it takes to hold the present conversation. There is no action in the traditional sense; physical action is replaced by dialogue and the sparse movements of the people portrayed. The number of people is restricted to seven. Out of this group the author has given two his particular interest.

The space, although seemingly of little significance, has been carefully chosen. At a provincial station near Rome a small group of passengers are waiting for the continuation of their journey in a "stuffy and smoky second-class carriage."

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Brooks and Warren, op. cit., pp. 165-169.

This, again, is a significantly limited space. As in a confined lagoon, in a pot-hole, in a room of a hospital, or in front of a grave, the human mind works revealingly differently from normal. The threat of war outside and the confrontation of the people's attitudes to it in the narrow carriage are factors well suited to lay bare some essential features of human existence. At the same time, the spatial description of an ordinary situation and the presentation of simple people<sup>1</sup> - "second-class carriage" -, are typical features of the modern short story and set War apart from the traditional Italian novella with its 'extraordinary event.'

In the course of a developing conversation about the loss of sons in the war the author makes two opposing poles of attitudes become more and more distinct. The one is represented by a "fat woman" who has just seen her only son off to the train which will bring him to the front. Although she does not actually participate in the conversation until the very end, the reader is made to assume from the description of her sobbing and "twisting and wriggling" how deeply she feels her grief. The opposite pole is represented by an old man who has actually lost his son, yet consoles himself by "philosophizing away all the fundamental sense of loss and grief."<sup>2</sup>

The "bulky woman in deep mourning" is partly taken in by the old man's argument, mainly, because she feels that having actually lost his son he has more right to judge grief than herself. She is, however, not able to understand completely his heroic attitude and, when she finally asks the surprising question, "'Then ... is your son really dead?'," the old man breaks "into harrowing, heart-rending, uncontrollable sobs."

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Frank O'Connor's concept of the representation of the "submerged population" in the modern short story, e.g. p. 39 in The Lonely Voice.

<sup>2</sup>Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in their comment on the story, Understanding Fiction, p. 170.

In their discussion of the story Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren maintain that "both views are modified."<sup>1</sup> Yet it seems that the consolation which the woman takes in the old man's argument is only temporary and due to the fact that she is and feels she is intellectually inferior. Despite this her crucial question demonstrates quite clearly that she cannot appreciate and instinctively rejects his attitude. Moreover, the author has left no doubt about the fact that it is only then that the old man becomes fully aware of the harsh reality that his son is "really dead - gone for ever - for ever." The old man's frame of mind at the end of the story is the very opposite of what it had been at the beginning. A single piercing question has revealed the hollowness of his heroic and philosophic rationalization and laid bare dammed-up choking grief beneath.

The challenge which the simple woman's seemingly "silly" and "incongruous question" makes to the old man is made particularly convincing in the restricted space of the smoky carriage. In the stasis of this limited space the sound and meaning of the spoken word acquire a weight which they can never have outside in the rush of life. It is only in the dense atmosphere of the presented enclosure that the simple woman's intellectually inferior argument is able to have the shattering effect on the old man's attitude. The revelation of the man's philosophical cover of his grief as untrue is, it seems, aesthetically satisfying because Pirandello has presented it within the confines of a meaningfully limited space.

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<sup>1</sup> Brooks and Warren, op. cit., p. 170.

In Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa ...<sup>1</sup> (Traveller, if You Come to Spa ...) Heinrich Böll presents the stream of thought of a fatally wounded young soldier in an emergency operating theatre at a grammar school.

While the hero of the story is carried through the passages up to the second floor, he recognizes the busts and pictures of the great of the world's history, Caesar, Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, Frederick the Great, up to Hitler. Everything looks strangely familiar to him, but he cannot make himself believe that he is in his old school. It is only when he suddenly recognizes his own handwriting on the blackboard of the drawing room that he realizes with a shock that he has returned to his grammar school to die, three months after he had been called up by the army.

Seven times that old Greek epitaph "Traveller, if you come to Spa ..." is written on the blackboard; in his own handwriting, in Roman type, Gothic script, italics, Roman-nosed, Italian, and round hand.

After the surgeon has removed the bandages the wounded man sees that he has lost both his arms and one leg. He recognizes in the fireman with the sad face and the sooty uniform, who is holding him by the shoulders, his old janitor. Asking him for "milk," like he used to do in his school days, he dies.

Every structural detail reflected in the youth's mind is selected carefully under the aspect of approaching death. Time, space, action, characters, on the level of the experienced present as well as on the level of the soldier's delirious memories, are artistically organized towards the death of the wounded. But beyond the layer of the immediately experienced reality there appears to

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<sup>1</sup>(1950), in Heinrich Böll, Erzählungen (Opladen: Verlag Friedrich Biddelhaue, 1958), pp. 155-164.

the hero and to the reader the universal significance of Böll's fictional worlds. The story's meaning and value can, perhaps, be suggested from the aspect of its treatment of space as a meaningfully restricted locality.

The grammar school and, in particular, the drawing room are given as the narrow spatial frame within which the consciousness of the dying soldier moves. The burning town outside provides the implicit motivation and outer cause for the story's external action and, at the same time, incorporates the microcosm of the soldier's mind in the macrocosm of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup>

The drawing room is the space for the "others," those who are still alive. The young unnamed soldier reflects that he still belongs to the "others," while they carry him through the passages. When he passes the war memorial, he suddenly knows: "if I was really in my old school, my name would also be added, engraved in stone, and in the school calendar they would write behind my name - 'went to the front from school and died for ...'." He does not know, however, what he is going to die for.

With amazement he realizes that he no longer experiences any feelings of schoolboy hatred against his environment. The impression that this old grammar school is his natural environment from which he had been separated unnaturally and too early becomes more and more clear.

The fragmentary Greek epitaph on the blackboard which serves as title and central symbol in the story hints at the wider historical connection with those Spartan soldiers who, under their leader Leonidas, died for the rescue of the fatherland from Persian oppression. "Sparta," however, is incomplete on the blackboard, suggesting that there is no just cause for which the young soldier will die and no ultimate meaning in his death. The meaninglessness of his death and of the war in general is the bitter experience which

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. the concept of an 'enveloping action', Gordon and Tate, *op. cit.*, p. 451.

drifts through the young man's mind.

When he dies with the supplication, "milk," on his lips, he has finally and fully returned to his schoolboy existence. The last thing he sees in his life is the face of the janitor Birgeler, sooty and sad, the man who had provided him with milk and allowed them, now and then, the forbidden pleasure of smoking a cigarette in his cosy little room.

Space in Traveller, if You Come to Spa... has an intense symbolic meaning beyond its function of providing a realistic spatial frame for the action presented. The way in which the young soldier is carried up to the drawing room becomes a mode of recognition in its realistic and symbolic meaning. The recognition of his own handwriting, the hopeless state of his wounded body, and the meaninglessness of his death form the climax and the ending of this masterpiece. The presented spatial elements in Traveller, if You Come to Spa ... are condensed in the final moments of the young man's stream of consciousness into a space of cognition.

In the first short story which Edith Wharton published, Mrs. Manstey's View<sup>1</sup>, the author has not yet achieved her later mastery of the short story genre. The influence of Henry James's predilection for and handling of "developmental" motives appears in the story as a conspicuous lack of compactness and as looseness of motivation. A rather long introductory part and a clearly sentimental tone set the story apart from Edith Wharton's more convincing achievements. There is, however, one particular instance which makes Mrs. Manstey's View appear as relevant to this chapter: the use of space.

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<sup>1</sup>(1891), in American Short Stories (IV, Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1962), pp. 79-91.

Mrs. Manstey, an elderly lady, lives in a rather cheap boarding-house in a shabby section of New York in a small room on the third floor. She has practically no contact with relatives, little with strangers. One day she learns that the neighbouring house is going to get an extension which will block her view. Fearing to lose the only joy left to her she makes a futile attempt at bribing the owner of the house to prevent her from building the extension. But the old lady is regarded as insane, and the workers start with the new building. During the night Mrs. Manstey sets fire to the neighbouring house, but fails to cause any serious damage. She catches pneumonia and dies.

The spatial elements employed in the story are distinctly divided into two groups. The one embraces all the details concerning the 'inner space' of the old lady's back room, the other deals with the particulars of 'outer space,' the world which Mrs. Manstey perceives through the frame of her window.

The physical peculiarity of the room - it is high up, and it is a back room - reflects the essential characteristics which the author attributes to her heroine. Mrs. Manstey is lonely and she wishes to keep herself aloof from other people. The little room seems to symbolize the lady's retreated soul out of which she glances at a world outside.

The 'outer space' is juxtaposed to the back room on the third floor like the stage to a box in a theatre. It is not a typical locus amoenus with which the lady is confronted from her window. There are gardens and a beautiful magnolia tree, but there are scrap yards and a factory as well. There are the people in the neighbouring houses of whom she catches glimpses now and then.

The one-sided contact which Mrs. Manstey has established with the outer world is her great and only pleasure. It puts her, however, into a

very vulnerable position. Once this contact is threatened the joy of her last days is endangered. She is ready to sacrifice a thousand dollars, all she can offer, in order to retain her view. But it is only when she resorts to arson that the reader realizes fully how deeply wounded the old lady must be by the loss of the last joy in her life.

Mrs. Manstey's death, which obviously has a sentimental effect, can only be partly defended on the grounds that it symbolizes her inability to go on living after her last tender contact with the outer world has been destroyed.

In one of Hemingway's finest stories, Indian Camp<sup>1</sup>, the incident of death and the function of space are of major importance. Indian Camp is an initiation story in which the hero, young Nick, is confronted with suffering in the form of childbirth and death.

Nick Adams accompanies his father to an Indian settlement beyond the lake to watch childbirth for the first time in his life. His father, who is a physician, has to do a Caesarian operation to bring the baby into the world. The young Indian woman's husband, who lies in a bunk above her with an injured leg, cannot stand her screaming and cuts his throat. On their way back Nick asks his father questions about life and death and, in the chilly morning tries to reassure himself that he is still far away from his own death.

As Danforth Ross has pointed out in a short comment on Hemingway's art, "the story hinges .... on Aristotle's key structural elements, recognition and irony."<sup>2</sup> The effect of both elements is

<sup>1</sup>(1925), in The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway, pp. 189-193.

<sup>2</sup>Danforth Ross, The American Short Story (Pamphlets on American Writers, Number 14; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 35.

considerably enhanced by the author's matter-of-fact presentation. All the structural elements leading up to the climax, the successful operation, and its climactic reversal, the suicide of the husband, are given objectively as concrete facts. On the one hand this technique allows the author to achieve great verisimilitude, on the other it satisfies the reader beyond its verisimilitude, as it leaves much to his imagination.

The harshness of life into which Nick is going to be initiated first appears in the exceptionally hard way in which life comes into existence. Although this may prepare the experienced reader for some impending disaster, the suicide of the Inian comes as a shock to the reader as well as to Nick.

The death incident is the conspicuous pivot of the story. Its unexpectedness, its ironical perversion of what has preceded it heightens its effect as a hard 'lesson' which life has to tell the growing-up. Although Nick attempts to regain his stability afterwards in the boat, there will remain, as with most of Hemingway's heroes, a wound or, at least a scar.

The treatment of space in this modern short story reveals convincingly Hemingway's art of giving realistically presented details symbolic meaning. At the beginning of the story there is Nick lying in the boat "with his father's arm around him." Protected like this he glides through the darkness and mist towards an incident of revelation. Although he has moved into the kitchen after the operation, he "had a good view of the upper bunk" and understands fully what is going on. The physician's request to "take Nick out of the shanty" comes too late. The father cannot protect the child for ever against the harsh reality of life. The proposed change of space - out of the shanty - shows the physician's regret for having allowed his son to intrude too far into adult reality, into an "awful mess," as Hemingway has Nick's father put it.

It is on his way back through the forest that Nick asks the crucial questions, "'Do ladies always have such a hard time having babies?'" or, "' Why did he kill himself, Daddy?'" and, finally, "' Is dying hard, Daddy?'" It is a different Nick who is walking back through the wood. A change has taken place within the boy which has brought him a big step nearer to the disillusionment of adult life. This change is underlined by the fact that the former darkness is giving way to the approaching sun. The full light of life is not yet there, it is "just beginning to be daylight."

When young Nick is sitting in the boat, he reassures himself that he will never die. The new feeling of life is introduced with a few objectively descriptive remarks. The rising sun over the hill, a jumping fish, and, above all, the warmth of his hand as he feels the chilly water, all help Nick to regain, at least partly, his security.

Gerd Gaiser's The Pot-Hole, which has been discussed under the aspect of time, can be regarded as coming ideally close to the type of modern short story using space as its primal structural foundation. Limited to the extreme of a narrow pot-hole, space here reveals itself as a real and symbolic trap to man.

Within the course of the story there is a change in the understanding of the spatial restriction both on the part of the hero as well as on the part of the reader. First the pot-hole in the forest is seen as a particular formation of rock and earth that deserves scientific interest. On the young student who has been taught to question and investigate things the hole exerts a magnetic compulsion. Although he pretends to himself, as the reader understands from his thoughts, that the investigation will be only a minor digression from his normal way, there is a significant contrast between the boy's cool thoughts of how to approach the problem scientifically and his

emotional rush towards the goal of this "minor digression." He hastens through the undergrowth, his face covered with sweat. This contrast is underscored by the situation showing the student's dangling in the air, his hands still holding on to the edge of the hole. There is still the scientific urge of the mind, while the body seems to recoil instinctively from allowing itself to jump.

After the disappointed boy has to admit that there is nothing much to discover, the concept of space changes from a scientific object into understanding space as a simple yet deadly trap. This new quality of limited space has a deep effect on the trapped boy's mind. The detached attitude of the scientist is suddenly gone and replaced by the total involvement of a human being realizing that his existence is at stake.

Space, then, is transformed here into something new. Beyond its meaning as a trap to life it acquires the function of forcing a significant existential experience upon a human being. The pot-hole, first an object of scientific interest, then the simple animal trap, reveals itself in the end as a space of cognition.

This implies an ironical reversal of the situation at the beginning. Whereas formerly the young student regarded himself as the investigator of an object, he now finds himself as the object in some experiment which has no significance for his life. This sudden realization that there is no meaning behind his absurd misfortune is the crisis in the young man's last hours. After he has passed through all the stages of doubt and despair, he finally returns to accepting God's will.

The narrowly restricted space in The Pot-Hole forces a human being to look at and into himself as he would never have been able to do under normal circumstances. Within the space of the pot-hole the approach of death appears more inevitable, more terrible, more irrevocable, and

more revealing than it might have in a different situation. It seems that the young man, under the pressure of his particular situation lives through the spiritual development of a whole life time.

b. Space in the Modern Short Story  
Tends to Be a Significantly  
Limited Space

The reader's perception of space in fictional reality is, despite many similarities, certainly different from his perception of space in reality. In fiction authors have to employ normal spatial qualities, yet, at the same time, the presented space is essentially artificial. One can describe the necessary minimum of spatial representation in fiction with Immanuel Kant's concept of the human perception of space.

In the first section of "The Transcendental Aesthetic" of his Critique of Pure Reason<sup>1</sup> Kant defines human experience of space as an a priori experience similar to that of time. From our concept of a certain fruit, one could say to illustrate his idea, we may abstract any of its empirically experienceable qualities such as its colour and smell without destroying the idea of this fruit as long as we do not abstract from it its particular extension in space. In so far as we share this experience with all men, and because objects always appear to us as spatial extensions, space, Kant says, has empirical reality. At the same time space has transcendental ideality, because it depends on our granting the possibility of empirical experience.

Another feature of our experience of space which is exploited in fiction is the fact that man has a pre-experience of certain spatial extensions.

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<sup>1</sup>Immanuel Kant, op. cit., pp. 67-74.

We automatically imagine objects in their complete spatial extension, although we can only see one side. A cube, although we can only see three sides at most, is automatically completed in our minds and we perceive it, as if we had turned it round before our eyes.

This phenomenon is of very great importance in fiction. As the author can make use of the reader's pre-experience of spatial extensions, he is free to present space richly and fully delineated or slightly suggested, approaching a photographic reproduction or as if with only a few delicate strokes of the brush. As with other structural elements the main problem in spatial representation is selection. By artistically selecting certain spatial details and meaningfully relating them to other structural elements the author can give his space symbolic significance beyond its function of heightening verisimilitude or creating atmosphere.

In addition to all this space in the modern short story is of a particular and, in a few aspects, essentially different interest. In the modern short story space tends to be significantly limited. Man is often shown in a temporal and spatial restriction forcing him to make a decision or initiating him into some knowledge. In the death story the immediacy of compulsion is considerably enhanced. Spatial as well as temporal restriction in the modern short story add to the poignancy which is so characteristic of this genre.

Complexity of space in longer fictional forms is usually replaced in the modern short story by spatial singularity. A pot-hole, an Indian shanty, the back room of an old lady's flat, the emergency surgery in a drawing room, the second-class carriage of a provincial train, the narrow confines of a lagoon, or a settlement in a narrow mountain valley, all these are typical

spaces. They are significantly limited spaces which add to the particularity of the modern short story. It is in such restricted spaces that man is represented in convincingly compulsive existential situations.

### 3. Death and the Function of Action

#### a. Case Studies

It is obvious that the 19th-century action story with a pointed death incident has not died out. On the contrary, it is this type that supplies innumerable stories for the consumer-goods literature of today. The short western story, the short detective story, to mention only two basic types, depend heavily on action.

It is true to a certain extent that this type of action-and-plot story is not necessarily restricted to light fiction. Yet there seems to be strong evidence for the fact that the artistic value of such stories depends on how far the layer of action becomes transparent and is capable of revealing a layer of ideas, and on whether the reader is offered, behind the presented reality of action, the ideality of moral, metaphysical, or existential questions.

Ambrose Bierce's The Boarded Window offers little beyond the aesthetic pleasure of a well-constructed action-and-plot story. The action is presented mainly for its own sake. The final shock which both the hero and the reader experience embraces, as in a centre of gravity, the aim and purpose of the story. In its type the story is certainly a near perfect achievement. Compared to stories such as Crane's The Upturned Face, however, its basic weakness, its lack of moral weight, becomes evident.

The two stories differ from one another in artistic quality to the degree to which their actions

show transparency. Whereas Bierce's story is only transparent to the middle layers of action and atmosphere, The Upturned Face reveals the deeper middle layer of character through its action and, in a final layer, the whole existential complexity of man's spiritual position in the limit-situation of death.

Richard Connell's story The Most Dangerous Game<sup>1</sup> may serve here as an example to show what happens, if a writer allows the action of his story to dominate his intended, or at least suggested, theme.

The American big-game hunter Sanger Rainsford falls from a yacht in the Caribbean Sea. Distant reports of a gun in the night give him a direction and, after an exhausting swim, he reaches an island. Rainsford finds the château of General Zaroff, a Russian aristocrat, who lives alone on the island with his Cossack servant Ivan. During an exquisite dinner the General tells Rainsford that he has become tired of hunting the usual big game one can find all over the world, as the limited powers of the animal are no real match for his intellect. Instead he has turned to hunting men who get stranded every now and then on his little island. Rainsford who rejects the General's hobby as cold-blooded murder is told that there is fairness in the game, as the fugitive is equipped with a good hunting knife and food, and is granted a three hours' start. If the quarry should elude him for three days, the General is prepared to accept him as a winner. With a shock Rainsford realizes that he has been trapped in a mad-man's game. He is given a knife, clothes, and food, and sets out on his flight. After exploring almost all possible terrors he manages to escape and takes the General by surprise in his own bed-room. Accepting his defeat General Zaroff retreats to "furnish

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<sup>1</sup>(1924), in Jaffe and Scott, op. cit., pp. 17-38.

a repast for the hounds."

In the introductory conversation on the yacht Sanger Rainsford defends hunting as "the best sport in the world." To the suggestion of a friend of his that it is a one-sided pleasure the hunter responds: "Don't talk rot ... you are a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how the jaguar feels? ... They have no understanding." And the argument that "they understand one thing - fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death," is rejected by Rainsford's answer that there are two classes in the world, "the hunters and the huntees. Luckily, you and I are hunters."

With this conversation a promising theme is indicated, the fear of death. Unfortunately the author has restricted himself in the course of the story to explicit only a small portion of his theme. Only on a very few occasions does he mention the psychological condition in which the hunted finds himself. The main emphasis is clearly on the presentation of the external action.

The reader's interest in the theme of fear of death is suppressed in favour of creating suspense by means of a cleverly arranged chain of events. The action of the hunt and Rainsford's escape becomes the main purpose of the story. As a result, the writer's shift from stressing his initially suggested theme towards emphasizing outer action finds a parallel in his treatment of character. The author's concentration on the two diametrically opposed characters of Rainsford and General Zaroff seems to promise a more complex presentation of the inner forces they might embody. Both characters, however, remain disappointingly flat and serve merely to maintain a suspenseful external action.

Death in this story functions as the continuous threat which speeds up the action and motivates the suggested terror that the hunted must experience. The death incident at the beginning - Rainsford hears shots and later sees signs of a

struggle in the forest - becomes meaningful at the point at which the hero and the reader come to know the General's grisly hobby. The fear of imminent death is the driving force in the action.

On the level of external action it has served its purpose well. On a more meaningful level of character presentation, on a level of moral or existential questions, the author has certainly failed to give the motif of death its potential significance. The lack of a moral, metaphysical, or existential dimension sets The Most Dangerous Game apart from great artistic achievements and puts it in the neighbourhood of light fiction.

Some of John Steinbeck's stories tend to give a similar impression. Though more concerned with an underlying idea, the outer action seems to take over at times and become the dominating structural element. In Flight<sup>1</sup> Steinbeck tells the story of Pepé, a nineteen-year-old youth, who, after killing a man with his knife, has to flee and is finally shot by his pursuers.

In an introductory part functioning as an exposition Pepé is portrayed as "a gentle, affectionate boy" who is very lazy. The only thing he can do properly is throw his knife, the knife which he has inherited from his father. One day he is sent to Monterey for salt where a man insults him in a pub. Almost unaware of what he is doing Pepé throws his knife and instantly kills him. He rushes home to his mother who equips him with food and clothing for his flight. While she hastily packs the few necessary things she realizes that the boy whom she had sent to town has come back as a man. "The fragile quality seemed to have gone from his chin ... the lines of the lips were straighter,"

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<sup>1</sup>(1938), in John Steinbeck, The Long Valley (Rome: The Albatross, 1949), pp. 38-62.

and there is no laughter in his eyes any more. As rashly and inexperiencedly as he behaved in the pub does he flee up into the mountains. His mother and younger brother and sister who stay behind know that he will have to die. After a few days the pursuers catch up and Pepé having lost his horse, equipment, and his rifle, half dead with thirst and with a wound in his right hand, is shot near the ridge of a mountain.

The two death incidents, Pepé's manslaughter in the pub and his own death at the end of the story are the significant hinges of the action. Through the first incident the "gentle, affectionate boy" becomes a man. It finds a parallel at the end, when Pepé's premature manhood is cut short by a premature death. A series of incidents, such as Pepé's possession of a knife, his great skill in using it, the fatal accident, and the young man's death, are arranged in such a manner as to give the impression of inevitability.

Despite the similar motif of the hunt in both stories, this element of an inevitably approaching, irrevocable catastrophe sets Flight distinctly apart from Richard Connell's The Most Dangerous Game. On the other hand the critic will realize that the tragic element of inevitability in Steinbeck's story is somewhat weakened by the fact that it is revealed mainly by a great number of details of outer action. The structural element of external action at times gains such prominence that it seems to be the all-important quality of the story.

Pepé's change in character from playful youngster to man facing the harsh reality of life is ironically proved to be an illusion by the action. Yet, the reader unfortunately does not learn much about the fleeing man's frame of mind. He is portrayed as a fleeing animal driven by the fear of death. Although this adds considerably to the atmosphere of hopelessness, the reader will most probably feel that the motif of change from boy to man, as given at the beginning, does not find a fully

satisfactory expression in the rest of the story. The strong emphasis on the external action of Pepé's flight makes this initial thematic element appear to be almost a blind motif. The promised complexity suggested at the beginning gives way in the main part of the story to a clear linear presentation. Although obviously superior in artistic quality to Connell's The Most Dangerous Game through the poignant tone of inevitability and the fatal outcome, the contrast between youthful playing and the harsh reality of death, and the bitter irony underlying this picture of attaining manhood, Flight lacks the depth and multiplicity of meaning which many other of Steinbeck's stories display.<sup>1</sup>

Erskine Caldwell, in Kneel to the Rising Sun<sup>2</sup>, depicts with grim realism shocking events in the milieu of America's South. Lonnie who works with his family as a share-cropper on Arch Gunnard's plantations is too much of a coward to speak up to his disgustingly brutal, miserly, and unjust employer. When Lonnie's old father, Mark Newsome, leaves the house at night looking for something to eat, he falls into Gunnard's hog pen. He is killed and partly devoured by the animals. Clem Henry, a courageous Negro worker accuses Arch Gunnard by saying that the terrible accident is partly his fault, as he didn't provide his workers with sufficient food. The irate planter who has long been waiting for the occasion to put the Negro in his right place summons a group of farmers to catch him. After Lonnie has betrayed Clem, his only friend, Arch Gunnard and his followers lynch the Negro in a nearby forest.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. The White Quail (1938), The Red Pony (1938), The Chrysanthemums (1938), all in John Steinbeck, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>(1931), in Burrell and Cerf, An Anthology of Famous American Stories, pp. 1226-1245.

Death, in this action story, appears in the form of two death incidents, the grisly death of old Mark Newsome and the lynch death of the Negro Clem Henry. The first incident illustrates the desperate position in which Lonnie's family and the rest of the workers are and symbolizes the beastly cruelty of the employer Arch Gunnard. The final death incident demonstrates the outburst and culmination of racial and personal hatred and constitutes Lonnie's failure as a friend and man.

The general ideas incorporated in Caldwell's story are mainly a protest against brutal suppression of workers, against racial hatred, and against cowardice which leads to betrayal and participation in murder. Arch Gunnard's racial hatred is heightened by his personal hatred against the Negro, as he feels that Clem Henry is ethically superior to him. Lonnie's weakness is presented as unpardonable; it makes him allow his boss to suppress his family, betray his friend, and, thus, help to murder him. With the presentation of his hero Lonnie, Caldwell illustrates how cowardice can become a crime.

Although Kneel to the Rising Sun implies fairly complex thematic patterns, it cannot be regarded as a fully artistic success. The general ideas are too much dominated by the effects of horror springing from external action. Not only does the crude presentation of a terrifying reality dominate the moral problems implied, it suppresses them to such an extent that they appear to be of less than secondary importance. The layer of action is still transparent enough to suggest some significance in the layer of ideas. The author has, however, spent so much effort on creating his world of a more than harsh reality that the world of ideas behind it appears to be, much to the story's disadvantage, merely an additional, less significant ingredient.

The 'story-teller' Somerset Maugham is particularly interesting here, as he uses action in a more traditional sense than most of his contemporaries. Tightly "knit action" that proceeds "in an unbroken line from the exposition to the conclusion"<sup>1</sup> is one of Maugham's artistic aims. Apart from a lengthy flash-back middle part in which the hero's former life and career are told, The Outstation<sup>2</sup> conforms roughly to this ideal.

Mr. Warburton has been serving under a sultan as Resident of an outstation in the jungle of Borneo for twenty years. Although very sympathetic towards the native Malays, he sticks strictly to the rules of his European upbringing. He is distantly related to an aristocrat in Britain, reads the Times, and enjoys remembering his days at Eton and Oxford. When there is too much work to be done, Mr. Warburton asks for an assistant. Allen Cooper, a young man who was born in the West Indies, is sent from Kuala Solor. He appears to be competent but offensively mannerless. Mr. Cooper shows open dislike and contempt for the native Malays. When he maltreats his servant, Warburton warns him, but is only laughed at. Finally Cooper beats his Malay boy who takes revenge and kills his master. Warburton accepts his assistant's death as a just punishment and feels, as if "a great weight had been lifted from his mind."

Maugham uses the isolation of the jungle environment to juxtapose two extreme positions of character to one another: the one, a slightly snobbish, yet refined gentleman, the other, a young Colonial who simply has no manners. The contrast of the well-educated elder makes the younger man feel inferior, and drives him to aggressiveness.

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Dolch, "The Outstation," in John V. Nagopian and Martin Dolch (eds.), Insight II: Analyses of British Literature (Frankfurt: Hirschgraben-Verlag, 1965), p. 253.

<sup>2</sup>(1924), in W. Somerset Maugham, The Casuarina Tree: Six Stories (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1955), pp. 76-116.

The picture of a slightly more congenial Cooper and a less likeable Warburton at the beginning of the story is radically changed as soon as both men's attitudes towards the native population are demonstrated.

At the end the reader accepts Cooper's death as the logical conclusion of his worsening behaviour towards the Malays. It is foreshadowed in many ways, but most clearly by the warning of Warburton's headboy and the Resident's dream in which he sees Cooper lying in the jungle with a kris in his back.

Much of the outer action is dramatized and internalized. The reader learns most from dialogue and from the narrator's rendering the hero's thoughts and feelings. Yet the main emphasis is on external action. There is little related symbolism that would give the story further significance. It is through his outer action that the author presents the thematic conflict between Warburton's self-control, self-respect, civilized forms of behaviour, respect for a foreign way of living as well as respect for his own traditional values on the one hand and Cooper's pseudo-democratic contempt of nobility, of traditional values, and self-indulgence on the other.<sup>1</sup>

Maugham obviously leaves little doubt about which one of the two basic attitudes should be preferred. It is above all by means of his treatment of action, in particular his arrangement of the details of the external action towards a pointed final incident, Cooper's death, that he voices his opinion and gives this short story its moral weight. Through the layer of outer action and through the layer of characterization the conflict of moral values appears in the final layer of ideas that gives the story its artistic quality beyond its stress on external events.

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Dolch, loc. cit., p. 257

Hemingway's The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber<sup>1</sup> has been included in this section, as it appears to be a combination of two types of short stories, the story of action and the story of revelation.

An American couple, Francis Macomber and his wife Margot or Margaret are on a big-game safari in Africa. They are accompanied by the professionally competent English hunter Wilson. During an attempt at shooting a lion the inexperienced Macomber panics and runs away. The American is despised by his wife who, during the night, leaves her husband to join the hunter in his tent. Ashamed and humiliated Francis Macomber wishes to make up for his cowardice on a buffalo hunt. They wound a few animals, and when one enormous bull charges the party, Macomber suddenly experiences an unknown sensation of courage. He fires a couple of shots at the attacking bull without giving way. When the bull seems "about to gore Macomber," Margot shoots her husband killing him instantly.

The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber is fairly complex for the genre of the short story. What allows the critic to classify it as a modern one is the fact that it concentrates on two closely related situations which can be regarded as limit-situations according to the foregoing definitions.<sup>2</sup> A few remarks on the function of death in this story may help to affirm this assumption. The central character is certainly Francis Macomber. Neither the woman nor Wilson face the challenges which Francis Macomber has to struggle with. Margot sits in the car or stands at a safe distance from the actual centres of danger, enjoying her observer position. To Wilson big-game hunting has become a routine requiring professionally correct behaviour rather than

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<sup>1</sup>(1936), in The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway, pp. 102-136.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Karl Jaspers's statements, above, Part I, Chapter V, 3.

the conflict of overcoming fear.

To the inexperienced Francis Macomber both events, his confrontation with the wounded lion and with the charging buffalo, constitute limit-situations. Unlike Wilson he sees in the attacking lion his certain death and runs. Macomber's reaction here is instinctive behaviour resulting from fear that cannot be evaluated in isolation. When he has time to reflect on the significance of his action for his own self-respect, he wishes to prove that he is able to master his natural yet unmanly reactions.

The now experienced Francis Macomber faces the second danger in a completely different manner. Once he has taken the initiative he realizes with amazement that he feels perfectly at home with the new sensation of courage. He has acquired a new vitality and independence. He feels he can and finally does rely completely on his own ability and courage. Wilson feels this change before the actual shooting and readily accepts and understands it as a "coming of age." The hunter gets a bit talkative "as football players are in the dressing room after a game,"<sup>1</sup> whereas Mrs. Macomber suddenly is "very afraid of something." It is not absolutely clear here of what the woman is afraid. Is it that she fears to lose her husband, as Wilson tells her at the end, or is it that she fears that Francis, having become too courageous, might be killed?

At this point two basically different interpretations seem possible. The majority of critics accepts Wilson's word for what has happened and believes that Margot has deliberately shot her husband. Frank O'Connor, in The Lonely Voice, voices this opinion with sarcastic witticism and derives from this possible interpretation his negative

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<sup>1</sup>The narrator about Nick's father in Hemingway's Indian Camp; cf. interpretation of the story above, Part II, Chapter VII, 2.

value judgement:

In "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" Francis runs away from a lion, which is what most sensible men would do if faced by a lion, and his wife promptly cuckolds him with the English manager of their big-game hunting expedition. As we all know, good wives admire nothing in a husband except his capacity to deal with lions, so we can sympathize with the poor woman in her trouble. But next day Macomber, faced with a buffalo, suddenly becomes a man of superb courage, and his wife, recognizing that Cressida's occupation's gone and that for the future she must be a virtuous wife, blows his head off. Yet the title leaves us with the comforting assurance that the triumph is still Macomber's, for, in spite of his sticky end, he had at last learned the only way of keeping his wife out of other men's beds.<sup>1</sup>

Although justly putting his finger on one of the weak points of the story and of Hemingway's art in general, it seems that O'Connor here says things neatly rather than exactly.

Warren Beck, in a thorough and sensitive study of the story, comes to a radically different conclusion.<sup>2</sup> Assuming that one should "question not just Wilson's credibility as a witness but his comprehension of Mrs. Macomber and the Macomber's human situation,"<sup>3</sup> Warren Beck concludes that Hemingway had hardly conceived the story within the hunter's limited view. After trying to prove that Mrs. Macomber is a much more likeable person than Wilson sees her he states that she "too had a happy moment of a kind, in which she wished and tried to save her husband, with that access of recognition and penitence and hope in which love can renew itself."<sup>4</sup> Interpreted like this the story, according to Warren, would appear "more profound ... more human in substance, and larger and more subtle ... than Hemingway has been credited with by those who

<sup>1</sup>O'Connor, *op. cit.*, pp. 168f.

<sup>2</sup>Warren Beck, "The Shorter Happy Life of Mrs. Macomber," *Modern Fiction Studies*, I (1955), pp. 28-37.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

have taken Wilson's word for it."<sup>1</sup>

But even if the reader accepts the first possibility of understanding the story's meaning, there is more to The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber than Frank O'Connor's witty comment would suggest. It seems a bit crude to harp upon the fact that men are not normally confronted by lions. It is simply surface reading to maintain that Hemingway merely suggests that "the only way of keeping [one's] ... wife out of other men's beds"<sup>2</sup> is to show courage in the face of a charging lion or bull. Certainly Hemingway uses as his external action the extreme situation of big-game hunting. But obviously, the story has more to offer than this surface action.

Action in The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber becomes transparent to the careful reader and reveals, on the layer of ideas, a more subtle significance. The important thing in the story is Francis Macomber's inner change. Lion and bull are merely external agents of this process of gaining maturity. It is significant to note that Hemingway has connected the second, more important event, Francis' rehabilitation, with the bull, the more dangerous game of the two. The two impulses could be replaced symbolically by any other threat with a similar effect. Francis Macomber can be understood as symbolizing a man who, taken by surprise by some unknown quality in an otherwise expected threat, panics like Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim, but, unlike Conrad's hero, on a second attempt gains a spiritual position which is adequately described by Hemingway as "coming of age."

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> F. O'Connor, op. cit., p. 169.

b. Action in the Modern Short Story  
and the Importance of its Being  
Transparent

Comparing the use of action in the two extremes, the novel and the short story, one will discover differences which well support the notion that the two genres differ from one another not only in degree, but in kind. Two elements in the treatment of action may serve here as a measure. The one is transparency, the ability of a story's action to reveal itself as significant in the layer of ideas. Thinking in spatial terms one could call this quality the story's third dimension. The other element is what Gordon and Tate, in The House of Fiction, label "enveloping action," or, "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."<sup>1</sup> To remain in the given spatial terminology one could, perhaps, call this extension of the action the story's second dimension, leaving the term first dimension to the action's immediate presentation in the story.

Transparency in itself surely does not provide an essential difference between the two genres. It is the particular transparency the short story writer usually employs which makes this element interesting here. Due to the structural laws of brevity the short story, unlike the novel, can only depict a very limited section of human life. Life-stories in the short story form have been rejected by the majority of important writers as aesthetically dissatisfying. The short story writer who wishes to give his tiny piece as high an artistic value as a novelist can bestow upon his complex work must make the presented fragment meaningful far beyond

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon and Tate, op. cit., p. 451.

its narrow immediately visible limitations.<sup>1</sup>

This process of giving a very short piece of fiction more and more complex meaning can be observed within the evolution of the short story. External action such as suspenseful, physical events in adventure stories gradually becomes internalized. Significant internal changes, spiritual and psychological conditions, are presented. In addition to this both external and internal action may be given more and more complex symbolic meaning.

The coherent pattern of such symbolized outer and inner action appears as a projected coherent and meaningful pattern in the layers of ideas. It is the degree to which the short story and the novel depend on this transparency that constitutes a difference. The long novel is not suited to carry the densely woven symbolism of action which can give a short story high literary rank.<sup>2</sup> If the short story lacks transparency of action, it lacks multiplicity of meaning and is stuck in the surface level of action (one of the middle layers) and is of little interest beyond its immediately presented reality. It is one of the outstanding characteristics of the typically modern short story that its external action tends to be very slight, whereas the inner action is depicted with deliberate care. It is there where the important dramatic changes take place.

Practically every piece of fiction has "enveloping action." Yet, it "remains inert unless it can be brought into the story through the immediate situations of the leading character."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This involves, of course, the whole question of symbolism in the short story, a problem which will be discussed at least partially below,

<sup>2</sup>There are, however, examples of novels with densely symbolic action such as Kafka's Trial, which is not a very long novel, or Joyce's Finnegan's Wake which is barely intelligible due to its complexity.

<sup>3</sup>Gordon and Tate, op.cit., p. 451.

This statement applies to the short story much more than to the novel. The presented reality in the novel can most adequately be described with 'the world of the novel.' It is a whole complex, artistic world in itself which the novelist creates. And the existence of such an "enveloping action" is much easier to grasp in the novel than in the short story. There are indefinitely more hints suggesting a 'before and after,' a 'besides' or 'behind' in the complex reality than in the "slice of life." It needs considerably greater artistic skill to establish the short story's place in the "enveloping world" within the narrow limitations of its form. This is not to say, of course, that the novel is easier to write than the short story; the novelist faces other and, perhaps, greater difficulties.

The relationship between the short story's immediate action and its "enveloping action" is reflected by the relationship between topicality and universality. The more a short story tends to be restricted to its immediate action and is not able to point beyond its narrow frame to a larger context, the more must it be called topical. The more it is able to illustrate its significance, if projected onto its "enveloping action" or "world," the more it gains in universality. It is at this point that "enveloping action" and transparency meet. The degree to which a story is able to present both could be suggested as a measurement of how far the treatment of action is aesthetically satisfying.

4. Death and the Function of Point-of-View

a. Case Studies

Joyce's The Sisters<sup>1</sup> must be regarded as an early example of a very conscious and intricate handling of point-of-view in the evolution of the modern short story. A few comments on a possible interpretation of The Sisters may serve as an introduction to this chapter.

In his often-quoted criticism of The Sisters W.Y. Tindall states that "this story is a riddle" and "nothing comes quite clear."<sup>2</sup> Obviously to Tindall the story's enigmatic quality is above all an element of confusion. So much so that his remark, "riddle became obsessive theme"<sup>3</sup> to Joyce, appears to apply, ironically, as much to his own criticism of The Sisters. A more fruitful approach to the story's meaning is promised by an interpretation by Thomas E. Connolly<sup>4</sup> who describes the theme of The Sisters simply as "the response that the boy [who narrates the story] makes to the death of his old friend, Father Flynn."<sup>5</sup>

This may sound rather unimaginative. Yet, by summing the story up as a boy's response to a death incident Connolly not only points out the story's thematic direction, but also focuses on its basic constitutive technical device. Joyce's story is consistently recorded from the point-of-view of the young first-person narrator. The author's choice of this particular narrator is, of course,

<sup>1</sup>(1914), in Harry Levin (ed.), The Essential James Joyce (London: Jonathan Cape, 1948), pp. 22-29.

<sup>2</sup>W. Y. Tindall, A Reader's Guide to James Joyce (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas E. Connolly, "Joyce's 'The Sisters': A Pennyworth of Snuff," College English, XXVII (1965), pp. 189-195.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

deliberate. It bears on the story as a single piece of art as well as on its position and function within the frame given by the title and arrangement of Dubliners.

Through the eyes of the young boy the reader is presented with an external and an internal reality. The external reality comprises everything the boy sees and hears, outer action in general, and in particular people's opinions of and attitudes to his dead friend. There is a public view of Father Flynn expressed by the unsympathetic Cotter and the more private view of Nannie and Eliza, the dead man's sisters. As internal reality the boy offers the reader his own thoughts and feelings and through both his inability to grasp intellectually the meaning of what surrounds him.

The boy's deep and sensitive interest in the world around him and his inability to bring into proper rational relationship what confronts him find expression in a sentence which appears to be significant as a key to The Sisters as well as an authorial motto of the whole sequence of stories. Gazing up at the dying man's window the boy remembers, among other disturbing terms, the word "paralysis" and records, "it filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work."

Repulsion and interest are the two poles in the boy's response to reality in The Sisters. Interest and repulsion are also the two main elements which appear to have fascinated the author of Dubliners, portraying his town filled with paralysis and death.

The death incident in The Sisters functions as a final point in the relation between the narrator and his old teacher. It serves also as an initial point in a new phase of the boy's life. Father Flynn's death constitutes a pointed experience through which the boy is made partially aware of what his friend and teacher had been. Instead of a clear picture he receives contradictory glimpses

of Father Flynn, complicated even by his own conflicting memories. The old priest's death is the impulse to the boy's partial initiation into the cognition of the disillusioning complexity of life. At the very beginning of his rationally conscious life the boy realizes that Good and Evil only appear in disturbing combinations. By constantly emphasizing their brother's honesty and worthiness despite his misfortune of having broken the holy chalice the sisters only heighten the boy's doubt and vague assumptions, nourished by earlier instinctive reactions on his part. In the morning he had felt a "sensation of freedom as if ... [he] had been freed from something by his death."

Joyce has not allowed the narrator to give more information to the reader than he is able to give to himself. Hence the impression that the story is a riddle. On the other hand the effect of the mystery of life into which the boy is initiated is considerably enhanced by this restricted point-of-view. Joyce has preserved a deeper, yet still partial insight for the hero of the last and best story in Dubliners, The Dead.<sup>1</sup> A complete insight into man's spiritual position in his home town was kept to the author himself and is revealed in the sequence of Dubliners as a whole.

William Faulkner, one of the undisputed masters of the modern short story, is very sensitive to the possibilities of the treatment of point-of-view in this short form of prose fiction. In his famous A Rose for Emily<sup>2</sup> he makes the point-of-view one of the revealing clues to the deeper understanding of the story.

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<sup>1</sup>(1914), in H. Levin, op. cit., pp. 139-174.

<sup>2</sup>(1924), in Ray B. West (ed.), American Short Stories (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1966), pp. 187-192.

Miss Emily Grierson, an old lady of Jefferson dies. The narrator reviews her life from her early days as the daughter of a dignified Southern aristocrat who rejects all the suitors for Emily. Dying he leaves his daughter alone in the old house, with only a Negro man-servant to attend to her. A Yankee foreman with whom she falls in love disappears. Completely shut away from the town community Emily lives her lonely life towards her death. After the funeral curiosity drives people to investigate her house. In a locked room they find the rotted corpse of that young foreman lying on the wedding bed. Miss Emily had poisoned him with arsenic nearly half a century ago.

A Rose for Emily approaches very closely the assumed pure ideal of the modern short story form. The funeral is the occasion which serves as an impulse for the narrator and as a structuring motif in the story. The old lady's death is the restricted theme through which the author makes his narrator reveal a case history in a broken chronology. The particular time-arrangement supports the progressive revelation of horror. Space is handled very consciously to give it meaning beyond its importance on a realistic surface level. There is a speaking relationship between the immediately presented spaces, the narrow space of Emily's house and the town of Jefferson, and the implied space of the American South. This relationship is paralleled by the treatment of action. The immediate action of a horror story gains universal validity on the level of the "enveloping action." The mad, perverse lady becomes a symbol of the old Southern form of society. Her actions symbolize the decay of the wider 'action' of Southern history.

The main clue to the transparency of all these different structural elements is Faulkner's subtle use of his narrator. On the occasion of Emily's death a series of significant fragments

from the woman's life come to the narrator's mind and form a logical, yet limited picture.

The narrator contrasts Emily's world with the world of the growing town. Her house, her dignified manners, her refusal to pay taxes are anachronisms which stand in a strong contrast to the modern way of life. Around her house "garages" and "cotton gins" symbolize a new era. The effect of the narrator's record of details and his inability to see their larger meaning is enhanced by the fact that the narrator is a man of Jefferson, a fellow-citizen. His relatively little spatial distance from his narrated object finds an ironical contrast in the unbridgeable distance which separates him from the unfortunate woman.

As the main theme Faulkner clearly wishes to make his narrator reveal the decadence of the American South. And in fact, the experienced reader will discover under the narrator's surface reality the more meaningful reality of a Southern way of life being threatened and slowly abolished by the progressing Northern civilization.

Miss Emily is given many of the positive and all the negative qualities of a by-gone Southern generation. She is the last, stubborn remainder of the South, proud and decadent, aloof and corrupt. When the North, symbolized by an irresponsible, handsome foreman, seduces the South, the clash of the opposing forces and values leads to disaster. The defeated South resorts to a horrifying method to be able to go on living. The "marriage" between the two conflicting values is doomed to fail. The rotted corpse does not bring forth any children, and with Emily's end, the South dies a symbolic death. Outside the Southern "angel's" sphere, however, the North has taken over and "Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps - an eyesore among eyesores." The funeral, once more reviving Southern ideals in the old men's "brushed Confederate uniforms," is followed by the discovery

of the "town monument's" crime and apparent insanity.

The narrator recalls the final experience as a Gothic horror event, whereas to the sensitive reader it reveals itself beyond its realistic level as the culmination of the author's thematic development: the fall of the South.

Like Hemingway in The Killers Faulkner uses the threat of death as a revealing motif in That Evening Sun.<sup>1</sup> Both Nick who is about fifteen and Quentin who is about nine years old are initiated into the knowledge of evil forces of the adult world. Both are only partly comprehending. But whereas Hemingway uses a dominantly scenic presentation revealing the hero's experiences objectively through dialogue, Faulkner heightens the reader's impression of Quentin's limited understanding by having the action seen through his eyes.

The grown-up narrator Quentin Compson remembers how Nancy, their Negro laundress, experienced the threat of violence and death, when he was a boy of nine years. After a general introduction into the place and time, Jefferson and "now," the adult narrator recalls in a flash-back what happened "fifteen years ago." The general verb form "would" ("Nancy would set her bundle on the top of her head") is soon replaced by the past tense and direct speech ("'What yawl mean, chunking my house?', Nancy said."). The rest of the story is told from young Quentin's limited point-of-view. Through his eyes the reader is given Nancy's affair with Mr. Stovall, a bank cashier and deacon in the Baptist Church. She is jailed for accusing Mr. Stovall of not having paid for his three last visits to her. A conversation between her husband and Nancy is witnessed by Quentin and his younger brothers who do not understand Nancy's pregnancy nor her husband's threats. Shortly

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<sup>1</sup>(1931), in Matlaw and Lief, op. cit., pp. 31-45.

afterwards Jesus leaves her, but threatens to come back and kill her for having betrayed him with a White man. From this moment onwards the Negro woman lives with the growing fear of a violent death.

When Dilsey, the cook of the Compson family, falls ill, Nancy is asked to take her place. She stays over night and Quentin, unlike his younger brothers, partly understands the anguish which the woman experiences. Soon Dilsey is able to work again and Nancy has to go home. Afraid of being attacked by her violent husband in the dark she takes the children with her. Paralyzed with terror Nancy is unable to make the children stay with her by telling them stories. Quentin's sympathetic father finally fetches the children and offers to take Nancy to a friend. The Negro woman, however, has reached a stage of terror which makes her resign. "'I reckon I going to get ain't no more than mine,'" she says and leaves her door open for her murderer to enter.

As in A Rose for Emily the reader understands more than the observer. Unlike the unimaginative citizen of Jefferson, however, Quentin is a silent and perceptive child who remembers nuances which only later become meaningful and form a comprehensible pattern.

Again Faulkner seems to offer a horror story in the Gothic tradition. But soon the sensitive reader realizes a transparency in the story which relates it to Hemingway's similar attempt in The Killers. On a surface level Jesus appears as the stock figure of the black villain. At closer reading, however, his attitude is shown as clearly motivated and understandable. He has been betrayed by his wife in the only thing he can properly call his own, his love and is unable to call the White man to account for his crime. "'I cant hang around white man's kitchen,' Jesus said, 'But white man can hang around mind. White man can come in my house, I ain't got no house.'"

Through Quentin's subtle observations the whole action becomes transparent, revealing the powerful forces of sex, convention, and crime: Nancy's betrayal of love, her shirking the responsibility to face her punishment, the injustice and hypocrisy of the White South as represented by Mr. Stovall, and the Negro woman's final resignation in her fate.

Although only partly comprehending what is going on Quentin is able to feel the atmosphere preceding Nancy's violent death. Even if the reader does not know that Faulkner intended Nancy's death to happen - in The Sound and the Fury Nancy is murdered by Jesus who leaves her corpse to the vultures -, the whole story is so completely dominated by the expectation of fatal violence that one can regard Nancy's future death as the pivot of the story. Every detail is arranged toward this final event. As in The Killers the death incident is not important in itself, it is the threat it makes to man and its function of revealing moral problems and man's attitude to them.

The process of initiation into this complex world that the young Quentin experiences finds an end and resolution with Faulkner's having the twenty-four-year-old man attempt to grasp it by giving it the artistic form of a narrative. The limited point-of-view of the young boy differs essentially from that of the narrator in A Rose for Emily in that it is potentially identical with the sensitive reader's understanding of the events. It only needs the perceptive Quentin to grow up to see the past events as transparent, whereas the narrator in the earlier story has only the average ability of recognizing logical interrelations on a surface level.

In both stories Faulkner succeeds in making his artistically arranged materials meaningful beyond their immediate action. The limited point-of-view gives them a transparency and subtle pluri-significance. It is by means of this device that the

author is able to give a short piece of fiction considerable artistic weight, and it seems that this kind of limited point-of-view adds to the author's achievement of dense brevity.

A much anthologized story is Ring Lardner's Haircut.<sup>1</sup> It may serve here as a revealing example of how a writer can exploit the device of a first-person narrator as an unreliable witness.

The whole story is a garrulous barber's monologue. The barber's routine questions to his customer, "You're a newcomer, ain't you?" at the beginning and, "Comb it wet or dry?" at the end give the story a matter-of-fact frame and, at the same time, form a strong contrast to the tragedy the listener is told in between.

After a few introductory remarks the barber, in order to stir the stranger's interest, mentions the death of one of his favourite customers, Jim Kendall. He describes him as a comical character, always prepared to make a practical joke. Although the barber goes on stressing Jim's good qualities, he cannot help gradually revealing the man's irresponsibility towards his wife and children and his appalling sadism against inferiors, in particular against the half-wit boy Paul Dickson whom he chooses again and again as the object of his cruel jokes. Poor Paul Dickson is befriended by Doc Stair and a young spinster Julie Gregg. Doc Stair is described as a young physician who has retreated to this provincial town to become an all-round practitioner and to forget some affair with a woman. The barber portrays him as a good-looking sympathetic fellow ready to help where he can. It is he who starts teaching the half-wit and maintains that he can notice first successes, when Paul reacts like a normal sensible boy. Julie Gregg is characterized by the gossiping barber as having

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon and Tate, op. cit., pp. 231-239.

fallen in love with the Doc at first sight. Being too well-educated to be able to communicate satisfactorily with the people of the small town she hopes desperately that her love will be returned by Doc Stair.

A conflict arises when Jim Kendall, the vulgarly comical town hero, starts to pursue Julie Gregg. Rejected by her he takes revenge by tricking her into visiting Doc Stair's house at night only to be mocked at by Jim Kendall and his drunken friends who had been hiding nearby.

Paul Dickson who regards Julie Gregg as one of his protectors reports the incident to Doc Stair. In a sudden reaction he says to the mentally deficient boy "that anybody that would do a thing like that ought not to be let live." When Jim takes poor Paul along duck-shooting, most probably to "play some joke on him," the half-wit shoots and kills him.

Despite the barber's insensitivity to the tragic complication the careful reader realizes the strong element of inevitability that pervades the story. The death incident which is given at the beginning and the end of the story functions as the structural point towards which the details are arranged. It is the poetic justice of this incident which makes it acceptable for the reader. At the same time, it reveals the basic irony of the story: the barber-narrator, the one who should know most, is, as Gordon and Tate observe, apparently least qualified to tell it. He "sees the action at a low level, and in the discrepancy between the way he sees it and the reader's sense of what it must actually have been lies the central dramatic interest."<sup>1</sup>

The barber's obvious misrepresentation of Jim Kendall's character as "a good fella at heart" leads the reader to reverse the view offered by

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 440

the insensitive narrator. The story becomes transparent rather despite than through the barber's limited perceptions. Seen in the form of a graphical model the process of revelation by the narrator and understanding of the reader can be represented by two lines both starting at the same point, the barber's first mentioning of Jim Kendall, and moving more and more asunder at a wide angle. One could push the analogy between model and fictional reality a little further by assuming that the narrator's line has a beginning and definite end, whereas the reader's could be regarded as a vector that points beyond the immediately offered scope of the story towards universal understanding.

This insight leads necessarily to a careful re-reading and new appreciation of Haircut. The simple concept of character as it appears in the barber's mind will have to give way to a more subtle analysis and understanding of more complex psychological patterns. Julie Gregg, the young woman who is "too good" for the simple people of that small town, appears to be a frustrated young woman cheated out of her higher aims of a well-to-do family by circumstances. Her father died as a drunkard and her mother, who is a "half invalid," does not wish to move to a more promising place. Having attended schools in "Chicago and New York and different places," she is frustratedly aware of the discrepancy between her actual reality and her possible reality, her dreams.

Once the barber's unreliability as a witness has been accepted it is only logical to reject his presentation of Jim Kendall as the story's central character. As Melvin Goldstein emphasizes, the actual centre of Lardner's masterpiece is the quiet, helpful Doc Stair.<sup>1</sup> A careful reading will

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<sup>1</sup>Melvin Goldstein, "A Note on a Perfect Crime," Literature and Psychology, XI (1961), pp. 65-67.

reveal a series of details that seem to prove this assumption convincingly. The young doctor has certainly advantages over the people in town. His position as a physician and coroner protects him from attacks, even from direct ones by Jim Kendall. As one of the protectors and the psychiatrist of the mentally deficient Paul Dickson he has an immense control over a naturally faithful person in town. When he finally, after "a lot of figuring," passes into the boy's defenseless mind the idea "that anybody that would do a thing like that ought not to be let live," violence takes its inevitable course. Killing with a shotgun is only one possible way in which Paul Dickson followed his master's indirect advice.

It can be argued, of course, that the young doctor passed that fatal sentence in an uncontrolled moment of anger. And yet, it seems hardly convincing that a sensible man should forget himself so unpardonably in the presence of a half-wit patient. Moreover, Doc Stair's advantage of being able to protect the boy as a physician and coroner is only too obvious. He "rushes out" to the lake, certifies Jim Kendall's death and assures the witnesses that "they was no use leavin' it there or callin' a jury, as it was a plain case of accidental shootin'."

Unlike Faulkner who in A Rose for Emily and That Evening Sun uses his two narrators as limited observers the one of which at least suggests a deeper meaning, Ring Lardner employs a narrator who, completely insensitive to the tragedy which he is recording, provides the reader with a perverted picture of his narrated reality which becomes meaningful only, if the reader reverses the perceptions of the limited barber-narrator and tries to reconstruct what had actually happened.

b. General Comments on the Use  
of Point-of-View in the  
Modern Short Story

An obvious difference between the way a novelist treats the device of point-of-view and the way a short story writer does lies in the fact that the latter normally omits the shifting point-of-view and sticks to his chosen viewpoint throughout the story. The main reason for this is that the homogeneity of a brief work would be endangered, its density lessened, by a frequent change of point-of-view, whereas the same device can add considerably to the complexity and artistic quality of long pieces of fiction.

The possible artistic control that can be exerted on the device of point-of-view has been demonstrated briefly but only with examples with first-person narrators. For the sake of completeness the basic types of point-of-view must be mentioned. There are three major methods: an internal one, embracing the devices of first-person narrators, an external one, including the omniscient narrator, the concealed and observer narrator, and a third device combining many advantages of the two first groups, the method of the Central Intelligence.

The device of the first-person narrator can be subdivided into one having the I-narrator as a main character and one with the narrator as a minor character of the story; or, evaluatively, into the devices of employing the narrator as a reliable or an unreliable witness of what he recalls. The conspicuous advantage of the last device employing a biased report as a major constituent of the story is demonstrated in Melville's Bartleby, Anderson's I Want to Know Why, Hemingway's My Old Man, Kafka's The Married Couple, Lardner's Ex Parte, and the four stories discussed in this chapter, to give only a few examples.<sup>1</sup> The particular significance of this method for the

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Table of short stories, below, pp. 433-436.

modern short story will be summed up below.<sup>1</sup>

Within the group of the external point-of-view there is a tendency to move from a completely omniscient author-narrator method towards the point-of-view of the concealed narrator and the strictly limited one of the observer narrator. A completely omniscient point-of-view is, usually, not a very promising device for the short story writer. It tends to comment rather than to dramatize, to fill in what the modern short story writer commonly wishes to leave to the reader's imagination. It has, however, beautifully handled in a story like Aiken's Silent Snow, Secret Snow, where the narrator takes on the role of a psychiatrist and follows carefully the process of the child's mental disintegration. The temptation to resort to panoramic presentation and summary (as the narrator knows everything) by the omniscient point-of-view has been mastered here by the author's concentration on the implied final death incident and the significant details leading up to this point.<sup>2</sup>

A limited omniscient point-of-view is perfectly handled in Thomas Mann's Unordnung und frühes Leid (Disorder and Early Sorrow), where the authorial comments give way largely to dramatization and concentration on Professor Dr. Cornelius' consciousness. If this concentration on the consciousness of one major character were predominant, the point-of-view would become that of a Central Intelligence.<sup>3</sup>

The inventor of the concealed narrator, Flaubert, "takes the reader by the hand," in his Madame Bovary (1859), "and induces him to plunge into the consciousness of a character so that the reader seems to see with the eyes of that character,

<sup>1</sup>See below, pp. 29of.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Part II, Chapter VII, 6.

<sup>3</sup>See below, p. 29o.

hear with his ears, experience the tactile or gustatory sensations which he experiences."<sup>1</sup> The point-of-view in this method tends to shift from one centre of observation to another and, thus, demands space-consuming complexity. It has, however, been employed in an excellent shorter piece of prose fiction, in Crane's The Open Boat.<sup>2</sup> The concealed narrator changes his point-of-view constantly, having the given fictional reality experienced in turn by the four men in the boat. At the same time the narrator organizes these experiences towards the tragic culmination of the story. At one moment the concealed narrator may identify himself with one character, then again may experience the world through the mind of any other character in the story. He must never, however, show his active part as a narrator. This is what distinguishes this device clearly from the method of the omniscient point-of-view.

In revolt against the psychological method, which has been led perhaps to an unsurpassable peak by James Joyce, a group of writers, mainly of the 'lost generation' and among them particularly Hemingway developed a seemingly more objective method of story telling in which the narrator tells the story as an observer. Contrary to the omniscient method or the device of the concealed narrator the narrator here avoids rendering psychological states and deliberately restricts his view to gestures, words, and visible action. To give a story told in this way the necessary artistic weight the author resorts strongly to symbolism. An outstanding advantage of the observer narrator device is that it can achieve great objectivity and verisimilitude. It can also give the reader considerable satisfaction,

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon and Tate, op. cit., p. 443.

<sup>2</sup>(1898), in Wallace and Mary Stegner (eds.), Great American Short Stories (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 257-286.

as it is largely up to him to discover what has been left unsaid. O'Connor points out one of the dangers of this deliberately objective method of presenting fictional reality by criticizing Hemingway, in his Hills Like White Elephants, as leaving so much to the reader's imagination that the final artistic effect remains vague and dissatisfying.<sup>1</sup>

A method combining many of the advantages of the external and internal devices of point-of-view is that of the Central Intelligence. Invented and widely used by Henry James it has reached perfection in the art of James Joyce. In the last story of his collection Dubliners, The Dead, the device of the Central Intelligence is employed according to the Jamesian style in that "we see nothing that Gabriel Conroy [the hero] does not see"<sup>2</sup> as well as in a more complicated way in that Gabriel Conroy is made to see "himself as a very different fellow at the end of the story from the fellow he fancied himself at the beginning."<sup>3</sup> A necessary result of the subtle and gradual revelation of Gabriel Conroy's inner change is a relative complexity. This element is underlined by the fact that The Dead not only functions as merely one part within a cycle of stories, but also forms its structural and thematic conclusion. An interpretation of the story has naturally to be aware of this fact which gives The Dead a unique place in the art of the modern short story.<sup>4</sup>

To add a few concluding remarks to the stories discussed in the first part of this section on different techniques of point-of-view the preference given to stories told in the first person

<sup>1</sup>F. O'Connor, op. cit., pp. 166f. However, O'Connor's criticism appears only justified as far as it points out the danger which this method implies. The story is nevertheless a masterpiece.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon and Tate, op. cit., p. 445.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>A similarly striking effect is achieved by the final story in Faulkner's collection Go Down, Moses.

shall be briefly defended.

This very old device of having a narrator record his own experiences is often used by the masters of the modern short story in a new and striking way. The author's stress on the unreliability or, at least, limited power of perception seems to have much in common with Bertold Brecht's attitude as revealed in his emphasis on Verfremdung.<sup>1</sup> By making familiar things appear unfamiliar the fictional world, like the world in Brecht's epic-dialectical theatre, acquires a new dimension. The process of understanding becomes more sophisticated; the simple fictional illusion is broken and replaced by a consciousness of and alertness to the author's potential artifices. Thus, the distance between story and reader is significantly enlarged, a greater detachment on the part of the reader is achieved, and new possibilities for the writer are opened.

For the modern short story this new handling of an old device is of particular significance. It enables the writer to pack into his short piece of fiction additional reality, a reality which contradicts or at least enlarges the one offered by the narrator, a reality which has to be reconstructed as it were from between the lines. It is then, perhaps, permissible to conclude that the first-person observer's point-of-view, combined with an unreliable or, at least, limited narrator can be regarded as a device calculated to add considerably to dense brevity in the modern short story.

As a concluding remark the fact should be stressed again that in their objectification in individual pieces of fiction these different devices of point-of-view usually overlap and appear in mixed form. It should also be emphasized that the means of point-of-view, like other structural elements, will always appear, in good fiction, as interrelated with all other technical details in order to form a homogeneous whole.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. "A Little Organum for the Theatre," trans. B. Gottlieb in Accent (Urbana), XI, I (1951).

5. Death and the Function  
of Tone and Atmosphere

a. Case Studies

Tone is understood here as the author's attitude towards his presented fictional reality. Tonal unity would then be the author's consistency in this attitude. Atmosphere is employed in Barbara Pannwitt's sense as "the emotional effect of the physical setting and external action or of the psychological aspect of character and internal action."<sup>1</sup> The death incidents in the stories to be discussed in this section will be shown to function as tonal and atmospheric pivots from which or towards which the individual tone and atmosphere are developed. Two basic ways of tonal presentation seem to be employed in the modern short story. The one uses a sensitive narrator who is in accordance with the little world which he presents, the other exploits the device of an ironical discrepancy between fictional reality and its intentional or unintentional misrepresentation by the narrator. Having a death incident as a major constituent most of the stories will contain a final element of tragedy.<sup>2</sup>

In Chekhov's The Lament the author has his omniscient narrator present his fictional reality in a constant, sympathizing tone creating a dense atmosphere of grief. The only modification of tone and atmosphere may be seen in the fact that the reader, at the end of the story, is able to grasp the old father's sad situation as tragedy. The melancholy atmosphere created by the image of the old, snow-covered, lonely cab-driver waiting for customers in a Petersburg winternight is gradually intensified until it reaches the heavy atmosphere

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Pannwitt, The Art of Short Fiction (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1964), p. 474; cf. also p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Exceptions are stories with a stress on the comic or macabre; light fiction is disregarded here.

of desperate grief. The contrast between a busy capital and the loneliness of one of its inhabitants displays a tone of bitter irony which heightens the predominantly heavy tone of Chekhov's story. Not a single detail is allowed to disturb this tonal unity by a note of bathos. Together with old Jonas the reader descends more and more into the depths of solitary grief.

Katherine Mansfield's Life of Ma Parker, a story that seems to have been influenced by The Lament displays a similar curve of tone and atmosphere. The key-notes of sympathy and grief are sounded at the beginning of the story with little Lennie's death. Yet it is only towards the end that the reader realizes the full meaning and shattering impact that this incident has on Ma Parker and consequently on himself. The insensitive "literary gentleman" has a function similar to that of the unsympathetic characters in Chekhov's Lament. In both cases these characters serve as foils to underline the loneliness and depth of the hero's suffering. In Life of Ma Parker the atmosphere of grief is heightened through the fact that the perceptive and sympathetic concealed narrator presents the heroine as an extraordinarily brave woman who, only after she realizes that her sad life appears to be annihilated with the last terrible blow of her grandson's death, finally breaks down. Her dammed-up emotions accumulate with her conscious memories of all the harsh experiences she has had in her life and try to free themselves in a final moment of despair. At the end the tragic tone is intensified by the fact that, unlike Chekhov's old cabdriver who at least has a stable and a horse where and to whom he can tell his grief, old Ma Parker is not even allowed to succumb to her pain.

Poe, who apparently attempts to give a model of a grotesque story in his The Masque of the Red Death, sticks deliberately to his once chosen tone and atmosphere. The element of the grotesque appears to be both a tonal as well as an atmospheric quality. As a particular tone it reveals itself as the author's attitude to distort reality and make familiar things appear as unfamiliar, as an atmospheric quality the grotesque is realized by the reader as an effect exerted on him by the disturbing fictional reality presented.

Only to the very insensitive reader can the end of the story come as an unprepared for surprise. The initial element of the grotesque is gradually intensified until it is resolved in the final catastrophe only to go having its effect on the reader's mind. Poe's atmospheric effects in this story depend almost exclusively on colour. The few effects of sound, the warning chimes of the ebony clock, or the ceasing of the music are subjected to those of meaningfully arranged patches of colour.

The characteristic colours of the Red Death, red and black, form the logical contrast to and ironical culmination of the colourful gaiety in the Prince's environment. The irony which springs from the discrepancy between Prince Prospero's pretentious attitude in the face of the plague and his gradually approaching and inevitable end is reflected, too, in the arrangement of colour effects. Gaiety predominates in the dresses of the majority of the dancers and in the earlier chambers. Now and then, however, a note of warning, a sign of reminding of the forbidden character of the whole performance, can be perceived. Darker colours mix with lighter tones, till towards the final chambers the colours of foreboding predominate and the colours of death in the final apartment are revealed. Throughout the entire story the progression from the licentiously gay towards the tragic is reflected in the handling of atmosphere and tone. So much so that

one can regard The Masque of the Red Death itself as a metaphor of Poe's term "grotesque."

As has been shown in the last chapter, a fascinating ironical effect can be achieved in a story through a particular exploitation of point-of-view. In The Capital of the World<sup>1</sup> Hemingway's narrator presents a comically tragic fictional reality in a matter-of-fact tone, in the manner of shrugging one's shoulders. If one accepts as the essence of irony a felt discrepancy between the apparent and the real, the main ironical effect of the story springs from the discrepancy between the hero's expectations and reality. This contrast is conspicuously underscored throughout the story by a complex ironical pattern of elements of grandeur juxtaposed to elements of the pathetic.

A young man, Paco, "which is the diminutive of the name Francisco," comes to Madrid and finds a job as a waiter at a second-rate hotel, the Lurca, where his two "sophisticated" sisters serve as chamber maids. The narrator characterizes the different guests who are staying at the hotel as second-rate matadors, picadors, banderilleros, and provincial clergymen. Paco who is full of dreams and sees himself as a famous torero tells an older waiter that he could never be afraid of the approaching horns of a bull. Enrique does not believe him and suggests a mock bull fight in the empty dining-room. Paco manages to make a couple of passes with his apron. However, when he courageously steps forward "two inches too far" the one knife hits him. A femoral artery is cut, and the young man dies.

The Capital of the World would not be a very successful modern short story if it had to rely mainly on this simple plot. It is the inextricably interwoven pattern of the majority of the story's

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<sup>1</sup>(1936), in J. A. Thurston, op. cit., pp. 176-186.

structural elements that gives it artistic weight. The pattern of treatment of time and space, the hero and secondary characters, and conflict as well as the narrator's presentation of his fictional world are based on a disillusioning irony.

Madrid never appears to be more than a great name and as such forms an ironical contrast to the Luarca. The hero's name is merely a diminutive form of a grand historical figure. The second-rate picadors, matadors, and banderilleros have to be seen against the background of the great toreros of Madrid, and the provincial priest fails to attain an audience with the high clergyman whom he has come to visit. Instead he has to wait for days on end in an antechamber, an instance which matches very well with his second-rate lodging. Whereas to him and young Paco the Luarca may appear as an antechamber to a better future, it should have the obvious meaning of a backchamber for the rest of the lodgers. The bull fight with its deadly outcome is an imitation bull fight and resembles merely ironically the brave young man's highflying dreams. When Paco dies, it is not by the horns of a dangerous and beautiful bull and not with the cape in his hands, but by "heavy-bladed razor-sharp meat knives" fastened to the legs of a chair while he is swinging a kitchen apron.

The tragic note at the end of a "comic rather than pathetic"<sup>1</sup> story is heightened by the author's smiling detachment, when he comments on Paco's death: "he died, as the Spanish phrase has it, full of illusions." Giving a final emphasis to the presented incident's insignificance the narrator closes the story with the remark, that Paco "had not even had time to be disappointed in the Garbo picture which disappointed all Madrid for a week." Irony, the all-dominating element here, manifests itself in an ironic title, in the ironical pattern

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<sup>1</sup>F. O'Connor, op. cit., p. 168.

of the fictional reality, and in the author's ironic use of a narrator who is ironically detached from what he records in order to give his little tragi-comedy additional poignancy.

If the narrator's presentation of the fictional world reveals itself as an oversimplifying and distorting rendering of an actually complex reality, the story's theme can gain considerable additional power. At a first and superficial reading Lardner's Haircut may appear as an interesting and well-written story. As soon as the reader, however, starts to mistrust the garrulous barber's presentation, the story takes on a different tone and its complex structure emerges. The author's irony of having the barber, "the one man perhaps least qualified by knowledge and insight,"<sup>1</sup> tell the story heightens the reader's impression of its pathos and tragedy.

Another device for intensifying the tragic tone of a story is the ironical use of a narrator like that in Faulkner's A Rose for Emily. The insensitive narrator is made here to render significant details of an enveloping action without being able to realize their bearing on the story's meaning. Fictional reality becomes transparent in Faulkner's story and reveals a wider reality with tragic significance despite rather than through the narrator who is allowed to provide the information. The narrator's rendered world of topicality is changed by the author's ironical use of the narrating medium into a reality with universal validity, the downfall of the South.

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon and Tate, op. cit., p. 452

In order to demonstrate how an author's ironical approach to his material can result in a deliberately macabre tone Roald Dahl's Pig<sup>1</sup> and William and Mary<sup>2</sup> will be briefly discussed. In the first story it is the hero's death and its particular presentation that gives it its macabre quality. A boy whose parents had been shot under grotesque circumstances when he was twelve days old is brought up by his strictly vegetarian aunt in complete isolation in Virginia. He is a keen cook and has started to write a colossal cookery book which is going to become the work of a life-time. After his aunt's death the young man goes to New York where he is offered a schnitzel in a restaurant. Amazed at the delicate taste he asks for the recipe. The waiter and cook receive an incredible amount from the good-natured simpleton and advise him to pay a visit to the town's stock-yards to get more detailed information about pork. The slaughter-house appears to him as a fascinating and complicated factory. While he is watching some men fastening chains around the hind-legs of pigs, which are then lifted up and vanish in the building, one of the men suddenly puts a chain round his ankle, and off he goes towards his destination. The butcher cuts his throat and with dwindling senses the youth sees himself approaching tub where men with long poles are busy dipping the pigs into boiling water.

Pig, quite obviously is not a short story in the usual sense. Perhaps one should qualify the term and call it a 'macabre short story.' One could, perhaps, recognize an ironic modern version of the successful fairy-tale hero in its protagonist. Dahl presents, on a few pages, the grotesque life-story and macabre end of his strangely innocent

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<sup>1</sup> (1959), in Roald Dahl, Kiss Kiss (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 184-205.

<sup>2</sup> (1959), ibid., pp. 19-46.

hero. The unreality of certain parts of Dahl's fictional reality is, of course, a legitimate device for his artistic aim, the creation of grotesque circumstances which he then leads to their macabre resolution, the young man's dying a pig's death.

In William and Mary the macabre tone is not achieved through the presentation of the death incident itself but by a gruesome picture of a philosophy professor's "afterlife." Professor William Pearl permits a scientist friend to use his head for an experiment after his death. The scientist succeeds in keeping the Professor's brain and one eye alive by means of a heart-lung machine. In fact, the brain and the one eye work perfectly. When Professor Pearl's widow is informed about the successful experiment she visits the scientist in his laboratory. Seeing the helpless state in which her formerly domineering husband now is she realizes her chance of being able to take revenge for all those years of suppression. She veils her husband's eye in a cloud of cigarette smoke - she had never been allowed to smoke - and wishes William's eye and brain a cynical good-bye, looking forward to the day when she will be able to take her husband's remains home with her for a life-long revenge.

Both stories demonstrate convincingly the author's brilliant wit and frightening imagination. The macabre tone is heightened in both cases by the fact that an obviously completely detached narrator records in a matter-of-fact manner the most appalling atrocities. Their high literary value is due partly to Dahl's superb wit and mastery of style, partly to the fact that the author, with tongue in cheek as it were, even seems to endow his stories with a moral. After reading Pig and overcoming the final shock the reader may feel warned of the dangers inherent in a one-sided education. In William and Mary the sparkling eye of the

dead professor seems to transmit the warning that we protect scientific experiments against the primitive evil in man or, more precisely, in women.

From this level of a tone of ironical and macabre wit it is a considerable step to the level of the bitterly cynical tone which prevails in Supper<sup>1</sup>, a story by the Polish writer Tadeusz Borowski. The first-person narrator presents an evening in a Nazi concentration camp. In front of all the inhabitants of the camp a group of Russians is shot by SS soldiers. The following day hardened by the common sight of shattered and bloody human bodies a Jewish prisoner keeps telling the narrator that the human brain is so delicate that one can eat it raw.

The first-person narrator restricts his report to what is visible and suppresses even the slightest emotion. The choice of an I-narrator is deliberate here, as he is made to witness the ghastly scene the displayed restraint makes the presented reality appear the more horrible. The contrast between the narrator's expected violent commotion and his almost inhuman holding back is paralleled by the contrast between the introductory lyrical image of a peaceful landscape on a Saturday evening and the double shock of the execution and the final instance of dehumanization. Every detail of Borowski's story is related to his basic bitter irony. The commander of the camp is portrayed as a good-looking, elderly gentleman, the SS soldiers appear to behave correctly according to their military routine. They are well-dressed and eager to avidly being splattered by the brains or blood of the falling Russians. The Russians on the other hand, are described with cynical irony as "criminals" who are given their due punishment.

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<sup>1</sup>(1949), in Gerda Hagenau (ed.), Polen erzählt: Zweiundzwanzig Erzählungen (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Bücherei, 1963), pp. 22-25.

The author has given his narrator such a degree of detachment that he enables him to draw the conclusion from the well-dressed appearance of the firing squad that the soldiers are probably on their way to enjoy themselves in the nearby town with some girls. This observation is set in the centre of the technically exact report of the execution. Not only does the author's ironical handling of his narrator add to the bitter tone of the whole story, but the narrator's mechanical observation also shows the state of a mere functioning organism to which man can be reduced in an inhuman situation.

b. General Comments on the Use  
of Tone in the Modern  
Short Story

On closer examination one will realize that there are differences between the way in which a writer of longer pieces of fiction can handle the problem of tone and the manner in which the short story writer has to solve it. Some longer short stories such as James Joyce's The Dead or Crane's The Open Boat display a superb mastery of tonal shifts which are definitely outside the range of the strictly short form. In The Dead the tone changes 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." A similarly strong shift of tone is employed in The Open Boat, when, at the end, the "soberly naturalistic"<sup>1</sup> presentation is suddenly interrupted by the sentence: "When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon and Tate, op. cit., p. 453

the great sea's voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters."

The careful preparation of these shifts of tone necessarily remain restricted to longer form tending towards the genre of the nouvelle or novel. The shorter forms depend on a stricter tonal unity. On account of the mere fact of brevity shifts of tone are very difficult to present in an aesthetically satisfying manner. Having to dispense with carefully prepared for shifts of tone has not prevented the modern short story writer from achieving complexity of tone. Tonal complexity in the modern short story, however, has been accomplished by a simultaneity of different levels of tone. Complex multi-level patterns of tone have been developed to enrich the short form which seems to be so restricted by its very brevity.

Although one could argue that the novelist can employ the same method, it seems that it would be difficult to maintain a very complex tonal pattern over a long narrative stretch. It is hard to imagine a dense, interlaced tonal pattern such as the one employed by Ring Lardner in Haircut consistently exploited in the elaborated structure of a novel. What an enormous and exhausting task to re-read the whole work under the aspect that the narrator has deliberately given the wrong clues! It is quite obvious that the novel usually develops its richness of tone step by step, interspersing tonal changes, whereas the highly artistic modern short story has to resort to packing its smaller tonal world into a deliberately restricted shell. Compared to the older forms of the short story, the modern short story has achieved a new tonal complexity which adds to the genre's density without abolishing Poe's formal postulate of a strict "unity of effect" or "impression."

6. Death and the Function of Character

a. Case Studies

In Brooksmith<sup>1</sup> by Henry James the first-person narrator sadly records the death of Oliver Offord whose house in London had been a salon for an esoteric circle of artists and culturally minded people of the higher classes. Gradually the reader comes to realize that the actual centre of the story is Offord's butler, Brooksmith. It is this unusually sensitive servant to whom Offord's death is more tragic than to any close friend of the deceased. For a while the sympathetic narrator is able to keep in touch with Brooksmith who is offered less and less adequate positions. After he has served as a waiter he disappears, presumably to commit suicide.

The theme of this short story of about 6,500 words has been elegantly and adequately described as "the plight of a sensitive servant whom a taste of the society to which he is not born has rendered unfit for the society to which he is."<sup>2</sup> Commenting on the story's generic type Vaid concludes that "it exemplifies the impossibility of erecting good fences between a sketch and a short story."<sup>3</sup> This is certainly a valid insight. It should, however, not be the main aim of generic criticism to draw lines; instead it should rather make an attempt at showing the tendency or direction which a piece of art takes towards an assumed pure model or, to speak in spatial terms,

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<sup>1</sup>(1891), in Clifton Fadiman (ed.), The Short Stories of Henry James (New York: The Modern Library, 1945), pp. 273-291.

<sup>2</sup>Krishna Baldev Vaid, Technique in the Tales of Henry James (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

toward an assumed centre of gravity. And Vaid has in fact already made an important generic choice. Out of a great number of possible pure forms the author has given two genres between which James's story should be located, between the character sketch and the short story. The question of which one of the two pure generic models approaches closer could, perhaps, be tackled in a promising manner if one reconsidered James's use of the terms "anecdotic" and "developmental."<sup>1</sup> The developmental element usually indicates the author's attempt at a fullest possible revelation of character. On the other hand, the anecdotic implies the author's restriction to a very few details of character in a limited action.

Although James's concentration on the limited situation and on a restricted number of character traits is not as rigorous as in the typically modern short story, he seems in Brooksmith to approach fairly closely the presentation of man in a restricted situation. The process of Brooksmith's disintegration between Offord's death and his own implied end appears to be a dense, interwoven chain of events. Though a "straight narration,"<sup>2</sup> it does not seem to be loosely knit and sketchy. In addition to this the stress is more on the butler's and, in a more universal sense, human tragedy than on a portrayal of an interesting individual figure. Whereas in a typical character sketch the writer would have put the main stress on the delineation of his hero's specific personality, it seems that James had to create Brooksmith to make his tragedy possible.

A more modern writer would perhaps have compressed the whole little tragedy into a few moments of desperate recognition. Brooksmith, written in 1891, anticipates at least partly the limit-situation story of today. In fact, it receives its

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 30-38.

<sup>2</sup>K. B. Vaid, op. cit., p. 49.

movement through a series of shocks of recognition. The initial shock is having to realize that nobody will be able to be to him a master as was Offord. "There ain't too such in the world," Brooksmith says to the narrator with resignation. This first shattering experience is then followed by a number of painful recognitions that his present position is inadequate until all his recognitions find a final one in his death.

The sympathetic first-person narrator, in three narrative phases, gives the general atmosphere of the salon, its disintegration up to Offord's death, and, finally, the butler's continuous failure to contend himself with increasingly inferior positions up to his indicated death.

It would seem, at first, that Brooksmith's tragedy is slightly outbalanced by the author's detailed picture of Offord's salon. It is not so much the salon as a realistically presented space but as a dense atmosphere that is evoked here. Fragments of conversation and description create in the reader's mind an impression of a refined, delicate, and almost perfect cultural circle which is carefully nurtured by Offord's butler. Once Brooksmith is accepted as the story's centre the seemingly too long introductory part reveals its main function as serving as an indirect device for portraying the essence of Brooksmith's character.

The two death incidents, then, Offord's death and Brooksmith's suggested suicide, form the temporal and thematic frame within which the butler's tragedy takes its inevitable course. Analogously to the salon's function as a necessary atmosphere for and metaphor of Brooksmith, the salon's disintegration and disappearance reflect the butler's decline and death. It is apparently a sign of James's refined later phase that this now crudely put pattern reveals itself only lingeringly through a series of sensitively arranged details in the story. The gradual process of the "terrible

vulgarization of Brooksmith" which is forced upon him by his fate - "he had indeed been spoiled" - is presented by the sensitive narrator who is willing yet unable to help efficiently. He manages to trace Brooksmith in increasingly humiliating positions, as a servant in houses with less and less culture. This social decline finds a realistic and symbolic expression in a serious deterioration of his health. And when Brooksmith finally disappears, the narrator assumes "that, with characteristic deliberation, he is changing the plates of the immortal Gods."

The narrator's inability to form a closer relationship with the retreating figure of Brooksmith finds a subtle parallel in the author's ability to make his narrator carefully control his tone. The tone of a slight but deliberate detachment appears to prevent the narrator's sympathy from lapsing into sentimentality. Through the tension between the narrator's reserve and sympathy James gives his story an additional dimension and Brooksmith's tragedy convincing depth.

An artistic idiosyncrasy which Henry James shares with Thomas Mann is the tendency to get absorbed in literary material - despite the ironical detachment which their works display - to a degree which seems to have prevented both from having seriously exercised the art form of the short story. Both were fully aware of this fact, and Mann, like James, called his collection of short pieces of prose fiction "Erzählungen"<sup>1</sup> (Tales) not "Kurzgeschichten" (Short Stories). By choosing this term Thomas Mann apparently felt that he would do his longer pieces such as Der Tod in Venedig<sup>2</sup> (Death in Venice) or Das Gesetz<sup>3</sup> (The Law) more justice and, at the same time, would characterize his proper

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Mann, Sämtliche Erzählungen (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 353-417.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 641-694.

short stories such as Der Tod<sup>1</sup> (Death) or Tobias Mindernickel (Tobias Mindernickel).

Tobias Mindernickel<sup>2</sup>, written as early as 1898, presents a lonely middle-aged crank who, followed and mocked at by the children in the streets, buys a little dog to have at least some company in his barren existence. When the playful puppy is injured by a sharp bread knife, Tobias cherishes him with exuberant love. One day, however, he realizes with hatred that the dog is becoming less and less dependent upon his care. Afraid of losing control over his dog he attempts to wound the puppy with his knife, so that he is once more able to exert his domineering love upon him. Striking too hard Tobias Mindernickel kills his little dog and sole companion.

On the layer of reality the author portrays a man whose feelings of inferiority have been built up by his environment into an all-embracing complex leaving Tobias deeply frustrated. Tobias' wish and inability to form a relationship with people finds an ironical expression in his pathetic attempt to substitute his lack by buying a little dog. In great detail Thomas Mann delineates the change in the man's behaviour from an attitude of permanent escape from people to a half benevolent, half oppressive despotism.

The author has avoided portraying a mere villain by moderating Tobias' behaviour and allowing him to display a trait of basic generosity and ability to love. Once Tobias Mindernickel has a companion - the only being which seems to be inferior to him - he projects the wishful image which he has of himself onto his creature. He demands absolute dependence upon him, on whom nobody has ever been dependent (except for a few moments, when Tobias helped an injured boy). But when the puppy

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<sup>1</sup>(1897), in Th. Mann, op. cit., pp. 54-59.

<sup>2</sup>(1898), ibid., pp. 111-118.

grows older, his jolly leaps and wilful play make Tobias painfully aware of the fact that he is losing something which had completely fulfilled him, his control over another being. He pities his dog, yet, at the same time, welcomes the accident in which the puppy gets injured. The dog's steady recovery hurts Tobias Mindernickel's distorted feelings more than did the realization of his puppy's pains. In an attempt to re-establish the complete, fulfilling dependence of the injured creature upon his master Tobias Mindernickel robs himself of the only joy he has ever had.

In the layer of general ideas Tobias Mindernickel's personality becomes significant beyond its meaning as a psychological case. The two forces within the hero's character, his feeling of inferiority and - probably as a result of this - his desire to exert despotic power are paralleled and underscored by the title and the hero's suggestive name. Tobias obviously represents the biblical "Tobiah," an authoritarian leader in the Old Testament. The compound noun Mindernickel emphasizes the state of being inferior. "Minder" means inferior and "Nickel" is a silver-white metal of less value than silver. In addition to this the German word "Nickel" has the old connotation of demon, thus stressing the more hideous qualities in the story's hero. Tobias' image of a dictator is also underlined by his comparing himself to Napoleon. This presumption finds an ironical reversal in the author's equipping his dictator with a single room instead of a palace and with a little dog instead of a thousands of subjects.

By killing his dog Tobias Mindernickel robs himself of the ability to show pity and master some creature, and makes himself once more the inferior being he has always been. The death incident in Tobias Mindernickel can also be seen as a pointed and ironical expression of the effect a dictatorship may have upon people. By choking the spirits of his subjects a dictator is likely to murder

rather than to master them. It is in the moment of Tobias' atrocious deed that his personality and, on a symbolic level, one aspect of dictatorship are most shockingly and convincingly revealed.

In Paul's Case<sup>1</sup> Willa Cather depicts the last phases in the life of a sensitive high school boy with little interest in society's accepted moral codes but with a love of the unusual and artistic. Full of dreams of a more romantic world Paul has to live in the drab environment of Cordelia Street in Pittsburg. The two worlds, his dream world which is symbolized by a red carnation which he used to wear in his buttonhole and the respectable world surrounding him, are bound to clash. He has to leave school and is put to work. With several thousand dollars which he steals from his employer Paul flees to New York where he hopes to find his imagined world and the outer world reconciled. However when he realizes that his red carnation world is incompatible with reality, he prefers death to having to go back to the life from which he had so much longed to escape.

Although the author presents her action with naturalistic detail, it is quite obvious to the sensitive reader that what is offered is as much anybody's case as it is Paul's. To the reader Cordelia Street takes on the quality of any dull environment able to choke individual spirit. Paul's flight is significant on a realistic as well as on a symbolic level. The geographical change from Pittsburg to New York brings as little resolution to Paul's dilemma as does man's attempt to flee the fundamental predicament of having to realize the incompatibility of spirit and reality, of ideals and practical solutions. Paul's terrible recognition

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<sup>1</sup>(1920), in Burrell and Cerf, op. cit., pp. 681-697.

that New York cannot keep what his dreams had promised is contained in the one shattering sentence, "all the world had become Cordelia Street." As his dreams form the essence of Paul's life, giving up his dream reality means giving up life.

Due to Willa Cather's creation of an impression of inevitability throughout her story the death incident in Paul's Case appears as a necessary and logical conclusion of the story's action. Every single detail is conceived as belonging to this pattern of two irreconcilable forces which can only be resolved in the hero's annihilation. Paul's Case strikes the reader as a tragedy, because of its stress on the element of hopelessness. An unsympathetic father who is conditioned by his environment is as little able to help Paul adjust himself to outer reality as are his fellow pupils and his teachers. Their lack of imagination only widens the gap between Paul's ideal world and the drab reality confronting him. Inevitably he approaches his shattering disillusionment and, step by step, he draws nearer to his death.

Necessitated by the compactness of form which Willa Cather aspires to in this short piece of prose fiction characterization, though obviously given strong emphasis, is essentially different from what it would be in a nouvelle or a novel. Not only does the author concentrate on a single character, she also restricts her characterization to a few basic traits in Paul's personality. All these traits seem to find their symbolic expression in the red carnation which he likes to wear. The red carnation is the visible projection of his dream onto reality. All other traits, Paul's negligence, unreliability, and readiness even to steal are merely consequences, it seems, of that one drive to objectify his richer and more beautiful world of dreams.

There is no change of character in Cather's story, only the moment of recognition which reveals to the boy that his red carnation blossoms only in his mind. Robbing him of the spiritual basis of his

otherwise unfounded existence this moment of recognition is identical with Paul's death. Thus Paul's suicide can be understood merely as the annihilation of a body whose spirit has already ceased to live. In his fall, however, "the folly of his haste occurred to him with merciless clearness." In the last fraction of his last second he regrets that he has left so much undone. For a last moment, before his "picture-making mechanism is crushed" by the locomotive, his imagination allows him to see a beautiful vision of foreign countries. Then death reconciles the world of his mind with reality and Paul "drops back into the immense design of things."

The contrast between these last desperate flashes of Paul's imagination and the physical violence of his death appears to sum up in an urgently pointed manner the fundamental dilemma of Paul and, in general, of the artist. The hero's last pictures also heighten the story's tragic quality, as they reveal once more the hidden potentiality for beauty inherent in his young mind.

In Hector Hugh Munro's (Saki) Shredni Vash-tar<sup>1</sup>, a densely-knit narration, character, and death incident appear as elements handled with particular consciousness.

Conradin, a sickly ten-year-old boy, has to live with his insensitive cousin and guardian Mrs. De Roop who subjects him to a dull routine of unpleasant restrictions. In his loneliness the boy develops a rampant imagination. He receives his only consolation from two pets, a Houdan hen and a polecat ferret, whom he keeps hidden in a toolshed in the garden. Gradually the boy builds up a pagan cult around Shredni Vashtar, praying to him with mystic devotion. Mrs. De Roop who resents Conradin's

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<sup>1</sup>(1911), in 76 Short Stories by Saki, with an introduction by E. V. Knox (London: Collins, 1966), pp. 103-108.

visits to a sphere outside her control punishes the boy by taking away his hen. Conradin does not allow himself to show any reaction, but prays the more fervently to his animal god. In an attempt to break the boy's spirit Mrs. De Roop tries to take away Conradin's other pet as well. From behind a window the downhearted Conradin awaits his guardian's triumphant return. Through the open door of the shed, however, emerges Shredni Vashtar, "dark wet stains around the fur of jaws and throat." With absolute self-control Conradin celebrates his victory by eating unusually richly buttered toast and listening to the servants' foolish conversation about how to break the shocking news to the "poor child."

On closer investigation one realizes how carefully space, action, and characters, among other structural elements, are handled to depict a few significant traits in the child's personality. Conradin, a sensitive boy whose "imagination ... was rampant under the spur of loneliness" is juxtaposed to a world of powerful, yet insensitive adults represented by a "silky and effete" doctor, a sour-faced maid, and, above all, Mrs. De Roop. Conradin's outer world determined by adult nagging and restraint finds an equivalent in a "dull, cheerless garden" with "few fruittrees ... jealously set apart from his plucking," and "blooming in an arid waste." This spatial correspondence has a parallel in the symbolic representation of Conradin's inner world by a disused toolshed which stands, very similar to the position of his inner world, "in a forgotten corner." And as the boy is capable of hiding his hatred against his cousin behind an impenetrable mask of cold politeness his shed is almost hidden by dismal shrubbery.

Without having to give a specific description of Conradin's inner state the reader is able to grasp from the world of the shed the significant traits of the boy's personality. His one pet, a "ragged-plumaged Houdan hen," seems to symbolize

the lighter side of his interior world. The name Anabaptist which Conradin bestows upon the hen without knowing its meaning suggests, through its very sound, the more serene quality of the boy's imagination. Once removed from the child's secret realm, it leaves him alone with the dangerously looking pole-cat ferret, apparently symbolizing the darker side of his being. Shredni Vashtar is the symbol and goal of Conradin's cult in which he is able to rid himself of his pent-up drives and desire of revenge. The boy is almost convinced of his god's power, when his prayers to prolong Mrs. De Roop's toothache appear to be effective.

A conflict arises, when Mrs. De Roop forcefully intrudes into the boy's world and takes away Anabaptist. Although deeply hurt Conradin keeps his feelings secret behind the mask of a "white set face." As soon as he is alone in his shed, however, the boy prays to his god: "Do one thing for me, Shredni Vashtar." When his guardian intrudes a second time, Conradin, used to being defeated, for a while loses faith in his pagan god. In despair he sings the blood-thirsty ritual hymn of Shredni Vashtar. After the ferret instead of Mrs. De Roop has come out of the shed Conradin drops on his knees in a final religious act. Before the animal vanishes he drinks from a creek in the garden, a symbolic act which indicates the cleaning of the god after having touched "an unclean thing," the adult intruder.

The death incident here has a multiple function. It serves as a surprise ending in the story's narrative structure. It is also a climactic expression of the boy's and in general children's mastery of magic powers and close connection with nature. Then, Mrs. De Roop's death functions as a turning point from Conradin's state of poor health to recovery, which is symbolized by his eating buttered toast with unusual enjoyment. Furthermore,

if one accepts the interpretation of Shredni Vashtar as a symbol of Conradin himself, the "Woman's" death would appear to represent the boy's long hoped for victory over a tyranny which was about to break his spirit and destroy his life.

Conrad Aiken, in Silent Snow, Secret Snow<sup>1</sup>, depicts the last phase in the life of Paul Hasleman, a schoolboy who suffers from a strange kind of schizophrenia. Increasingly he perceives the external world through a curtain of falling snow, an experience by which he is deeply and pleasantly fascinated. More and more does this beautiful internal world occupy the boy's mind. Convinced, however, that nobody could possibly appreciate his enjoyable secret he keeps his experience strictly to himself. Paul's parents who are alarmed at the boy's absent-mindedness call a doctor. When the physician asks a few questions, Paul who feels cornered and terrified at the prospect of being robbed of his secret inner world of snow flees to his dark bedroom where he abandons himself passionately to his other sphere. His mother who shakes him in his bed in order to bring him back to reality is sent away by the poor child in hatred, and Paul plunges completely into madness and death.

Characterization, in this pathological story, is restricted to delineating the schizophrenic disintegration of the child's mind. A further restriction is achieved by having the story start after the initial steps of the progressing disease have already happened. Partly through an omniscient author-narrator, partly through the boy's own mind by means of 'style indirect libre'<sup>2</sup> the two conflicting worlds, Paul's inner world of snow and the

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<sup>1</sup>(1932), in J. A. Thurston, op. cit., pp. 349-364.

<sup>2</sup>Not, as J. A. Thurston maintains, merely by an omniscient narrator; cf. op. cit., p. 19.

external world, are convincingly presented.

The conflict in the boy's mind is objectified in the story in four clearly marked narrative phases. A morning at school interrupted by flashbacks in Paul's mind, a section describing his way home, the doctor's inquisition, and, finally, the boy's madness and implied death. In the first section the outer world, represented mainly by Paul's teacher Miss Buell, is already less important to the boy than his inner experience of drifting snow. To achieve this effect Aiken, in this first section, renders most of the boy's glimpses of the external world in brackets, a device which had been successfully employed by Virginia Woolf in the middle part of To the Lighthouse.<sup>1</sup> In the second narrative phase, Paul on his way home, the boy has still a curious interest in outer details. His curiosity, however, concentrates more on the "accompaniment," the snow through which the different items reveal themselves to him in their "externality." Paul's madness and death are foreshadowed in this second section by his cognition that he would no longer be able to hear the postman whose steps in the morning had been muffled more and more by the deepening snow in the child's mind, so that this last morning he had only heard him when he knocked at his house. The doctor's inquisition in the third part threatens Paul's "retreat into [his] heavenly seclusion," the "wall" which he was able to erect between himself and the outer world. Paul's contact with reality has gradually become more and more insignificant. Increasingly his other sphere takes possession of his mind till, in the last section, he bans external reality from his thoughts and allows himself to get fully absorbed by his madness.

One could argue that Paul's death is not explicitly stated, but it seems that the author's

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 69-71.

emphasis on words such as "peace," "cold," and "sleep" are enough support for this interpretation. Aiken's concentration on this very last phase in Paul's state of schizophrenia enables him to reveal with great dramatic power a conflict in the protagonist's mind a conflict that needs only a minimum of outer action and yet is perhaps more successful and thrilling than that of any action-and-plot story can be.

b. Characterization in the Modern  
Short Story Tends to Be  
Significantly Limited

Bonaro Overstreet calls the modern interest in psychology the actual constituent of the Zeitgeist of this century.<sup>1</sup> Scientific and, more directly, literary attempts in this new field have not only had a deep effect on subject matter in fiction, but also on the structural presentation of the new themes. Bergson, Freud, W. James on the one hand and on the other E. Dujardin, H. James, or Proust, only to name a very few, have started a process in literature which one could, perhaps, call the internalization of external action. That this process changed both the novel as well as the short story in subject matter and structure is convincingly demonstrated by Henry James's art.

As has been mentioned before, James's interest in and fascination with psychological details had always been an obstacle in his attempt at creating really short pieces of prose fiction. Only rarely did he succeed in subjecting his developmental abilities to the strict ideal of honing

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<sup>1</sup>B. Overstreet, loc. cit., p. 99.

away rather than filling in.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Mann is like James in this that he usually prefers to unfold and develop his material by cutting out as much as possible. His art is, at least in one respect, related to Coppard's in that it often makes deliberate use of a narrator, thus leaving the illusion of the 'told tale' which many modern short story writers have tried to replace by a greater immediacy and directness of presentation.

The emphasis on psychological details in fiction towards the end of the last century is paralleled by a technique which stresses indirect presentation of character in favour of direct portrayal. One can roughly maintain that since Chekhov indirect characterization, although present in fiction before, has been accepted as a more subtle device and preferred to the older authorial way of character presentation.

The short story has particularly profited from the many variations of indirect characterization. Contrary to the authorial characterization which always meant an outer interference with the flux of the action and could be used in a linear way the structural device of indirect characterization is able to function in a multiple way. This is particularly significant, as the question of economy weighs heavily in the structure of the short story. Mannerisms, gestures, behaviour, dialogue, and dialect can be used for promoting the action as well as for rounding a figure. The multiple functioning of character treatment in the short story is heightened in its effect through the fact that usually, the short story concentrates on important

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. e.g. his stories of approximately and under 7,000 words: The Romance of Certain Old Clothes (1868), A Problem (1868), Rose-Agatha (1878), Brooksmith (1891), The Visits (1892), Grenville Fane (1892), Paste (1899), The Real Right Thing (1899), Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie (1900), The Two Faces (1900), The Tree of Knowledge (1900), and The Story in It (1902).

fragments of a personality rather than on a whole character's complexity. So the different indirect devices all reflect the light of the author's concept of what he wants to create onto a limited and graspable yet significant part of the hero's personality.

Indirect characterization in the short story has been achieved to perfection by James Joyce in his The Sisters. Father Flynn is evoked, however contradictorily, in the reader's mind, a character who does not even appear in the story (except as a corpse). This device has been excellently demonstrated by Henry James in The Ambassadors where the reader receives a very detailed and convincing portrait of Mrs. Newsome who neither appears in the action nor is directly described.<sup>1</sup> Because of the short story's brevity Father Flynn's characterization can never even approach James's effect. It is, however, the hero's growing awareness of reality which is important, not the priest's character. The short story cannot afford, like the novel can and does, to employ subsidiary characters for their own sake. They are usually subject to a function which relates them closely to the hero.

Hemingway's objective method of characterization can perhaps be illustrated convincingly by comparing the different attitudes of the cook, George, and Nick in The Killers to the threat of killing Ole Andreson. The cook's remark, "'I don't even listen to it'" is contrasted with George's reaction for he admits that it is very bad and suggests that someone should do something about it. But it is Nick alone who actually makes an attempt, however futile, to prevent the imminent disaster. Here no full characters are presented, only glimpses of single yet highly significant traits of the three

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. also James's The Middle Years (1893) and the indirectly presented death of the countess.

personalities are offered. Whereas in the novel qualities of a character which are not absolutely necessary for its complex depth would still be acceptable as an additional illumination and rounding of a dramatis persona, one would have to regard the very same device as an aesthetic flaw in the brief form of the short story.

As the short story writer has to use his structural elements in a stricter multi-functional manner to give his limited characterization more convincing power than has the novelist, one often finds a very conscious use of names in the short form. E. M. Forster gives a character in The Celestial Omnibus<sup>1</sup> the suggestive name "Mr. Bons," obviously an anagram which sums up his attitudes towards art. Hemingway gives a minor character in Ten Indians<sup>2</sup> the ironical name of "Prudence" to heighten the effect of her irresponsible behaviour. The name "Tobias Windernickel" in Thomas Mann's story with the same title contains, as has been pointed out, in a nutshell, as it were, the narrative's theme: the combination of despotic drives and feelings of inferiority in one particular person as well as a general phenomenon.

It is of some interest here that the modern short story practically makes no use of allegorical names in the strict meaning of the term. Most probably this is due to the fact that the modern short story writer usually depicts an individual situation which he presents as symbolically meaningful beyond its individual validity. And even names in modern parables such as Kafka's have a symbolic-parabolic function rather than an allegorical one, as they lack the strict metaphorical equivalents which the major objects in an allegory have.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>(1911), in J. A. Thurston, op. cit., pp. 387-401.

<sup>2</sup>(1927), in J. A. Thurston, op. cit., pp. 167-171.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. below, Part III, Chapter XI, 2.

One can certainly argue that symbolical names are not restricted to the short story form. Thomas Mann e.g. uses symbolic names in all his works. The difference, however, is not one of appearance but of function. A symbolic name will not add fundamentally to the complexity of a dense novel nor would it be able to improve essentially a loosely knit or light novel. Yet, in the short story the symbolic use of a name such as Tobias Mindernickel can add considerable artistic weight to the structure's dense brevity.

This thesis' emphasis on the death incident in connection with the handling of character appears justified, as it makes it easier for the critic to point out the typical nature of characterization employed in the modern short story. The assumption underlying this conclusion, namely that the 'death story' is a genuine representative of the type of the modern short story in general, will be discussed in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> The formal insight that, necessitated by the compactness of the form, it is impossible for the short story writer to reveal a complex character as aesthetically satisfying demands the conclusion that the artist can only make an attempt at delineating a limited number of significant character traits. A further logical step is the assumption that it is only in particular human situations that man reveals most honestly his innermost condition. Such situations can be called limit-situations in the sense in which Karl Jaspers uses the term.<sup>2</sup> Death being man's utmost limit-situation now appears to be particularly appropriate for allowing the most piercing and revealing artistic interpretation of the human condition. One could, then,

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. below, Part II, Chapter IX.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, Part I, Chapter V, 3.

classify all modern short stories which reveal their main theme, in this special instance character, by means of a death situation as limit-situation stories.

## 7. Death and the Function of Symbolism

### a. The Special Position of Symbolism within the Model of Structural Layers

It is not strictly in accordance with Hartmann's argument that symbolism is regarded here as a layer. However, there seems to be some evidence for the assumption that the placing of symbolism in Hartmann's model as a particular layer can be useful for the analysis and understanding of fiction. Quite obviously an assumed layer like symbolism could neither belong completely to the reality given in the front and middle layers, nor could it have its position entirely in the final layers. But it is through the layer of symbolism that details in the visual layer of printed language as well as structural elements of any one of the middle layers can become meaningful in the final layers beyond their immediate function.

The black page in Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy or the brackets employed in Conrad Aiken's short story Silent Snow, Secret Snow, devices belonging to the visual front layer, become meaningful by creating aesthetic pleasure through the irony revealed in the first example and by symbolizing the insignificance of external reality in the second. It is important to see, however, that neither of the two fictional devices can reveal their full meaning immediately. Only after having penetrated the middle layers can the reader grasp their total impact.

This also holds true as far as the presented reality and its technique of presentation in the middle layers is concerned. Movement, speech, action, character, fate, as well as the treatment of the whole fictional world can be symbolically heightened so that concrete individual phenomena point to and become abstract phenomena, phenomena of an ideal individual personality (which is not presented in but appears through the middle layers) or of general ideality.

An aesthetic model could then be assumed in which a layer of symbolism appears between front and middle layers on the one hand and the two final layers on the other. The model should be conceived in such a way that multiple connections are thinkable between the layer of symbolism and each of all the foregoing layers. With such a general model in mind one could then, perhaps, arrive at the following definition of the fictional symbol:

A fictional symbol can be understood as a device by means of which an author can render the fictional reality which is given in the front and middle layers transparent and, thus, capable of allowing its presented concrete fictional details to appear as general abstract phenomena in the final layers.

b.       The Significance of the Layer  
          of Symbolism in the Modern  
          Short Story

If one makes an attempt to distinguish the novel form from the short story by means of the device of the symbol, one will soon find out that there is no difference in appearance. There is, however, a difference in the use of symbol, if you see it from the view point of the author, and in function, if you look at it as belonging to the structure of a fictional work.

Like poetry, and for the same reason of brevity, the modern short story has to resort much more to symbolism than the long form, if it is to achieve as great an artistic weight as can be demanded by the novel. On the other hand there seems to be a limit of symbolic density beyond which a novel cannot go without becoming unintelligible. It is true that in a sense this applies to the short story as well. But it seems that the borderline can be pushed much further back in a short work. It is hard to imagine a novel as densely symbolic as Dylan Thomas' short story The Lemon<sup>1</sup>, and although Kafka achieves highly symbolic novels they are not as densely knit as for example his parabolic short story Ein Landarzt<sup>2</sup> (A Country Doctor). It seems that it is the use of symbolism which gives a writer a chance to lift the modern short story from the concept of 'minor fiction' to the level of high art.

An empirical investigation into the use of symbolism in the modern short story will lead to the first result that one can distinguish between two major groups. The one comprises stories which are rooted in 'real', concrete individual situations and become symbolically meaningful beyond their topicality. The other, a smaller group, contains stories depending so heavily on symbolism that one would not be able to understand them at all without having found their symbolic clues. As in the foregoing chapters most of the stories discussed belonged to the first group, the following interpretations will deal exclusively with examples of the second group.

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<sup>1</sup>(1936), in Dylan Thomas, Adventures in the Skin Trade and Other Stories (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1955), pp. 120-127.

<sup>2</sup>(1919), in Matlaw and Lief, op. cit., pp. 144-149.

## c. Case Studies

In E. M. Forster's The Celestial Omnibus a boy living in a London suburb is fascinated by a signpost which has painted on it the words, "To Heaven." The boy imagines seeing an omnibus stop at the signpost and carry him up to Heaven, where he is welcomed by the figures of myth and poetry. When he tells his parents about what he had experienced he is punished by being caned and having to memorize a sonnet by Keats. Mr. Bons, a friend of the family and the "President of the Literary Society," listens to the boy's fantastic story and promises to cure him. He calls the next evening to have a look at the boy's omnibus. It is in fact there, and against his will Mr. Bons accompanies the boy to the realm of art. Mr. Bons, unlike the boy, is unable to see the beautiful things around him, and when the omnibus arrives, he cannot bear the sight of the boy's heaven and falls down to earth with the cry, "I see London'." The next day a newspaper reports that the body of Mr. Bons has been found "in a shockingly mutilated condition" and concludes that he must have been "hurled from a considerable height."

The real and symbolic conflict in the story is that between the sensitive and imaginative boy on the one hand and the unimaginative world of adults on the other. If one interprets the story as a parable, the general qualities should be emphasized. The Philistine mother, the crude, unimaginative, and intolerant type of father, Mr. Bons, whose name suggests clearly the snob, and finally the boy who represents all children with a natural love of the beautiful and a powerful imagination. Possible individual expressions of these parabolic types could then appear to the reader through the presented reality. Or one could stress the story's quality of individual expression of a general truth.

In either case there are two clearly separated groups, the boy's parents and Mr. Bons on the one hand and the boy on the other. Using a subtle indirect method of character presentation E. M. Forster allows the figures to a large extent to characterize themselves. Asked by Mr. Bons, whether there was no Shelley in the house the boy's mother answers "in much agitation:" "Dear Mr. Bons, we aren't such Philistines as that. Two at the least. One a wedding present, and the other, smaller print, in one of the spare rooms." Stressing merely external qualities about the books in the house, the boy's mother is ironically allowed to give herself the portrait of a thoroughbred Philistine.

In a similar way the father reveals his own insensitivity and lack of imagination when he laughs at the boy who starts to recite the Keats sonnet. "Standing aloof in giant ignorance. One for you, my son!" he roars, "I never knew these poets talked sense. Just describes you."

Mr. Bons who at first is seen through the eyes of the boy as "serious as well as kind" is revealed in the course of the story as worse than the boy's insensitive parents. Mr. Bons is the "President of the Literary Society," he donates books to the "Free Library," he has "seven Shelleys" at home, knows all about leitmotifs, and has a "bijou pronouncing dictionary" in his pocket when he is found dead. After the boy has told him about his experiences in the heaven of art Mr. Bons with a half arrogant, half fatherly air comments, "It is odd how, in a quite illiterate mind, you will find glimmers of Artistic Truth." Later, when he unwillingly follows the boy to the realm of art, Mr. Bons who has never "doubted the essential truth of Poetry" fails to establish any contact with what surrounds him. The rock of poetry is no foothold for the literary gentleman and he falls back to earth, to London and his death.

To this group of persons who are incapable of approaching art adequately is juxtaposed the hero of Forster's story. He is an unnamed boy who knows little, Mr. Bons calls him an "illiterate," but who has a tremendous longing for and sense of beauty. He feels that Keats's sonnet is himself. He is given a glorious welcome in his heaven, and when he goes back there a second time accompanied by Mr. Bons, he is raised "aloft on his shield" by Achilles and crowned with the laurel of poetry. Whereas Mr. Bons, the literary snob, has erected too many artificial walls between himself and art so that he is unable to bear a close contact with it, the boy with his naive joy in the face of the beautiful is made "poeta laureatus" by the magic hands of his dream heroes.

If we look at the death incident in the story the mixing of the two spheres, the boy's dream world and the drab sphere Agathox Lodge, 28, Buckingham Park Road, provides it with intriguing poetic ambiguity. On a real level the death incident could be seen as the boy's interpretation of an accident or as a terrifying real confirmation of the boy's dream wishes. Another possible interpretation would be to understand the final paragraph which is given the Greek heading "ΤΕΛΟΣ" (end) as belonging to the boy's dream. The Greek word would then function as a link between the figure of Achilles in the heaven of art and the boy's world in Surbiton, London. The mutilation of Mr. Bons would then be a pointed image of the boy's destructive drive against an artificial approach to art which is a complete negation and deadly threat to his own genuine and uncorrupted love of the beautiful.

Franz Kafka's Die Verwandlung<sup>1</sup> (Metamorphosis) is without doubt one of the most widely

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<sup>1</sup>(1916), in Franz Kafka, Metamorphosis and Other Stories, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961), pp. 7-63.

interpreted stories of this century. Shocking at first reading, then fascinating through its plurisignificance, Metamorphosis demonstrates clearly that any interpretation of a densely poetic piece of literature can only be a humble attempt at making a few suggestions as to its complex of possible meanings.

Gregor Samsa, a minor agent in a large company, wakes up one morning to find himself a huge beetle. Although terrified, his younger sister feeds him, but after a while begins to neglect him. It is only his mother who to the end is able to see her unfortunate son in the repulsive insect. Gregor is restricted to his bedroom and is fiercely driven back to it by his father whenever he tries to join the family in the dining-room. With a rotting apple in his back, which had been thrown at him by his father, and hardly eating anything Gregor realizes the burden which his presence means to his family, grows indifferent to life and dies. His family feels free of an almost unbearable burden and celebrates the bug's death by making a spring excursion into the country.

One possible interpretation could emphasize the story's probable objectification of the popular metaphor according to which the artist is a parasite on the human community. This concept has apparently been held by Gregor Samsa's family which, quite obviously, represents the human community. They have formed in their artistic son feelings of guilt which are heightened by Gregor's own thoughts and subconscious wishes to give up providing money for his family altogether in order to be able to lead his secluded life. Gregor's own feeling of being parasitic by nature is then objectified after "restless dreams" by his transformation into the most parasitic being thinkable, a helpless, useless, burdensome, and repulsive giant bug. From the viewpoint of the community he is so useless that he cannot even communicate. The father, who is the spokesman of the family since Gregor's metamorphosis, voices this

opinion when he complains, "'If he could understand us ... then, perhaps we might come to some agreement. But as it is ... .'" When Gregor's sister presenting a person with whom the artist had enjoyed a closer relationship than with the rest of the family suggests that if this bug was really her brother he would have left them "of his own account," the artist, expelled from the community and convinced that he had in fact no right to disturb their more productive lives, dies.

An interpretation which investigates more thoroughly the psychological qualities of the story<sup>1</sup> puts particular stress on the split between the hero's consciousness and his physical shape on the one hand and the theme of the father-son relationship on the other. Gregor Samsa's new shape could be understood as the true expression of his innermost self. The metamorphosis of the hero's human body into the repulsive shape of a giant vermin would then be the objectification of Gregor's subconscious longing. When he awakens and finds himself a beetle, he remembers that he had in fact thought about the tempting possibility of giving up supporting his family in order to realize his true self. The repressed wishes finally break through and destroy Gregor's former existence which was false and inauthentic. His actual and essential destiny, a life in seclusion, separated from the productive community, is finally reached through the act of the hero's metamorphosis. Only when he is hardly able to move, completely dependent on his family and in fact an intolerable burden to them, has his wish of irresponsibility been utterly fulfilled.

On the other hand, there is the hero's consciousness which has not changed with his outer shape. It appears as Gregor's untrue self. Only his subconsciousness and, after the transformation, his

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Walter H. Sokel, Franz Kafka (Columbia Essays on Modern Writers; New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 16f., 21f.

outer shape are genuine constituents of his true self. Gregor's consciousness goes on pretending to be something which it had never, cannot, and will never be. Before the transformation of his body Gregor's consciousness had pretended to be and to have to be the supporter of his family despite the fact that it needed strong repression to ban his actual desire from his thoughts. And even now where his outer shape reflects his true being Gregor's consciousness still pretends to be Gregor Samsa the office clerk, the son who is still of significance within the human community. He pretends that the transformed shape of his body is a temporary matter only and that he will soon function again as the family's breadwinner. Everything, however, contradicts these pretensions. He is not only not a help any more, he is the most terrible burden and cause of shame to the family. Not only does he not support them, they themselves have jobs now and are very well able to keep things going, not only not through but despite him.

It is only when the hero's consciousness admits that his outer shape is the true expression of his self that the conflict is resolved. Once Gregor has accepted his sister's death sentence his consciousness gives up hoping for the restoration of his untrue former existence. He accepts his self-elimination as the consistent and only honest step to take. The hero's death, thus, appears as the logical conclusion of what had happened before the story's beginning, Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis.

The general idea of the father-son relationship, present in almost all of Kafka's writings, can well be put into the centre of an interpretation of Metamorphosis.<sup>1</sup> Despite his actual desire to live a secluded life the son has stood up in rivalry to his father. For this act of remonstrance Gregor is

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. in particular Franz Kafka, Brief an den Vater (München: R. Piper and Co. Verlag, 1965).

punished by an external manifestation of his actual position. The hero is removed from the place he has usurped from his father and is degraded to a vermin, a being incomparable in every respect to the spokesman of the family. After his transformation Gregor makes three attempts at regaining his old position. Three times he is driven back, twice by a now powerful father and once, at the end, by his sister. The hero's assent to his death sentence may be understood as a final restoration of the disturbed family order and the bug's death as an objectification of the rebellious hero's total elimination from the human community.

A further shift of meaning is achieved in the story's interpretation if one gives special prominence to the family's reaction to the transformed hero. Like Tolstoi's Ivan Ilich, Gregor Samsa retains his consciousness to his very last breath, whereas his outer appearance and function within the community is completely changed. Gregor's family react to their son's terrible state as to a repulsive disease. On first recognizing the degree of change the family react frightened and repelled. For a while pity for the suffering being prevails, until time makes them accept the outer shape of the bug as the true essence of the former son. The family feel that the bug threatens their contact with members of the wider community of human beings. The transformed son becomes a source of shame. Gregor's attempts to participate in the life of the community are thwarted and he is restricted to his prison-like room in order to keep him shut off from the healthy sphere of the community. When the members of the family feel that their vitality is threatened, they openly wish the bug's death. This they try to justify by maintaining that the vermin is an "it," not a "he," a foreign body, not part of themselves.

By giving the insect an independent evil existence, they are able to rid themselves of the responsibility which they would have towards a

relative of the family. When the last link between Gregor's consciousness and the family is broken through the sister's judgement, he assents to his total exclusion and death. As soon as he is dead, the community try to forget everything which might remind them of their horrifying experience. They go on an excursion into the country and they decide to rent a house different from the one Gregor had chosen. In accordance with spring they realize their obligation to be procreative. Looking proudly at the young and healthy body of their almost grown-up daughter the parents are thinking of a "good husband," a man unlike Gregor who had decided to live as a bachelor.

Not only are persons who suffer from a terrible visible disease such as Tolstoi's hero repulsive to the 'healthy' community, but also any kind of psychic anomaly is rejected as burdensome and repugnant. Gregor's wish to crawl along the ceiling expresses this otherness. As soon as a certain degree of otherness is reached, the human community exclude their former member, refusing to accept any common link. Declared as an unproductive, parasitic member of the community, a foreign body at last, the step to total exclusion and annihilation is quickly done.

At this point it is frightening to realize how Kafka could imbue his universally valid fictional world with prophetic topicality. Starting from an individual and concrete, though fantastically unreal, situation the story, through its dense symbolism, points to a wide range of possible interpretations in the final layer of ideas. At the same time Metamorphosis leads back by means of its parabolic qualities from its realm of universality to concrete situations and becomes shockingly topical, especially in the historical context of the twenty years to follow its author's death. The poetic density of Kafka's story can be demonstrated by testing how much of its totality is conveyed if one tries to compress it into a plot summary. And even the few

directions towards possible interpretations given here can only tentatively suggest the cosmos which it contains.

The first story in Kafka's phase of maturity, Das Urteil<sup>1</sup> (The Judgment), has as its main constituent the general idea of the father-son conflict. Georg Bendemann, a young merchant, has written a letter to a friend in Russia telling him of his impending engagement to a girl of a well-to-do family. He puts the letter in his pocket and enters his father's dark and stuffy room. Georg mentions the letter, but the father doubts that the friend in Russia exists. The son carries his apparently senile father to his bed and covers him up with a blanket. In an outburst of anger, however, the old man leaps high up in his bed like a giant until he reaches the ceiling with his fingers. He accuses his son of untruthfulness and disgraceful behaviour and, in a nightmare climax, sentences him "to death by drowning." Georg hurries to fulfill his father's judgment and lets himself fall into the river and to his death.

The story derives part of its power from its clear dialectical pattern. There are the two opposing forces of Georg Bendemann's self-deception and his father's representation of truth. They function as thesis and antithesis which find a resolution in Georg's final acceptance of his father's authority and his own death.

The first and larger part of The Judgment develops the deceiving picture of a successful young merchant who is justly proud of his acquired position. As the young head of a growing firm he is shown in his private office which allows him a full look at the blooming world of spring outside. With casual superiority he handles his correspondence.

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<sup>1</sup>{1913}, in James R. Frakes and Isadore Traschen (eds.), Short Fiction: A Critical Collection (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), pp. 388-395.

The manner in which he thinks of his friend in Petersburg who has obviously taken the wrong turning underlines this attitude. Self-assertively, though not without sensitivity, George makes himself believe that he can only pity, not help his distant friend. He takes pride in remembering how he had taken over from his father since the day his mother died, and had become the actual head of the firm. He recalls how the business had developed, the personnel had doubled and he is convinced that further progress can be expected. In his private life too Georg can look back at promising developments. He is engaged to a rich girl and his marriage would add to the general ascent of his fortune. Georg's self-deception reaches a climax, when he undresses his father, speaks to him soothingly as to a child, and finally covers him up with a blanket. The father's repeated question, "'Am I well covered up?'" functions as a conclusion of this first part and, at the same time, foreshadows with its inherent tone of danger the disaster presented in the story's second part.

With a terrifying "'No!'" the father frees himself from the covering blankets and his son's usurped domination. Leaping high up in his bed he fills the space like an all-powerful giant. The spatial expansion of the senile and child-like father into a threatening towering giant presents in concrete terms the act of regaining his lost authority. His dressing gown fluttering round his knees he discloses to his first embarrassed, later horrified son that he knew the friend in Russia after all and kept up his memory more honestly than Georg. The giant father accuses the son of having disgraced his mother's memory to satisfy his desires, betrayed his friend and covered up his old father and played him false all the time. As the representative of Georg's distant friend his father by uncovering himself, uncovers to his son the whole shattering truth of Georg's position. In a final moment of recognition, with his friend

emerging powerfully from his memories, Georg Bendemann accepts his father's death-sentence.

This recognition of his latent true self is followed by the full re-establishment of his childhood obedience and acceptance of his father's authority in the moment of his fall. The image of this fall is powerfully contrasted with the father's nightmare rise to giant size and to power over life and death. But before he fulfills the father's judgment Georg speaks a fervently humble prayer to his parents: "'Dear parents, I have always loved you, all the same.'" Only through his death, through the total annihilation of his corrupted existence, can the antagonistic contradiction of his life be resolved as in a final synthesis.

A further development of the punitive theme can be observed in Kafka's In der Strafkolonie<sup>1</sup> (In the Penal Settlement). A traveller who is an expert in legal practices visits a penal colony and is given a long and detailed explanation of the complex nature of the settlement's penal machine by an apparently highly competent officer. Invented by the Old Commandant who had died some time ago the machine does not simply kill the convict, but engraves into his body in a twelve hours' process the law which he has violated. With scientific enthusiasm the officer defends the superiority of this method against new and more liberal practices which the New Commandant, it is feared, will introduce. To make his explanations appear more convincing the officer has a soldier who insulted his captain put into the machine. When the traveller, however, shows his disapproval of the inhuman procedure, the officer realizes with deep affliction that the end of his Old Commandant's system has come. He sets the prisoner free, re-arranges the subtle mechanism for a more noble and

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<sup>1</sup>(1919), in Franz Kafka, Metamorphosis and Other Stories, pp. 167-199.

perhaps, its last task, and lies down on the rack where innumerable convicts before him had suffered, assented to their death, and died. Yet the machine which had been neglected lately due to the New Commandant's lack of cooperation collapses and the officer is murdered without being granted any purification or atonement. After a short visit to the Old Commandant's grave the traveller hurriedly leaves the island.

The discussion of this story will concentrate on Kafka's treatment of death as punishment in the story's structure and on some of its possible implications. According to the officer's belief the only acceptable punishment of a convict is a slow process of making him feel with his own wounds the law he has violated. Only when he finally assents to his death as the only adequate solution to this process can his punishment be regarded as fully successful. The convict is granted complete atonement, as physical pain is the deepest possible experience of expiation.

Death, then, is the climax to a process of becoming just. It is identical with the prisoner's full acknowledgement of his guilt and the authority whose law he has infringed. This old form of punishment and death is contrasted with a more liberal form in which the criminal himself is no longer of particular interest. It is a quick death which eliminates the criminal rather than makes him aware of his guilt. It shows more interest in the society which has to be protected against the criminal than in his being granted some kind of atonement through suffering. The painful way to justice, purification through torture, and katharsis through pain are replaced by an unceremonious removal of the culprit.

The officer's death at the end of the story introduces the new form of punishment. Instead of proving the old system's superiority over more modern legal practices the machine by collapsing and killing its victim instead of torturing him anticipates what the officer tried to prevent. The

officer is denied the final satisfaction of being "just," and the machine, as if consenting to its replacement by something more adequate, disintegrates. When the machine as a last act sends a "great iron spike" through the officer's forehead, it robs him of the desired twelve hours' ceremony as well as of the promised redemption and the final state of being just in death.

An obvious implication here is that the contrast between the Old and New Commandant, between the old and new system suggests some of the major discrepancies between the Old and New Testament, the modifications for instance of the harsh Pentateuchal legal practices by the powerful idea of Christian love in the New Testament.

Perhaps even more obvious are the story's implications of medieval Germanic legal practices as contrasted to modern ideas of justice. Franconian law contains a series of particularly cruel - i.e. cruel from our point of view - Leibstrafen.<sup>1</sup> They are mutilating punishments aimed mainly at deterring people from committing certain crimes. Perjury and counterfeiting are thus punished with the culprit's loss of his right hand, blasphemy with the cutting out of his tongue. Counterfeiters are later branded with a glowing coin, burning into their skin the object, institution, and law which they have violated. The parallel to Kafka's penal machine is obvious. Gradually such punishments could be redeemed until a stage was reached at which the underlying cruelty was not more than an effective threat to get as much money out of the convict as possible. However inconsistent their application laws of this nature existed in Germanic times and do still exist in more primitive societies. In Kafka's story the essence of all these 'reflecting punishments' seems to be symbolized by the process during which the "Designer" makes the "Harrow" engrave the violated law deeper and deeper into the

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Mitteis and Lieberich, op. cit., p.69.

convict's skin. The twelve-hour procedure suggests the complex rituals which, according to the concept of justice in young societies, usually accompany the act of punishment.

The representative of the old system in Kafka's story, the officer, suggests the figure of Moses. He is the guardian of an old code foreign to man. The emphasis on the process of purification through physical pain is underlined by the officer's scientific enthusiasm which bears a strongly aesthetic quality. He is absolutely loyal to the machine left to him by the Old Commandant and prepared to sacrifice his life for its justification.

The traveller on the other hand clearly suggests modern man and represents the shift of interest from the manner in which the convict is punished to the motives of his action and the possibilities which he is given to defend himself.

Although the old system literally collapses in the story, Kafka does not release the reader with the satisfaction of having witnessed a lasting victory of a more human administration of justice. The story ends on a pessimistically prophetic note. Before the traveller flees from the island a compulsive curiosity drives him to visit the Old Commandant's grave. It bears an inscription predicting that "after a certain number of years the Commandant will rise again and lead his adherents from this house to recover the colony." The threatening certainty of the prophecy motivates and underscores the traveller's unrest and flight from the colony.

Written in a time of mounting feeling of totalitarianism the story, besides its timeless universal validity, displays a powerful and frightening topicality.

If we see the penal colony as a symbol of our world the traveller represents modern man experiencing himself as being thrown into a limited space in which, punished by more or less humane means, he dies. Being born into this space is no

more of a guarantee than a few "letters of recommendation." He knows that his stay is only transitory, a visit without consequences. His concept of a more refined society can be voiced only as a suggestion which might have a temporary effect. Soon, however, the darker forces will come up again and destroy the achievements of the more humane part of mankind. Once again cruelty and death will rule, restored by people driven by blind beliefs. The pessimistic outlook revealed by this interpretation was unfortunately proved in the years to come after Kafka's death.

Seen as an interpretation of the author's own artistic personality In the Penal Settlement appears to be a metaphoric description of what Kafka is doing himself. W. H. Sokel comments on this phenomenon by saying that In the Penal Settlement "summarizes in an image the ... first phase of Kafka's mature writing" and that the "machine repeats Kafka's own activity as a writer of punitive fantasies who grants his characters illuminating insight as he kills them."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, In the Penal Settlement marks the end of this phase of punitive fantasies, as death here is no longer the final acceptance of authority and climax of illumination but the meaningless end of a life absolutely devoted to an authority. It is the authority now and the ideals which it represents which seem to be questioned.

Kafka's art often resembles the presentation of dreams. Despite this resemblance there is, however, a fascinating clarity which enables his critics to agree on a fairly large common ground before they split up and follow their individual interpretations to the deeper ranges of the final

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<sup>1</sup>W. H. Sokel, op. cit., p. 26.

layers.

A modern writer who seems to have combined dream presentation with an almost undecipherably dense method of symbolically enigmatizing his artistic objects is Dylan Thomas in his early phase.<sup>1</sup>

In The Lemon<sup>2</sup> Thomas apparently makes an attempt at presenting the narrator's physical, and in particular his sexual and spiritual development from an embryonic stage up to his first sexual experience with a woman. The author consciously or unconsciously capitalizes on Freud's cognition that one can call a "constant relation ... between a dream-element and its translation a symbolic one, and the dream-element itself a symbol of the unconscious dream-thought."<sup>3</sup> The reader of this very brief story (under 3,000 words) is very much in the position of a dream-interpreter who tries to translate what is offered in dream-images into common language. "Symbols," Freud argues, "make it possible for us in certain circumstances to interpret a dream without questioning the dreamer, who indeed in any case can tell us nothing about the symbols."<sup>4</sup> Transferred onto the act of interpreting the present story this would mean that we have an author who has made a narrator tell his dream to a reader who is expected to unriddle its meaning. Clearly the author has outstripped nature in making the dream particularly consistent and complex for his artistic purposes. The presented dream appears as real, however, in so far

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed study of Dylan Thomas' use of symbolism see D. A. C. MacLennan, Symbolism and Ambiguity in the Poetic Method of Dylan Thomas (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Univ. of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1962).

<sup>2</sup>(1936), in Dylan Thomas, op.cit., pp. 120-127.

<sup>3</sup>Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, trans. Joan Riviere with a preface by E. Jones and G. S. Hall (New York: Garden City Books, 1952), p. 134.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

that it seems to share the peculiar associative logic and the floating quality of its progression with a natural dream. Neither the author, like nature, nor the narrator, like the real dreamer, interfere with the reader's difficult task of analysing and understanding the presented dream-reality.

The story's opening paragraph presents the disturbing image of the creator Dr. Manza who is experimenting with life. With the first time indication "early one morning" the author apparently suggests the dawn of creation in general and of the narrator's nascent life in particular. Near the creator men lead a spiritual existence "like too many ghosts." It is their spiritual quality after death or before life that grants them access to the experimenter's house. A boy is among them who, unlike the others, sleeps protected. He has not yet had any experience of the outer world, his "room [is] shuttered from the stars."

The foreign doctor, the magician and experimenter is "power and clay knife," God the creator and God the master. His acids contain, as the word's multiple meaning suggests, the extract and intrinsic nature of life and the power of death. His remoteness from the world he creates seems to be expressed in the foreign name he has been given.<sup>1</sup> The doctor's qualities of God and experimenter appear to be compressed into the bold image of the "frozen crucifix of steam." "The mystery of matter" is no mystery to him, he passes the sentence of Cain's expulsion, an act which is symbolized in his marking the frog, and he sends his son to mankind. However, Dylan Thomas does not use these religious qualities in a strictly Christian sense. The images of modern scientist, Creator-God, and master of creation, merge into the all-embracing image of an inconceivable creative force.

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<sup>1</sup>The name "Manza" suggests, perhaps, man from A to Z.

When we are told that the boy's hands move "along the walls of the corridors" towards the light, it seems quite clear that an extended metaphor is given for a human being developing in a mother's womb. This is strongly underscored by the name which the boy is given. "Nant" is apparently a contracted form of nascent which, *inter alia*, means 'just beginning to be.' He is not alone, his mother is "around" him, protecting him.

The different stages through which the unborn passes seem to be symbolically summarized by the narrator's impression of having seen himself in his dream as a "cat-headed creature." Together with the first aural impressions - he hears a "frock rustle" - the unborn develops his limbs. The image of the arm "turning into a tree" suggests the unfolding of the embryo's fingers, as if they were growing branches on a tree.

Inside the dark sphere of the womb the boy is without a guide. It is the urge towards light and birth alone that drives him on. Towards the end of his prebirth existence, which is suggested by the creative urge to die as well as by the unborn's urge to light, the narrator identifies himself with the spiritual part of the boy. From this point onwards he merges only temporarily with Nant, the physical component. During the last phase immediately preceding his birth Nant and his spiritual part urge like "two brothers ... To London and the Sun," towards the exterior world and light and warmth.

It has been stated that birth is the deepest traumatic experience man ever has. Thomas makes an attempt here to render its possible effect on the mind of the narrator as a new born boy. There is thunder and lightning, storm, whistling, and rustling water, the disturbing concerted onslaught of the exterior world on the baby's senses. When the boy enters the wider sphere of the exterior world,

the interior world is, to a large extent, left behind. The doctor is a "foreign logician," a creative force unknown to the world outside. In the act of birth part of the forces which have brought forth the new life are separated from the new-born.

The next step in the boy's spiritual and physical development is the awakening of his sexual drives. In his dream the narrator sees how "a woman danced alone with the hands of a man on her shoulders." A probable interpretation here seems to be that the narrator's dream gives as a stored memory the symbolically 'enigmatized' image of the boy who realizes the close contact which he has to his mother, whereas the father appears to him only vaguely as a protection or perhaps even as a threat. This impression of his mother is, however, soon overlaid by the image of virgins, "bared to the waist" who make "the movements of dancing." The image of dancing virgins may well be stimulated by the memory of the boy's subconscious pleasure of sucking at the breasts of his mother. Still dream-like, "sleeping as they moved," these female figures are the counterpart necessary to the development of the boy's sexual powers. Gradually the mother is eliminated and there remains the dream image of the dancing virgins as a sexual stimulus. According to Freud the movements of the dance should be understood as a clear symbol of sexual activity.<sup>1</sup>

With the arrival of the first phase of obstinacy in the boy's development more connections between the boy and the doctor, the inconceivable creative force, are severed. The creative force which we may compare to the force inherent in a seed unfolding roots and shoots is separated from the physical being called Nant and the spiritual

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<sup>1</sup>S. Freud, op. cit. , p. 140.

part of Nant, the narrator's subconscious I. Like root and developing stem rid themselves of the rest of their now dead kernel, the growing boy oversteps another important mark on his way to full independence. He realizes that his will-power is now master over certain actions. Late in the morning according to the dream-time or in the third year of the boy's life, if we translate the presented time roughly onto reality, the narrator experiences the first affirmation of his own will.

As the author compresses the period from the boy's adolescence to his first sexual experience with a woman into the remaining one and a half pages of his story, he has to employ a by far more selective technique than in the first part of the story. The stage preceding puberty is packed into the one sentence, "at noon the storm was stronger." The storm now is an obvious symbol of the boy's distinctly awakening sex drives. When the author makes the narrator dream that "all afternoon it shook the tower, pulling slates from the roof," there is no doubt that the reader is given a strong sexual symbolic image. The tower is used here as a plurisignificant sexual symbol. It stands for the father begetting a child, the force of creating life, and generally for sex. During the disturbing period of adolescence the boy perceives outer reality only through sex. The strange experience of this stage frightens and fascinates the boy at the same time. He still sees the "half-naked virgins dance to the doors." The fact that the dancing figures are virgins may symbolize the boy's inexperience, and that they dance "to the doors" seems to be an image of the force of sex enticing him to leave the protecting, but at the same time subduing environment.

Again a new stage of development is introduced with the death of a foregoing one. Towards the evening the boy drinks the acid of knowledge. When the "boy's heart" breaks within him, the young

man leaves behind him the illusions but also the charm of childhood. He takes the lemon, the acid-juiced fruit, and hurriedly leaves the house, the lemon clutched to his breast. With the loss of his childhood being the people surrounding him have become "strangers." The possession of the lemon whose acid juice and seeds symbolize bitter knowledge and, at the same time, life gives him strength to break the cumbersome emotional bonds.

Body and spirit are one for a while in the new experience of independent life. The young man's name, however, is still Nant, now meaning 'not yet mature.' The emotional liberation has to be followed still by an intellectual breakthrough. Running through the space of his new life the hero frees himself of the nursery-tales of the past. "The wicked intimacies" of the outer world and the "devils in the corners" vanish before the young man's thirst for experience and search for truth and fulfilment. The last necessary experience left is the sexual fulfilment of a man who has freed himself emotionally and intellectually. The physical desire once more becomes all-dominating, thus taking leave of the spirit that follows the light.

Nant, all sexual urge, rushes up the "last tower," a stronghold which his experience has to take. In a few lines the reader is given the major stages of his final sexual experience. There is the kiss, the touching of the woman's breasts, and finally, the act of love-making, when he "cuts the lemon in half with the scissors dangling from the rope of her skirt."

Nant cuts the fruit of knowledge with the body of a woman. Thomas here closes his story with a powerful double image. The young man's cutting the lemon implies first the releasing and revealing of knowledge to himself, the freeing of the fruit's acid. Then it suggests the setting free of seeds, his procreative powers. The second image, "the scissors dangling from the rope of her skirt" seems to be a symbolic description of a woman's posture in

in the act of conception as well as of giving birth.<sup>1</sup> The physical union is symbolized by the gesture of drinking from the fruit of knowledge. The gesture also indicates the man's having reached full maturity. The change from adolescent sexual desire to mature fulfilment is made distinct by the difference between the image of the sleeping half-naked virgins and the final image of the woman ready to love. With the "death of the interior world" the young man overcomes the stage of his dream projections but, at the same time, loses some essential part of his being.

In The Lemon Dylan Thomas also seems to make a bold attempt at projecting the Christian concept of Trinity onto man. Just as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost are one before Christ is sent to redeem the world through his death, so man is one with the creative forces of nature and his spiritual powers in a pre-birth stage. When Nant is sent into the exterior world, his spiritual part accompanies him as the Holy Ghost accompanied Christ on his way towards his destination. But whereas Christ finds his way back to eternity in his death, man, by opening the fruit of life, severs the last connections with the forces of the interior world and moves towards death. It is a secularized image of the Trinity which Thomas offers. Christ drinks from the bitter cup of death to gain eternal life and to be one again with the Father, Nant drinks from the bitter-sweet cup of life to gain death. The lemon like the beetle in Kafka's Metamorphosis or the torture-machine in the Penal Settlement functions as a metaphor containing in nuce the main elements of the story. As a whole the lemon is first a fruit, an entity, then an essence and, finally, seeds, its procreative force. If this force is to be freed, its parts have to be disintegrated. Its unity, however, which is the interior world, is lost.

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<sup>1</sup>In Dylan Thomas' symbology the image of scissors can also mean that which gives life removes it.

d. The Structural Potentiality  
of the Death Incident in  
the Highly and Purely  
Symbolic Short Story x

The main and obvious difference between the significance of the death incident in an action-and-plot story, a realistic symbolic story, and a purely symbolic story seems to be one of ambiguity. In the first case the death incident is understood in its immediate context, in the second it is still understandable in the presented reality but it gains its actual significance beyond its visible world. In the purely symbolic short story the death incident which appears as a series of concrete structural details in the layers of movement and action is so strongly modified in the layer of symbolism that it loses its concrete relationship with other structural details in the middle layers. A new relationship can thus be established in the final layers.

As the death incident, by nature of its ultimateness and finality, is always a potential pivot in a fictitious reality, its transformation by the layer of symbolism and projection into the final layers seems to set it significantly apart from other symbolically heightened structural details.

Once given the role of a structural pivot, as is the case in The Celestial Omnibus and in the stories by Kafka which have been discussed, the purely symbolically meaningful death incident functions as the organizing centre of gravity. The act of symbolizing not only has the effect of making the story's structure as a whole more dense, but also of endowing each single structural detail with poetic ambiguity.

Poetic ambiguity, one of the main criteria of high art, carries with it, however, the danger of disintegration. Having lost the structuring effect of a causal nexus in the middle layers highly symbolized structures need a new organizing force

in the final layers. If this force is lacking, the quality of floating ambiguity reaches the point where density is dissolved into a conglomerate of unlinked multiple meanings. Although the story's many symbols may still be understood independently, the symbolic content of the story as a whole is endangered. Dylan Thomas' story The Lemon illustrates this danger, at least partly; whereas Kafka's stories do not.

The death incident, then, appears particularly suited for taking over in a highly or purely symbolic story the role of a necessary structuring force not in the presented reality of the middle layers but in the reality which merely appears in the final layers. The purely symbolic story, set apart from the novel structure through its poetic density and moving towards the lyric, keeps a precarious balance between a necessary narrative organization and the free play of symbols. It seems that the death incident can serve as a lucid example of prominent structural points able to exert the effect of narrative organization necessary to distinguish fiction from pure poetry.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DEATH SITUATIONS AND THE FINAL LAYERS IN THE MODERN SHORT STORY

Not only the immediately presented reality of the middle layers, but also universals which appear in the final layers seem to be able to function as organizing principles. The universals expressed in the following stories reflect thoughts and conclusions found in existentialist philosophy. Short stories, however, are not to be regarded simply as mouth pieces of existentialism. They are mirrors of the Zeitgeist, but, at the same time, create Zeitgeist. Different philosophical contents are rarely kept strictly apart in these stories, but are allowed to overlap and mix. Whereas the resulting contradictions would appear as incompatible elements and, in fact, as shortcomings in a single philosophical system, their appearance in one story may well add to its complexity and artistic value.

Much of what can be said with objectivity about an individual work's meaning in the final layers had been said in the foregoing discussions in order to demonstrate the significant yet limited position which the middle layers have in a short story. However a few general ideas will be selected to illustrate some striking similarities between otherwise completely different modern short stories and to offer a basis for comparative practical criticism.

1. Short Stories with a Death Incident  
at the Beginning and Sartre's  
Concent of Death

The idea of the bitter reversal of 'victory' in Crane's The Upturned Face can be understood as an ironical illustration of Sartre's interpretation of death as an incident which interrupts our projects. Death would not have left Bill absolutely dispossessed had Crane portrayed the burial situation in a more optimistic and heroic light. But as it is, with military codes and conventions breaking down, with the meaning of Bill's death lost, at least to the older soldier, death has indeed removed all meaning from Bill's life. A glorious death of a soldier who had died for his fatherland, and a glorious military funeral with all the proper religious rites would have made his death the meaningful climax of a heroic life. Crane's artistic honesty, however, reveals the other side of things: war's horrible reality and man's pathetic condition in the face of death. The two officers who have to force themselves to bury their dead comrade appear, in a very definite sense, as Bill's guardians. The dead Bill is completely dependent upon the mercy and courage of his friends, and it is the younger of the two officers who has the necessary moral strength to fulfill his task as a guardian. To leave the dead unburied, a thought which occurs to both of the soldiers but is suppressed, would not only have a bearing on Bill's death, but would also put his life as a whole in a different light. The reader is not told the story of Bill. It is implied, however, that a pompous military funeral would have rendered his career as a soldier as an ascending line towards the final honour of having died for a great cause. His rotting corpse on the 'field of honour' would have changed this illusory pattern into the disillusioning insight that his military career was a downward movement towards a disgraceful death stripped of all meaning. This thought is

at least implied, otherwise Crane would not have stressed so much the contrast between the surface order of military convention and the harsh disillusionment of the burial situation. It is not Heidegger's idea of death as man's greatest potentiality that is suggested here, but a concept of death as utter and final extinction.

Death as the "triumph of the point of view of the Other"<sup>1</sup> is the idea determining the basic narrative pattern in Joyce's The Sisters. As has been shown, it is through the technique of point-of-view that the reader may gain a promising access to the story's meaning. The gradual revelation of Father Flynn's personality in the course of the story is not so much a revelation of truth about the priest as an accumulation of subjective opinions about what Father Flynn meant to a significantly limited number of people. It is the mind of the young boy that these opinions or, more accurately, splinters of opinions are cautiously moulded into a fragmentary picture. From the point of view of the priest death appears as the final climax to his process of paralysis. Once he is dead he is disintegrated into a number of attitudes, an unsympathetic public attitude represented by Mr. Cotter, a sympathetic yet not very sensitive one represented by Father Flynn's sisters and the narrator's parents and finally the attitude of the highly sensitive and sympathetic narrator, an attitude in statu nascendi. Death, as Sartre would put it, makes the old priest a "prey for the Other."<sup>2</sup> This is exactly what the author wants to present: the phenomenon of a paralyzed life and its reflection in a partially paralyzed society. It is significant that it is the youngest of the dramatis personae, a boy not infected by this disease, who is allowed the fullest, however, limited, understanding of his dead friend's contradictory personality.

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit., p. 540.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 543.

The idea of the living modifying and determining the image of the dead is suggested too in Katherine Mansfield's The Daughters of the Late Colonel<sup>1</sup> and The Fly. Although the dead father in first story exerts a strong and paralyzing effect on his adult daughters, it is through their minds and memories that the image of the old domineering father emerges. Sartre's idea of death making us a "prey for the Other" is present in the story, but at the same time finds an ironical reversal in the fact that the actual prey is not the dead but the living, the daughter of the late colonel. The Fly<sup>2</sup> presents a hero in whose mind the dead son dies a second death. Death as total annihilation is underscored here by the dying of the young man's memory in his father's, his guardian's, consciousness.

"The fall of the town monument" in Faulkner's A Rose for Emily<sup>3</sup> is an obviously symbolic presentation of Emily's total dispossession and through her that of the South: It is Emily's death which allows the public of Jefferson to finally tear from her the secret of her perverse existence. With her death Emily's subjectivity is taken from her and lives on as a modified memory in an insensitive narrator representing the citizens of a modern Jefferson and as an individual instance with wider significance within the sensitive reader's consciousness.

Wolfgang Iser's My Pale Brother<sup>4</sup> could be read as a pointed interpretation of Jean-Paul Sartre's thoughts on the meaning of death. For the sergeant death not only deprives him of the "dimension of futurity,"<sup>5</sup> it hands him over to his lieutenant's revengful thoughts. His life becomes in

<sup>1</sup>(1922), in West and Stallman, op. cit., pp. 108-124.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 230-233.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. above, pp. 277-280.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. above, pp. 200-204.

<sup>5</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit., p. 540

fact the "point of view of the Other."<sup>1</sup> His death leaves him defenseless to the humiliating and cynical unvoiced attacks of his survivor. Death here has brought a complete reversal of what had been: the sergeant, formerly the beau of his group, with a great interest in his outer appearance, is reduced to an ugly heap of blood and rags, an eyesore which spoils the the flawless snow dress of a Sunday morning. He who had always found an occasion to laugh at his senior is laughed at now by his lieutenant with all the scorn that has accumulated since the days when the officer had been teased as a small boy by his fellow scholars. Sergeant Heller's life is turned through his death into a contemptible "prey for the Other," a bleeding heap which finds an ironical and symbolic parallel at the end of the story, when the lieutenant cracks a louse leaving a stain of blood, the sign of Cain, on his forehead.

2. Death in an Axial Position: Turning-Point between Blindness and Recognition of Truth

Joyce's A Painful Case<sup>2</sup> and Lawrence's Odour of Chrysanthemums<sup>3</sup>, stories written by two diametrically opposed writers, appear to reveal a basic structural pattern which renders them comparable in a meaningful way and allows us to use them as representatives of other stories which could be included in this chapter. The similarity does not, however, exist so much in the middle layers of immediately presented reality but appears as significant content in the layer of universals.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> (1914), in H. Levin, op. cit., pp. 89-96.

<sup>3</sup> (1911), in D. H. Lawrence, The Prussian Officer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 204-224.

The death incidents, in their immediate context, do not seem to have anything much to do with one another. In Joyce's story it is the suicide of a frustrated woman, in Odour of Chrysanthemums it is the accidental death of a young miner. And yet, the striking similarity is at once felt, if one realizes the relative insignificance of these incidents as external action. It is in the consciousness of the two main characters that the death incidents as well as all other details of outer action gain their full meaning. Death loses much of its significance as a final point of a chain of external events. It appears, in the final layers, as a marked border between two different and contradictory ways of seeing, between a state of blindness on the one hand and of recognition of truth on the other.

James Joyce takes deliberate care to portray his hero as the ascetic man he is, a man denying love and feeling, a man without friends. Characterization is achieved indirectly here through spatial allusions and through the foil of Mrs. Sinico. James Duffy lives near a "shallow river," in a room without carpets and with walls that have no pictures hung on them. His black iron bed is covered with one blanket, and the only decoration of his room is a white lampshade on the mantelpiece. His inability to create a meaningful relationship with other people is contrasted by Mrs. Sinico's readiness to love and to share his loneliness. Duffy's rejection of her is tantamount to a death sentence. He, however, is unable to grasp the full meaning of his attitude. His experience with Mrs. Sinico is but one more disillusion in a long chain of disappointments in people.

In Lawrence's story the contrasts in attitude are not as distinct as in A Painful Case, yet, perhaps, even more convincing. Before the death incident the heroine, Elizabeth Bates, is presented to the reader as a mother who tries despite rather than through the help of her husband to get her children

through. The negative side of Mr. Bates' character is stressed by Elizabeth's allusion to his taking to drink and neglecting the family. The established human relationship in Odour of Chrysanthemums then only seems to be a different version of the inability to form a relationship in Joyce's story. In fact, the relationships of Duffy-Mrs. Sinico and Mrs. Bates-Mr. Bates are both failures, and much on the same grounds.

The death incident, in both cases, underlines once more the basic error of the two main characters. Mr. Duffy reads the news of Mrs. Sinico's accident and its surface implications with disgust. He sees her as a human wreck destroyed by the vice of drinking and is glad to have parted with her. It is significant to note that it is in his barren room that the lonely man reaches this culmination of blindness. Though not as obviously as in Joyce's story, Elizabeth, too, is made to show an inauthentic attitude in the face of death. She weeps, but is "unknowing" that she does so. The practical thinking which is stressed in the first part of the story at first dominates the situation. One of her first thoughts is "they'll lay him in the parlour" and she quickly fetches a tablecloth to "save her bit of carpet." When one of the miners knocks over the vase of chrysanthemums, Elizabeth handles the matter with practical superiority.

Gradually however, this attempt to shirk the truth gives way in both stories to a process which leads the two main characters away from the darkness of not understanding towards a stage of insight until the whole shattering truth is revealed to them. James Duffy leaves his room and the darkness outside makes his thoughts wander. He feels that Mrs. Sinico is near him, and when his nerves begin to tear, he runs away. In a pub he tries mentally to relive the lost relationship. More and more piercingly, he grasps the meaning of the fact that she has ceased to exist. He begins to feel uneasy. First doubts as to whether he was to blame

arise, and suddenly he understands how lonely her life must have been. As a second insight the thought follows that his own life will also be lonely until he too dies. James Duffy leaves the pub, and in the cold night outside and in the darkness of the park he feels her presence again. Suddenly the question looms in his mind: why had he sentenced her to death? At the same time his moral self-assurance reveals itself to him as a terrible delusion. When he reaches the top of Magazine Hill and sees the shadowy figures of couples, James Duffy feels excluded from "life's feast." What had forced itself into his mind as an irritating question turns into acknowledgment of a crushing guilt, that he has sentenced her to disgrace and death. With the noise of a passing engine in his ear, hammering the syllables of her name into his mind, James Duffy takes his way home, towards a barren existence. With the passing engine Mrs. Sinico leaves him. What is left is the depressing silence and the shattering recognition: "he was alone."

The change from an inauthentic to an authentic attitude towards the death of the person with whom a relationship had been attempted is shown by Lawrence when he makes Elizabeth and her mother-in-law stand "arrested in fear and respect" before the "naïve dignity of death." Elizabeth realizes with a shock that death reveals "how utterly inviolable he [her husband] lay in himself." She lays her hands on his body "in claim." Death, however, drives her away, and she feels the "utter isolation of the human soul." Her former unsympathetic picture of a negligent husband who has taken to drink is contrasted now with her realization of his handsome body with its fine limbs, Embracing the body again, trembling and shuddering and having to draw away again, Elizabeth feels that the separation through death only symbolizes the absolute separation in which they had lived and she suddenly knows, "what a stranger he was to her." Their life had been "utter,

intact separateness, obscured by heat of living." They had made love as two "isolated beings, far apart as now." Gradually the woman understands that the dead man was not entirely to blame for the failure of their marriage. Looking at his body and searching for the truth, she turns towards herself. "'Who am I? What have I been doin?'," she asks herself and receives the crushing answer that she had been "fighting a husband who did not exist," while the real husband in front of her had "existed all the time." Elizabeth has to admit to herself that she had rejected him for what he really was, and turns her face to the wall. In Hemingway's The Killers this gesture symbolizes Ole Andreson's total resignation and acceptance of death. Here Lawrence uses it as a pointed image of the heroine's shame and despair. Having arrived, for the first time in her life, at a full insight into herself and her inability to break through a false relationship Elizabeth does not see death mainly as an annihilating force, but as something to which she can even be grateful, because it "restored truth."

The two stories have been discussed in greater detail than would appear appropriate in this chapter. It seems, however, that the basic pattern determined by a death incident in the middle of a story is not often used in such a 'pure' form as it is in A Painful Case and in Odour of Chrysanthemums. Stories which appear to employ a pattern which is a hybrid of the one discussed and one having the death incident towards the end of the structure are Joyce's The Dead, Katherine Mansfield's The Garden Party<sup>1</sup>, Hemingway's Indian Camp<sup>2</sup>, or Doris Lessing's A Sunrise in the Veld<sup>3</sup>. What connects them clearly to the type presented in the two

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<sup>1</sup>(1922), in K. Mansfield, op. cit., pp. 65-87.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 253-255.

<sup>3</sup>(1951), in Doris Lessing, This Was the Old Chief's Country (London: Michael Joseph, 1951), pp. 21-30.

stories analysed so far is the fact that a hero's confrontation with a death incident, not the realization of an impending death, functions in an axial position as a centre of gravity towards which the structural details of the story's first half and from which the structural elements of the second half are organized. The death incident in this type gains its significance mainly in the final layers of universals where man is revealed as passing from a stage of blindness through the confrontation with death towards a point of recognition and state of deep understanding.

It has to be emphasized that the compression of a story's content into a general formulation like this can never be a substitute for a thorough analysis and sensitive interpretation. It is however justifiable and appears useful as a common denominator linking together stories which one would perhaps not normally view under the same aspect. Comparative interpretations following individual discussions of stories are apt to bring to light features and directions of meaning which, at first sight, may have seemed irrelevant.

### 3. Death at the End of a Story

#### a. Death as Absurd End of an Absurd Existence

Naturally stories which deal with the disillusionment of modern man will present situations in which individuals understand their lives as meaningless or, in Camus's sense, absurd. Death as the end of a meaningless existence does not gain significance beyond the meaning of that which it ends. It is understood as the absurd end of an absurd existence. This view is, of course, not expressed systematically in the short story as it is in philosophy. There may be indications of it, but,

at the same time, instances which contradict it, for the modern short story's object cannot be to present a system of thought but rather to present the interpretation of instances in man's attempts at mastering his problematic existence.

To Harry in Hemingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro<sup>1</sup> the absurdity of his life and end are suddenly revealed with absolute clarity. He realizes the pettiness of so much of what he had been doing, and even in the face of death there is the "bickering over a drink." He knows that there will be nothing after his death. Death itself even is of very little interest to him. It is responsible, quantitative exploitation of his life that he realizes, however late, as his actual aim. When Helen complains, "'What have we done to have that happen to us?'," Harry rejects her implication of a transcendence as an absurd illusion. He emphasizes the ridiculous insignificance of the cause of his state with the answer, "'I suppose what I did was to forget to put iodine on it [the leg] when I first scratched it.'" Helen's question also implies the concept of guilt and punishment. Harry on the other hand, has reached a state of honesty and clear-sightedness in the face of his approaching death in which he forms a concept of life that, like Camus's, no longer knows guilty deeds, but only responsible ones. The short span of time which is left to the hero, his absurd freedom, one could argue in Camus's sense, allows Harry to find a new and authentic attitude toward the absurd facts of his life and death. He regrets to himself alone that he has not been able to live up to the standard set by his artistic potential, but, at the same time, accepts his failure as a result of his own decisions. His punishment is his own dissatisfaction with his partly exploited abilities, a punishment which he consciously accepts. The dying man resents his death

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 217-219.

as a ridiculous result of an absurd insignificance and as premature, as it will prevent him from writing the things which he had "saved to write until he knew enough to write them well."

Granny Weatherall in Katherine Anne Porter's story<sup>1</sup> has to realize in her very last moment of consciousness that her whole life had been built on an illusion. The absence of God at the end renders her fulfilled life an absurdity. Despite her jilting by her first fiancé the heroine would have been able to accept her life as meaningful, if God had accepted her in the end. But being left alone again with a priest and no bridegroom in the house makes her reject, with her last breath, both God and transcendence as the most terrible and final absurd illusion.

In William Saroyan's The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze<sup>2</sup> the young writer is made to perceive with great clarity his absurd existence. Hunger has driven him to the point where sleep means life to him and wakefulness merely a precarious state between sleep and death. His absurd state is emphasized by his futile attempts to be productive. Saroyan's hero stands in an ironical contrast with Kafka's heroes such as the hunger artist<sup>3</sup> or Gregor Samsa<sup>4</sup> to whom their state is the objectification of a deep wish. The hunger artist has accepted the fact that he is unable to be productive in a normal way and has made an art out of this incapability. Gregor Samsa wants to be unproductive and finally is, whereas the young writer in Saroyan's story tries to find work and rejects the mere thought of living on alms. Although he "perceives the definiteness of the course of his life" towards an inevitable death, he makes a

<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 208f.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 224f.

<sup>3</sup>Ein Hungerkünstler (A Hunger-Artist), (1924), in West and Stallman, op. cit., pp. 289-296.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. above, pp. 326-332.

final and absurd attempt to solve his insoluble dilemma. He starts to write "An Application for Permission to Live." But the artist neither believes in its success nor is he able to finish it. It is left a fragment as is his life. He is too weak to go on writing and there is nothing more to say. Smiling at a shiny penny he awaits his death. The coin is the last piece of reality with which he is concerned. It is, however, an absurd reality, and the words "E Pluribus Unum" and "In God We Trust Liberty" underline this quality. Unable to grasp the coin's usefulness, which is in fact non-existent, the dying young artist only sees its beauty, an absurd ideal in the face of death. Not having attained "permission to live" the hero tries at least to make his flight towards death with ease and grace.

To Nick Adams in Hemingway's The Killers<sup>1</sup> Al and Max present the absurd appearance of an anonymous death. He cannot understand that the killers, who have never met Ole Andreson before, should be willing to murder him. When he tries to warn the Swede, the man's resignation is even more a riddle to him. Nick and the reader can interpret Ole's impending death as an absurd end to an absurd life. The Swede who had been a heavy-weight boxing champion is not only not able, but does not even wish to defend himself. Nick is not yet so disillusioned that he can accept this fact and the absurdity of going on living in this town with the ironical name "Summit" in which absurd death punishments are carried out for crimes committed somewhere, sometime in the past, against some unknown person. Nick does not yet accept life's absurdity for himself, but he has witnessed its appearance.

The reader of The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber<sup>2</sup> may well interpret Francis' confrontation with death as the most concentrated form of man's

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 228f.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 268-271.

encounter with the absurd. Francis Macomber appears to be safe as a coward. When he suddenly has courage, and tremendously enjoys the feeling of it, he is killed. His death is as absurd as its cause. It is not a dangerous bull that gores him, it is his wife who, with a tiny movement of the trigger, blows out his brains and his courage. If Margot's action is unintentional, as is maintained by some critics<sup>1</sup>, her husband's death would appear even more absurd. She would then not only have killed her husband, but ironically robbed herself of exactly the chance for which she fired the shot, namely to rescue her husband to be able to make a fresh and more promising start in their marriage.

The absurdity of war and killing is the main general idea underlying Frank O'Connor's Guests of the Nation.<sup>2</sup> The very title and the tragic outcome embrace the absurd contradiction on which the story is based. O'Connor absurdly contrasts the growing affection between the four men, the fraternal feeling which make them play cards, try Irish dances, or even have heated discussions about religion, with the sudden command to shoot the Englishmen as hostages. The two Irishmen, and in particular the first-person narrator, are not able to see a meaningful relation between the death of the four Irishmen who have been shot by the English and the ordered shooting of their English friends. When Hawkins and Belcher have to take their positions in front of their open graves, the absurdity of the situation reaches its climax. Hawkins asserts to his friends that he loves his "chums" better than his country. But even his offer to desert and help the Irish fight his own nation cannot alter the absurd command. Their death has been decided as a retaliatory measure against the enemy which has no directly conceivable connection with the victims as persons. At the end of the

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 268-271.

<sup>2</sup>(1931), in Gordon and Tate, op. cit., pp. 240-248.

story the absurdity of man's existence and death is stressed once more, when the narrator curses nature for what he had had to do and sees himself removed from everything, as "very small and very lonely" and meaningless.

In John Steinbeck's Flight<sup>1</sup> absurdity is one of the major qualities of the hero's newly gained manhood. The conflict of the story has arisen from the triviality of having been sent to town for salt. When a man insults Pepé, he throws his father's knife and kills him. From the innocent play with his brother and younger sister the nineteen-year-old boy is unexpectedly torn into the torrent of life and death. With no time to come to terms with the manhood so vigorously thrust upon him he flees his unwanted responsibility. In a final situation in which the reader sees the young man wounded and battered on a mountain ridge Pepé, hopeless and desperate, stands up to his fate and meets his death at the hands of his pursuers. It is the rash and inevitable change from the most unencumbered life to the harshest possible death that seems to provide Steinbeck's story with its distinct note of absurdity. The hero is unable to see any meaning in his sudden suffering, nor does his final death appear to imbue Pepé's former existence with particular significance. His death seems to reflect very clearly Camus's idea of death as the absurd end of an absurd existence.

A strong quality of the absurd can be found too in Willa Cather's story Paul's Case<sup>2</sup>. The inevitability of a progressing action determined by an unfortunate collision of character and environment not only adds to the story's tragic impact, but also leaves an impression of meaninglessness. Paul in particular realizes the absurdity of his death, when he, in the final moment of recognition, rejects

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 262-264.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 309-311.

it as the right solution. In his desperate last second of consciousness the hero resents his premature death, as it cuts short his passion for quantitative living. That is how far he is able to understand his condition. The reader who has the advantage of seeing Paul's death in relation to what precedes it may interpret it as an absurd result - it is meaningless even to the hero - of an absurd constellation of incompatible factors.

Perhaps the most absurd death of all is died by Paco in Hemingway's The Capital of the World.<sup>1</sup> He dies because a femoral artery is cut by a kitchen knife in a mock bull-fight. The absurd quality of the incident is underscored by the narrator's matter-of-fact and ironically detached tone, when he comments, "a severed femoral artery empties itself faster than you can believe." Absurd too appears the indifference of the surrounding life that goes on as if nothing had happened. And in fact, nothing of any significance has happened. Paco dies, "full of illusions," without having had time consciously to grasp the meaning of the life which he could have lived in the "capital of the world."

b. Death as Sacrifice and Punishment

As has been suggested in an earlier chapter of this thesis death as an expression of the ideas of sacrifice and punishment plays an important role in the genre of the fairy-tale.<sup>2</sup> The punishment of the evil queen in Little Snow-White, however cruel it may appear to the sophisticated modern reader, is an example of a satisfying objectification of the "naïve moral,"<sup>3</sup> one of the main constituents of the

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 295-297.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, Part I, Chapter III, 2.

<sup>3</sup>A. Jolles, op. cit., pp. 238-246.

genre. The demands roused by the reader's sense of "naïve moral" are fulfilled in a similar way in short stories of our age, stories which one might classify as the equivalents in short form to what the romance<sup>1</sup> is in the long prose form: the typical Western story, the romance type of science fiction stories, in short the adventure and atmosphere story with an ideally clear confrontation of good and evil values. The bearer of the evil is punished and sacrificed to allow his positive counterpart to determine the fictional reality and restore the story's assumed ideal world. As A. Jolles has pointed out in his epoch-making book<sup>2</sup> what is evil in the fictional world of the fairy-tale and, one can assume beyond Jolles, in the fictional world of the type of story discussed here, need not necessarily correspond to accepted ethical standards, but is created as a new naïve standard within the reader's mind by the author's capacity for suggestion.<sup>3</sup>

In the literary short story death as an expression of sacrifice and punishment usually appears in a much more complex form. It may be, among other things, the objectification of a dream-wish fulfillment, a nightmare experience, the artistic presentation of a social-anthropological problem, or the frightening realization of a repressed wish for revenge. Contrary to the type of story mentioned above where the understanding of the presented death usually brings the reader very close to a full grasp of what is offered, the interpretation of the possible ideas inherent in the death incidents of the following stories can only be a very tentative attempt at suggesting their complexity.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Northrop Frye, "The Four Forms of Fiction," in The Theory of the Novel, ed. by Philip Stevick (New York: The Free Press, 1967), pp. 31-43.

<sup>2</sup>Einfache Formen; see Bibliography.

<sup>3</sup>It is important that the expectation of the righting of an initial injustice is aroused in the reader.

In E. M. Forster's The Story of a Panic<sup>1</sup> the goat-footed Pan appears to a group of Englishmen in the woods near Ravello. The fourteen-year-old hero, Eustace, to whom Pan is the revelation of the beauty of nature and who salutes nature in ecstasy is imprisoned by the adults who are unable to appreciate the grandeur of the appearance and feel nothing but terror. The only one to understand Eustace is the tragic figure of the Italian waiter Gennaro. Having passed the magic age of childhood and not fully reached the state of an adult he has no place in either of the two contradictory worlds. Gennaro sacrifices his life so that he can free Eustace and the forces of ecstatic joy from the fetters of an unimaginative, barren, and authoritarian world of adults.

The sacrifice of the hero's life in Kafka's Metamorphosis can be seen as the only possible consequent left to him after he has accepted his sister's death sentence. Gregor Samsa's death appears as the extinction of a life of pretence and unproductivity and the necessary liberation of the 'healthy' human community from a repulsive parasite. It is through the sacrifice of the parasitic hero's life that a disturbed order of productivity and procreation can be cleansed.

On a very different level a sacrifice takes place in Katherine Anne Porter's story María Concepción.<sup>2</sup> Here it is a community of half modern, half primitive Mexicans that sanctions the murder of a man's mistress at the hands of his legitimate wife as a just way of restoring a disturbed natural order. The modern world in the form of the police and the Western legal practice is rejected by the village people. They sacrifice the life of an unworthy member of the community who has usurped a

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<sup>1</sup>(1914), in E. M. Forster, Collected Short Stories (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1947), pp. 1-29.

<sup>2</sup>(1930), in Fenson and Kritzer, op. cit., pp. 340-359.

a position which was not rightfully hers and was finally claimed in the most terrifying way by a proud woman. The husband, too, immediately accepts his loss and Maria's quiet authority.

Lawrence's excellent story The Rocking-Horse Winner<sup>1</sup> displays a death incident as a double sacrifice. On the one hand there is Paul's self-sacrifice, his 'great sacrifice' or 'last sacrifice' which is the climax and the end of his desperate attempts at satisfying his mother's craving for more money. On the other hand Paul's death appears as the mother's sacrifice of her child to her egoistic demands. The Rocking-Horse Winner is a modern short story employing a realistically presented world modified by strong fairy-tale elements. Characters, dialogue, and setting are realistic enough to pass as instances of an everyday world. There are, however, features which clearly belong to magic, such as the "voices" which Paul hears whispering the family's lack of luck, or the boy's magic activity of rocking his toy horse until he is able to predict the winner of the next horse race. In his quest for creating luck he is not only the victim of his mother, but also of his superficially sympathetic uncle and the gardener Basset to whom the making of money has become a religious cult. The immediate context of the realistic-magic world becomes transparent to let Paul's death appear as a symbolic expression of man sacrificing and being driven to sacrifice his spiritual potential and needs to gain material wealth.

In Shirley Jackson's The Lottery<sup>2</sup> the death of Mrs. Hutchinson can be understood as a sacrifice in the sense of the ritual slaughter of a person as an offering to some deity. There is also implied, quite obviously, the symbolic sacrifice of

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<sup>1</sup>(1926), in D. H. Lawrence, Love among the Haystacks and Other Stories (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 81-96.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 225-228.

man by a human community that has to satisfy dark forces and pent-up drives hidden beneath the merely seemingly firm layers of civilization. The stoning of the woman at the hands of apparently 'normal' 20th-century villagers is a tour-de-force expression of possible forms of irrational mass behaviour in modern society.

Sacrifice in the double meaning which it has in Lawrence's story appears too in Faulkner's short story Dr. Martino.<sup>1</sup> A young American, Jarrod, finds himself unable to fully conquer Julie, a girl who cherishes an old and magically intense relationship with an old man. The dark fascination which Dr. Martino exerts upon the girl finds symbolic expression in a small metal rabbit, a present Julie had been given by him when she was a child. It is only when the mother, Mrs. King, sends the token back to the old man while her daughter is asleep that Jarrod is able to free Julie from Dr. Martino's paralyzing influence and that the old man is finally able to die. Dr. Martino's bond with life in the double form of his magical connection with Julie and in the form of his own unnaturally prolonged existence has to be sacrificed to free life from death.

Death as an expression of punishment forms one of the main constituents of punitive fantasies like Kafka's and, to a lesser extent, E. M. Forster's. Besides these highly symbolic stories death as an expression of the idea of punishment can be found in a great number of realistic-symbolic short stories. A strictly limited number of short stories will be sufficient here to support the argument.

E. M. Forster, in The Celestial Omnibus<sup>2</sup>, appears to employ the death of Mr. Bons as a possible expression of a child's dream projection of

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<sup>1</sup>(1934), in William Faulkner, Dr. Martino and Other Stories (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), pp. 163-183.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 324-326.

his unconscious death wish for an adult art snob who does not accept the boy's imagined artistic truth. Whereas his shallow, unsympathetic parents are merely excluded from his realm of art, Mr. Bons, who pretends to understand, yet disappoints the boy deeply, has to be punished. The fact that the resulting death wish is subconscious is suggested by the humble and willing manner in which the boy tries to show Mr. Bons his sphere of art. Mr. Bons's punishment is heightened through the terribly mutilated state in which his corpse is found. On the other hand the boy is raised on Achilles' shield and made "poeta laureatus." The strong contrast between his own triumph and Mr. Bons's punishment emphasizes that a child does not want to accept art to be what a corrupted adult snob makes of it.

The hero in Kafka's The Judgment<sup>1</sup> is sentenced to death by the authority of his father for his unfaithfulness to his friend in Russia, for disgracing his mother's memory, and for usurping the power of his father. By obediently fulfilling his father's judgment he accepts his punishment and, with a last prayer, returns to his parents as a loving child.

Gregor Samsa's death in Metamorphosis<sup>2</sup> can be interpreted as a symbolic-parabolic expression of a punishment inflicted by the human community upon one of its members that has turned into an unproductive, parasitic, and repulsive being. By accepting death as the only possible punishment the hero, like Georg Bendemann, assents to the restoration of an order which had been disturbed by his very form of existence.

The idea of death as punishment in Kafka's story In the Penal Settlement<sup>3</sup> appears mainly as the confrontation of an old form of punishment

<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 332-334.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 326-332.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. above, pp. 334-338.

according to which the convict's atonement is of primal significance with a more modern one which has its main interest in the society that has to be protected. The cruelty of the first form of punishment seems to be partly justified by the deep sense of katharsis which the victim is granted, whereas the modern, apparently more humane form appears to lack any interest in the convict's own process of purification. This is, of course, only one possible tentative interpretation. The bulk of Kafka criticism alone suggests that it cannot claim any priority.

Death as an expression of ideas of punishment and revenge is of considerable significance in stories such as A. E. Coppard's Silver Circus<sup>1</sup>, Katherine Anne Porter's Maria Concepción, W. Faulkner's That Evening Sun, or Hemingway's The Killers. In Silver Circus the hero Hans Siebenhaar is cuckolded by his wife and his friend. They leave him and Hans Siebenhaar abandons himself to gloomy despair. When he acts as a wild animal in a circus show, he suddenly perceives his wife among the audience and his rival disguised as an animal in the arena. Frightened by the surrounding bars and the atmosphere and mad with the instinct of revenge Hans Siebenhaar murders his former friend. There is a certain similarity in the narrative arrangement between Coppard's story and Shirley Jackson's The Lottery. A realistically presented everyday world is suddenly made questionable by the outburst of irrational forces. Mrs. Hutchinson is the scapegoat victim of a human community, Siebenhaar's unfaithful friend is the victim of the irrational force of a primitive instinct of revenge which apparently merely slumbers beneath the surface of modern man's psyche.

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<sup>1</sup>(1927), in Arthur Waugh (ed.), Georgian Stories 1927 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1927), pp. 76-87.

The heroine in Maria Concepción by murdering her rival takes revenge upon her husband's mistress for ~~her~~ having unrightfully usurped Maria's lawful position. Faulkner's Nancy, paralyzed with fear, awaits the revenge of her husband Jesus for her unfaithfulness as the Swede Ole Anderson in Hemingway's The Killers resigns himself to his imminent death demanded by someone whom he had "double-crossed" in the past.

Although in many respects altogether different pieces of art, the stories discussed under the aspect of death as an expression of sacrifice and punishment appear to have one significant structural phenomenon in common. They are all structured around a significant death incident which reveals, within a strictly limited artistic space, the basic human situations of sacrificing and punishing and the valid universals of sacrifice and punishment. It seems typical of the modern short story that such instances and universals remain isolated fragments and splinters of ideas and are not, as is usually the case in artistically successful long forms, moulded into an embracing pattern of a total world and a meaningful universe of ideas. The greater embracing unity may be formed in the reader's mind by a multitude of stories interpreting fragments of the human condition.

### c. Death as Man's Greatest Potentiality

The fact that existentialism lends itself readily to artistic presentation, perhaps even finds its most convincing expression in art is of particular importance for the modern short story. Since significant human situations are of major interest to the existentialist thinker and since the presentation of single human situations goes particularly well with the brevity of the modern short story, the two are obviously predestined to

intermix. This interrelation appears to have been suggested at a very early stage of existentialism. When Kierkegaard says about death that it can only be understood as a personal matter and not "merely in general,"<sup>1</sup> he has in fact opened the way for artistic treatment of this aspect rather than for a philosophic-systematical approach. It is in individual situations and with individual persons that the question of death and man's reaction to it can be treated most convincingly. To accept this conclusion one need only recall one of the main differences between art and philosophy, namely, that in art universals only appear through the presented individual reality, whereas in philosophy the universal idea is reached by a logical argument and finally explicitly formulated as a generally valid philosophical truth. It seems that the short story is an art form which is particularly fitted to make the impact of an individual death situation felt with poignant immediacy. It is perhaps more convincing to witness an individual face his death than to arrive at a philosophical conclusion about the question of man and death.

Heidegger's concept of death as man's greatest potentiality which is shared to a certain degree by a few other existential thinkers<sup>2</sup> has found convincing artistic expression in a series of short stories. To do art full justice, however, one has to mention the fact that Heidegger had at hand an artistic presentation of an important part of what he wanted to give philosophical form to in Tolstoi's The Death of Ivan Ilich.<sup>3</sup>

In Tolstoi's story it is the hero's consciousness of his imminent death which forces him to see the truth of his shallow life. The process towards Ivan's full recognition of truth is at the

<sup>1</sup>W. Lowrie, op. cit., p. 343

<sup>2</sup>E.g. Abagnano, Jaspers, or Schestov.

<sup>3</sup>M. Heidegger, op. cit., p. 298, footnote

same time the process of his accepting, more and more honestly, death as personally meaningful and as a permanent attribute to his life. Tolstoi made it clear that a seemingly successful man like Ivan Ilich needs the shocking fact of his approaching death to break the illusions of an inauthentic existence. It is in the very last moments of his life that the hero arrives at what Heidegger and Jaspers would call an authentic existence. Ivan finally reaches a state which is postulated by Nicola Abagnano as "faithfulness to death."<sup>1</sup> Beyond atheist and agnostic existentialist thinking Tolstoi's story is meaningful to Christian existentialism such as Léon Schestov's. It seems, as if The Death of Ivan Ilich had been used as a model for his statement that death is a limit to human reasoning and a threshold to belief. Only when Tolstoi's hero stops reasoning and, thus, hoping to go on living, is Ivan Ilich able to take the significant step towards belief. Until the very last moment his consciousness of death is blurred and he pretends that death is not his death. Death is Ivan Ilich's final existential test which calls upon him to make the decision which he finally makes, abandoning the life which he had been leading as shallow and false and accepting the truth of his death and the power of God. In the face of his ultimate limit situation Ivan Ilich, after a long progress from blindness through stages of doubt and hope to absolute honesty towards himself, finally achieves an authentic existence and fulfills his potentiality.

Vr Rarely is this aspect of achieving authenticity in the face of death treated as exclusively and convincingly as it is in Tolstoi's story. As one idea among others, however, appearing through the presented fictional reality this existential problem

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<sup>1</sup>N. Abagnano, op. cit., p. 23.

constitutes parts of a series of stories from which the following have been selected for the purpose of this section.

In Henry James's The Altar of the Dead<sup>1</sup> the dying hero in a final moment of reconciliation with his dead friend arrives at an authentic existence which he had been stubbornly denying in his life. The ultimate limit-situation of death forces upon him a clairvoyance and will to forgive which earlier he had been unable to reach. His reverence of the dead is complete in the face of his death, and dying he gains the reverence and love of the one person whose devotion of the dead had long been perfect.

Faulkner's Nance in That Evening Sun who avoids admitting her own guilt through the process of shattering fear arrives at a state where she is able to see her death in proportion to what she has done. "'I reckon it [her violent death] belong to me'," Nancy says to the narrator's sympathetic father, "'I reckon what I going to get ain't no more than mine.'"

The first-person narrator Pablo Ibbieta in Jean-Paul Sartre's The Wall<sup>2</sup> through his courage and loyalty in the face of his death achieves great personal dignity. His mature and proud attitude is contrasted with that of the young coward Juan Mirbal who shirks his responsibility and winces at his approaching end. The narrator's heroic attitude in not betraying his friend and comrade Ramon Gris is, however, ironically reversed into an absurd act at the end of the story, when Pablo Ibbiety learns that it was his very attempt to misguide his enemies which has in fact led to Ramon's capture and his own reprieve. By this reversal Sartre juxtaposes to Heidegger's positive interpretation of death its

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, pp. 116-119.

<sup>2</sup>(1939), in West and Stallman, op. cit., pp. 256-271.

absolute and absurd negation. Man's ideal realization of his potential in the face of death has been turned, by a ridiculous and absurd twist of circumstances, into the betrayal of the very ideals for which life was to be sacrificed.

Harry in The Snows of Kilimanjaro resembles, in many significant aspects, Tolstoi's hero. The progress towards death is a progress towards authentic living. With merciless honesty Harry separates the unimportant from the important in his life. Actual shallowness and ideal potentiality are sharply contrasted with one another in his stream of thought. The rigorous search for truth which he had postponed throughout his life suddenly appears in a concentrated form in these last hours of consciousness. Knowing his death to be an irrevocable certainty Harry, unlike his wife, is able to live a short span of authentic existence. It is his consciousness of death that demands the authenticity which had been excluded all the time from the hero's existence.

It has been stated before<sup>1</sup> that one part of the final layers, that in which the ideal individual personality of a fictional character appears, cannot be as distinctly developed in the short story as it is in successful longer fictional forms. Although this is generally true, it seems that stories such as Tolstoi's and Hemingway's do allow the reader, at least to a certain degree, to imagine through the heroes' insights their implied potentiality. In The Death of Ivan Ilich it can be achieved by reconstructing from the hero's insights and final negation of his shallow life, in The Snows of Kilimanjaro Harry's potentiality is clearly suggested by the things he should have written and the artistically satisfying life which he could thus have lived.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, Part II, Chapter VI, 2.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE DEATH STORY AND THE MODERN SHORT STORY IN GENERAL

The death incidents in the stories discussed in this thesis appear to be only particularly pointed incidents able to form structural pivots, from or towards which fictional materials may be organized. It must still be shown in how far the death incident, apart from its unique qualities, can be regarded as representative for other possible structural pivots or organizing centres of gravity.

In a story stressing outer action such as adventure stories of any kind death incidents usually function as the culmination and measure of tension and the effect of suspense. The detective story, a special type of action-and-plot story, usually has an impending death incident as pivot balancing the fate of criminal and detective. Through death as a threat the highest form of suspense can be achieved and through death as incident the most conspicuous form of resolution. However, it seems that death, as threat as well as an incident, may be successfully substituted by other, less final instances. The difference in effect is certainly gradual and not essential. Death in the action-and-plot story is merely a pointed instance particularly suited to display the qualities of this type.

Stories such as Gothic horror stories in the tradition of many of Poe's pieces which have atmosphere as their determinant constituent also preferably employ death as an impending threat and as an incident by which to arouse shock. It is however more the suspended state of horror to which the author wishes to subject the reader, not death

itself in which he is interested. Although death and all that goes with it offers the writer an inexhaustible arsenal of horrifying effects, the skilled writer is able to substitute death by other means without necessarily sacrificing the intended impact of horror. Again, death seems to be merely a specially appropriate instance to play a climactic role in the structural pattern of a horror story. Other types of atmosphere-stressing stories, such as idyllic stories, would of necessity have to employ as a climactic point something totally different from a death incident. The sudden appearance between gloomy clouds of the evening sun bathing the presented fictional reality in a warm and peaceful glow could function as a structural pivot just as death can in a horror story. The appearance of the sun, to keep this example, can take on the quality of a centre of gravity towards which the fictional material is meaningfully organized.

Unlike the novel which can reveal character gradually and carefully the short story emphasizing characterization can at best bring out convincingly a few significant features. Brevity, however, which at first seems only to force upon the writer disadvantageous restrictions reveals itself as artistically valuable, as it demands from the author that he present, in a significant moment of his hero's life, traits of his character which may reflect much more than seems immediately offered. Death, as has been shown, can function here as a tool to organize a story's material towards a climax of revelation in which a character appears as reflecting, in a dazzling moment of truth, his own being or even the essence of our human condition. A pathological case may be given tragic weight through a death incident<sup>1</sup>, the psychic idiosyncrasies of a character may appear overdimensionally distinct

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. C. Aiken, Silent Snow, Secret Snow; e.g. above, pp. 314-316.

in the moment of death<sup>1</sup>, or it is often the sudden consciousness of death which makes the hero realize his misused chance and individual potentiality.<sup>2</sup> Again, death appears to be only one possible, howsoever pointed, kind of instance functioning as a centre of gravity towards which the other structural details are organized. The revelation of significant character traits may be convincingly achieved through organizing fictional material around a petty fraud, as is the case in A. E. Coppard's Fifty Pounds<sup>3</sup> or through forming a shattering climax in a dialogue as in E. Wharton's Roman Fever.<sup>4</sup>

In highly and purely symbolic short stories, i.e. stories which leave the reader puzzled, if he does not find their symbolic clues, death, like any other structural detail, loses its immediate relationship and causal nexus connecting it with a world familiar to the reader. It may take on the meaning of any change or transition as is the case in Dylan Thomas' early stories. It may suggest a new beginning as well as an end.<sup>5</sup> Death may symbolize a state of paralysis or blind, inauthentic existence. It may function as a symbolic and pointed expression of punishment as in Kafka's punitive fantasies. Death can serve as the symbolic fulfilment of a dream wish as it seems to do in E. M. Forster's The Celestial Omnibus, or it may have its main function in a symbolic sacrifice as is the case for instance in Shirley Jackson's The Lottery and, in a different way, in Forster's The Story of a Panic. As the range of death's symbolic meaning in these stories is so conspicuously wide, it seems acceptable to conclude that death can be substituted by an even wider range of structural

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Willa Cather's Paul's Case, above, pp. 309-311.

<sup>2</sup>E.g. Tolstoi's Ivan Ilich

<sup>3</sup>(1927), in Phyllis M. Jones (ed.), Modern English Short Stories (First Series, The World's Classics, London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 157-176.

<sup>4</sup>(1934), in Fenson and Kritzer, op. cit., pp. 266-279.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. e.g. Thomas' The Lemon, see above, pp. 338-345.

instances than would be possible in the previously mentioned types of stories. Even death itself can be enigmatized through the layer of symbolism and represented by things which would not normally, i.e. on a realistic level and in the middle layers of a piece of fiction, be understood as death. This phenomenon of poetic flexibility in highly and purely symbolic stories illustrates that death incidents can play their prominent role only as long as the reader can draw from his experience of reality in which death maintains its unique quality of finality. As soon as a highly poetic arbitrary and new reality is created which is merely suggestively linked to our everyday world, death loses, at least partly, its unique structural importance. It can be substituted by any other marked incident which is able to fulfil the function of a centre of gravity towards which the story's material can be structured.<sup>1</sup>

In the vast group of limit-situation stories death, as has been shown, is of particular structural significance.<sup>2</sup> Death, the ultimate limit-situation with which man is confronted, is a most appropriate device for interpreting the human condition. Once recognized as the unique limit-situation death demands an assertion, modification, or radical change of man's spiritual position. But although death is the most distinct and demanding limit-situation, there are innumerable other similar situations which offer man the chance of arriving at a responsible and authentic existence. Any instance of fear, suffering, disappointment, in short, any moment demanding a decision from or forcing an insight upon man can take on a structural position similar to those which death incidents fill in so many modern short stories. One

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. e.g. Franz Kafka's A Country Doctor (1919), in Matlaw and Lief, op. cit., pp. 144-149. The initial appearance of the swinish groom and the doctor's departure appear to play here the structural centre from which story develops.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Part II, Chapters VII and VIII.

could call the first type pure limit-situations<sup>1</sup> in Karl Jaspers's sense and the second epiphanies in the sense in which James Joyce wanted them to be understood.<sup>2</sup> Eveline in Joyce's story of the same title fails to make the decision of change and returns to the dead life of her father's home.<sup>3</sup> Gabriel in The Dead realizes in his final epiphany the shallowness of his existence, his failure as a husband, and the gap which had been existing all the while between himself and his wife. More often than not limit-situation and epiphany are moulded into one moment of clairvoyance and decision. In the Hungarian story Better to Die<sup>4</sup> by Andor Gábor the hero realizes that the wound which he has received is only an external expression of a deeper wound which leaves him indifferent to life. Seeing the meaninglessness of reality he prefers death to being brought back to his unit and most probably life.

It is however not only situations of human suffering which may be understood here as limit-situations. The shock experience of sudden love may well have a similar structural function. When the doctor in Lawrence's The Horse-Dealer's Daughter<sup>5</sup> is suddenly no longer confronted with a patient whom he has rescued but with a girl who loves him and wants to be loved, he has to articulate against his will, as it were, his own shattering affection towards her. He is too close to his true self at this moment to miss his chance of an authentic decision.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. above, Part I, Chapter V, 3.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. James Joyce, Stephen Hero (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), pp. 216-218.

<sup>3</sup>(1914), in H. Levin, op. cit., pp. 40-44.

<sup>4</sup>(1917), in István Sötér (ed.), Hungarian Short Stories (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1962), pp. 307-332.

<sup>5</sup>(1922), in Robert Stanton, The Short Story and the Reader (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1960), pp. 490-504.

The moment of the sudden recognition of love appears through its great subtlety to have as much structural force as any death incident can exert.

It seems that the death incident as a centre of gravity and a structural force in various types of short stories is set apart from other marked incidents in that it is the reader's and author's preconceived most poignant experience. This should, however, be regarded as a difference in degree rather than in kind. There is an indefinite number of other incidents out of which authors can choose their structure-making pivots which may fulfill, in a slightly less pointed manner perhaps, the function which the death incident has in so many short stories of light fiction as well as of high art.

If this conclusion is acceptable the structural results gained from interpretations of death stories earlier in this thesis can be regarded as representative to a large degree of different types of short stories in general. An attempt will be made then in the final chapters to organize different types of short stories into a meaningful interrelationship and sum up the main characteristics of each particular type.

PART III

AN ATTEMPT AT A TYPOLOGY

The following typology is not based solely on aspects of technique nor on purely thematic distinctions. An attempt has been made to include both with the higher order of a typology categorizing modern short stories according to their individual emphasis on particular layers. Nicolai Hartmann's general aesthetic model has been considerably modified for this purpose and adapted to the idiosyncratic demands of the genre of the short story and its types.

The typology is understood as a meaningfully arranged system of ideal forms towards which individual stories appear to tend. One has to bear in mind the fact that there cannot be an identity or even congruity between such formal ideals and individual pieces of art, however closely some stories may approach them. Thus a double goal is being aimed at in constructing this typological model: On the one hand practical criticism of individual stories appears to gain considerably by offering the possibility of comparison between stories which emphasize the same layer, however different their individual form may be. On the other hand particular aspects of fiction such as modes of characterization, techniques of point-of-view, or different methods of presenting fictional time can be tackled more easily if a wide range of stories is available for comparison. It is not and cannot be the task of even the most detailed typology to serve as a substitute for some kind of analysis or interpretation. The following typological arrangement of stories should be understood rather as a tentative attempt at meaningfully classifying short stories for the purpose of individual interpretation. The typology is, however, not meant to be merely descriptive. It is also persuasive in as far as it suggests criteria of high art.

The two main sections of the typology do not entirely correspond to distinctions such as "formula-story" and "genuinely artistic short story"<sup>1</sup> or "formula short story" and "literary short story."<sup>2</sup> Short story types with underlying formulas will be clearly restricted to the first section, whereas types deserving the term art will not be entirely confined to the second part. The arrangement of stories has been based on the principle of an ascending line leading from less complex to more complex stories, or, to speak in terms of phenomenological layers, from stories allowing merely a few layers to appear to stories which offer a wide spectrum of layers and have their main organizing constituent in the final layers.

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<sup>1</sup>Howard Baker, "The Contemporary Short Story," The Southern Review, III (Winter, 1938), p. 577.

<sup>2</sup>Warren Beck, "Art and Formula in the Short Story," College English, V (Nov., 1943), pp. 55 and 58.

## CHAPTER X

### SHORT STORIES WHICH HAVE THEIR MAIN END IN THE MIDDLE LAYERS

#### 1. Stories of Action

The Conventional Love Story. This type of story is characterized by its stress on elements such as outer action, usually an O-shaped narrative structure, atmosphere, and a banal change "from antipathy to affection."<sup>1</sup>

Adventure Stories. Adventure stories in general have their emphasis on outer action and suspense. The structure of the average adventure story corresponds roughly to what Friedman terms "dynamic structure."<sup>2</sup> Western stories, war stories, racing stories, hunting stories, mountaineering stories, or detective stories fall into this category, if they do not have their main constituent in the final layers.

Western Stories. The Western story, a subtype of the adventure story, but at the same time a distinct type of its own, could be subdivided into the following groups:<sup>3</sup>

"The wagons west type." For the short story the epic breadth of the great movement towards the

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<sup>1</sup>Theodore A. Stroud, "A Critical Approach to the Short Story," Journal of General Education, IX (1956), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup>Norman Friedman, "What Makes A Short Story Short?," Modern Fiction Studies, IV (1958), p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Howard C. Brashers, "The Cowboy Story from Stereotype to Art," Moderna Sprak, LVI (1963), pp. 290-299. Some of his novel types have been adapted for this typology.

promised land cannot be exploited. The type has to restrict itself to incidents and situations which have the movement to the west as their enveloping action.

"The Indian story" presents as a hero an Indian in conflict between two worlds, his native society and the world of the White man.

"The mining type" was started and given literary weight by Bret Harte and Mark Twain.<sup>1</sup>

Other types are stories having a "reformed gunman" as their hero or a "buffalo hunter", or stories presenting a "Mormon" settlement.

Brashers concludes his typology<sup>2</sup> by arguing that the stereotype Western stories can become art by dropping their emphasis on their local subject and stressing the universal qualities of man. It seems, however, that such an essential shift from the middle layers to the final layers would change the type itself. Comparing two writers concerned with the American West Beck writes, "a Zane Grey could not think of letting the hero down; though evil is abroad in those fabricated open spaces, it is doomed to defeat, by romantic necessitarianism."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand "Steinbeck's 'Leader of the People' reflects the West with fuller dimensions; here adventure and heroism are seen in their social and psychological contexts, and the pathos of division between generations in a family has as background a similarly melancholy separation between periods of the nation's life."<sup>4</sup> Whereas Zane Grey restricts his writing consciously to the type of the Western story, Steinbeck has created in The Leader of the People<sup>5</sup> a story which obviously belongs more to the

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Harte's The Luck of Roaring Camp (1868) and Twain's The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and Other Sketches (1867).

<sup>2</sup>H. C. Brashers, op. cit., p 299.

<sup>3</sup>W. Beck, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 60

<sup>5</sup>(1938), in John Steinbeck, op. cit., pp. 246-265.

general type of the limit-situation story.

The Science Fiction Story. A descriptive definition of science fiction has been attempted by J. B. Hamilton in his article "Notes toward a Definition of Science Fiction."<sup>1</sup> He introduces two possible criteria for the evaluation of a piece of science fiction. First, "to what degree does a scientific concept determine the nature of the work involved as well as help reveal the meaning of the work, or, to what degree is the science in the work merely a superimposed garnish with no real integral relationship to the work?"<sup>2</sup> Second, "does the work in question have a meaning on an adult level; does that meaning interpret in a consistent way, some phase, large or small, of man's existence? Or does it, rather, merely amuse, or create slackjawed wonder?"<sup>3</sup> Hamilton finally arrives at the conclusion that science fiction is "an interpretation which reveals the unique contribution of the scientific idea."<sup>4</sup>

Hamilton's high esteem of science fiction as an art form cannot be shared. It seems that the individual presentation of man and the universal meaning of the human condition can be influenced by scientific insights merely in an insignificant manner. Scientific insight into the structure of our psyche scarcely affects existential choices, metaphysical questions, or religious needs, all important phenomena in literature. Thus the literary type of science fiction in J. B. Hamilton's sense seems to be a scientific contribution rather than a literary achievement. If this is so, why, one may ask, use a potentially artistic medium?

The broad majority of science fiction stories, so emphatically denounced by Hamilton, at

<sup>1</sup> John B. Hamilton, "Notes towards a Definition of Science Fiction," Extrapolation, IV (1962), pp. 2-13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

least makes an attempt at exploiting an aesthetic quality, the creation of "slackjawed wonder."<sup>1</sup> Stress on outer action, especially in the space story, modernized fairy-tale patterns in scientific or pseudo-scientific disguise, mixed perhaps with elements of the type of utopian fiction, these are all qualities firmly rooted in the middle layers of fictional reality. The question remains: if the essential human problems to be tackled could be tackled as convincingly within the space of Wall Street or a village, what is the significance of introducing outer space or some other scientific gimmick? An honest answer seems to be that the main aim is not the general human condition but the immediately presented reality in the middle layers - action and suspense, atmosphere or heroic character types. Future science fiction in the novel and short form of Hamilton's type or the one discussed last will perhaps prove that this is a dated conclusion; the empirical material apparently does not.

The Detective Story. This type of story is a particularly interesting subtype of action stories, as its emphasis on external action and suspense is extremely pointed. As has been pointed out, this special character is due to the fact that the detective story has as its basic narrative pattern a riddle structure.<sup>2</sup> The criminal enigmatizes himself and his crime. The detective on the other hand is made to unriddle the presented enigmatized world. As in early riddles<sup>3</sup> death and life are usually the poles between which the action unfolds and which guarantee the highest possible tension and suspense. The type of the detective story may be found in combination with any of the types of the adventure story, thus forming a great variety of formal hybrids.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 88f.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. above, Part I, Chapter III, 4.

Their common denominators are the riddle structure of the 'pure' detective story, the common stress on outer action based on clearly recognizable arcs of tension and creating a maximum of suspense. With Conan Doyle this type of short story has conquered a firm place in short prose fiction.<sup>1</sup>

The Semi-Literary Action-and-Plot Story. Bader in an article<sup>2</sup> defends the "story of traditional plot"<sup>3</sup> such as Jack London's Love of Life<sup>4</sup> as "sadly underrated by a generation which prefers care to vigour."<sup>5</sup> He defines this type of story as any story

(1) which derives its structure from plot based on a conflict and issuing in action; (2) whose action is sequential, progressive, that is, offers something for the reader to watch unfold and develop, usually by means of a series of complications, thus evoking suspense; and (3) whose action finally resolves the conflict, thus giving the story 'point.'<sup>6</sup>

Bader's structural comments are justified. But although a certain literary value in Jack London's story cannot be denied, it seems impossible to derive evaluative judgements about a story alone from its narrative structure. What Bader neglects is the question of how much the story is able to offer in the final layers. On these grounds a critic like Baker condemns many of O. Henry's stories as revealing an attitude of "slick banality resting on minor popular fallacies."<sup>7</sup> A similar comment is that by Beck who denounces the typical action-and-plot story as "essentially the short story of platitude - the fable founded on sentimental mottoes."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes (1894).

<sup>2</sup>A. L. Bader, "The Structure of the Modern Short Story," College English, VII, (Nov. 1945), pp. 86-92.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>4</sup>(1907).

<sup>5</sup>A. L. Bader, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>7</sup>Howard Baker, op. cit., p. 581.

<sup>8</sup>W. Beck, op. cit., p. 58.

An interesting technical complication of the action-and-plot story is the surprise ending, a device which O. Henry mastered to a high degree. Although short stories can be found in 19th-century America employing this device before O. Henry<sup>1</sup>, it seems probable that he adopted it from Guy de Maupassant. Bader shows convincingly that the surprise-ending story is a true subtype of the action-and plot story, when he writes that

while it is true that in stories such as Aldrich's 'Majorie Daw' and those of O. Henry the real story is hidden until the end, the reader nevertheless follows a conflict in the form of a progression of scenes and incidents, and the surprise ending merely contributes a new understanding to the progression and resolution of the conflict.<sup>2</sup>

The banality of O. Henry's world, however, which reduces his technique to a merely superficial cover of shallowness can only be expressed, if one sees the narrative technique in its proper place in the middle layers. Even in a widely anthologized story such as The Gift of the Magi<sup>3</sup> the weaknesses of O. Henry's and the action-and-plot story are conspicuous. The resolution of the story's double twist leaves the reader expecting a piece of art with little more than the impression of a cleverly designed magazine story.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. e.g. Washington Irving, The Little Man in Black (1807); Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mrs. Bullfrog (1837); Fitz-James O'Brien, A Terrible Night (1850); Thomas B. Aldrich, The Lady with the Balmoral (1859) or Miss Hepzibah's Lover (1859); Kate Chopin, Desiree's Baby (1894).

<sup>2</sup>A. L. Bader, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>3</sup>(1905), in Current-Garcia and Patrick, What is the Short Story?, pp. 323-327.

<sup>4</sup>Sister Maura, in "The Short Story," The Dalhousie Review, XXXI (Winter, 1952), pp. 285-290, apparently overrates O. Henry's work, when she merely sees "an occasional shade of artificiality" in his stories; ibid., p. 286.

## 2. Stories Stressing Atmosphere

If atmosphere, "the emotional effect of the physical setting and external action or of the psychological aspect of character and internal action,"<sup>1</sup> is made the major constituent of a short story, types are formed such as horror stories and dream-world stories.

Stories of Horror. The short story of horror is essentially the equivalent in the short form to the Gothic novel. Poe achieved great mastery in this type and, with stories such as The Fall of the House of Usher<sup>2</sup> or even more so with The Masque of the Red Death<sup>3</sup> proves its artistic potentiality.<sup>4</sup> Usually however, neither Poe nor the majority of his successors up to the present day were able to bestow upon the type any significance beyond the layer of atmosphere. In Frye's typology the type of the horror story and the story of atmosphere in general would belong to the short form of what he calls "romance."<sup>5</sup>

A significant step in the development of the horror story is Ambrose Bierce's version which does away with Poe's supernatural elements and roots horror in reality.<sup>6</sup> When he combines this type with the technical device of the surprise ending, as he does in The Boarded Window or in An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, the shock which the reader

<sup>1</sup>B. Pannwitt, op. cit., p. 474.

<sup>2</sup>(1839), in Gordon and Tate, op. cit., pp. 39-52.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Kermit Vanderbilt, "Art and Nature in 'The Masque of the Red Death'," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XXII (March, 1968), pp. 379-389. Vanderbilt gives the story a new meaning in the final layers by assuming that it is a fable of nature and art.

<sup>4</sup>Further literary horror stories are Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1866), Thrawn Janet (1887), and The Bottle Imp (1891), or H. James's The Turn of the Screw (1898).

<sup>5</sup>N. Frye, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>6</sup>This does not mean that Bierce did not write stories of the older type. For supernatural stories see E. F. Bleiler, op. cit.

finally experiences has greater impact than any of Poe's supernatural horrors. While Poe may be regarded as the most prominent writer of the Gothic horror story, Bierce may pass for the inventor of the realistic horror story.

The common element in the two types is the presentation of nightmare experiences not for the sake of giving insight into the human condition as is the case for instance with Kafka's nightmare stories, but for the sake of creating atmosphere by which to deeply shock the reader. And just as O. Henry's surprise-ending stories are still true action-and-plot stories, Bierce's type is still a story stressing atmosphere despite its disguise of realistic tone up to the ending. When the final revelation is given, the whole action is suddenly understood in the light of its ghastly outcome which modifies the memory of it from the end. The atmosphere is compressed, as it were, into the final passage. Once the reader touches this passage in the process of reading it explodes and the atmosphere of horror, in the moment of understanding, spreads over the rest of the presented reality.

If Ambrose Bierce contributed to the horror story a new tone and the device of the surprise ending, the type received a revolutionary treatment in the hands of one of the unquestioned masters of the modern short story, William Faulkner. In The Hound<sup>1</sup> or A Rose for Emily<sup>2</sup> Faulkner combines the type of the horror story which is normally rooted in the middle layers with a type of story which has its determinants in the final layer of ideas, the limit-situation story.<sup>3</sup>

The Pulp Story of Dream Reality. Beck very adequately calls examples of this type "popular

<sup>1</sup>(1931), in R. Stanton, op. cit., pp. 182-193.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 277-280.

<sup>3</sup>See below, Part III, Chapter XI, 1.

fiction's technicoloured myths."<sup>1</sup> This dream world story is obviously a result of and tends to satisfy shallow wishful thinking.<sup>2</sup> It has its main constituents in the middle layer of atmosphere, an atmosphere which intoxicates the reader with the vision of an ideal and idyllic world. The vision, however, remains one of platitude, as the action is founded on "sentimental mottoes."<sup>3</sup> A problem similar to the one which has been faced in the discussion of the typical Western story arises, if a writer wishes to give this story type of escapist literature any significance in the final layers: he would have to change its whole pattern and a new type would be created.

It is interesting to note here that Strong in his article "The Short Story: Notes at Random"<sup>4</sup> defends the neutrality of story types. "The bad stories," he argues, "are just bad examples of a class or form which, in itself, is neither good nor bad, but which, like the sonnet, epigram, or any other form, depends entirely upon whether it is well or badly handled."<sup>5</sup> Obviously this criticism is based on literary forms which would be called genres in this typology. Whereas it would appear questionable to make evaluative distinctions between a good sonnet and an excellent epigram, such a distinction would be certainly acceptable and valid between different types of sonnets or between different subtypes of any other genre. Strong's conclusion then

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<sup>1</sup>W. Beck, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>The possible argument that by doing so this type of short story fulfills, perhaps, a human need is irrelevant as far as the question of art is concerned.

<sup>3</sup>W. Beck, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>4</sup>L. A. G. Strong, "The Short Story: Notes at Random," Lovat Dickson's Magazine, II (March, 1934), pp. 281-291.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

seems irrelevant, because it is based on a false analogy. Once an author's attitude has determined a story's main constituent to be in the middle layers he can at best fully exploit the given potentiality, a potentiality which is by definition inferior to the potentialities offered in a significant interrelation between the middle and the final layers. To contradict Strong's argument by means of examples, it seems obvious that a well-handled story of atmosphere of the dream-world formula type or even Bierce's literary type is certainly inferior to a well-handled story of the limit-situation type such as Chekhov's Lament, K. Mansfield's The Fly, or D. H. Lawrence's The Horse Dealer's Daughter, to choose only a few.

### 3. Short Stories Stressing Tone

Sometimes tone, "the attitude of the author toward his content and sometimes to the reader, as revealed explicitly or implicitly by the story,"<sup>1</sup> is the major organizing layer in a short story. The pivot of the story is then the structure's organizing centre within the middle layer of tone.

Comic Short Stories. The author's particular attitude underlying a comic story appears to be simply to make the reader laugh. The story's narrative phases and minor structural details are arranged then in such a manner as to achieve this aim. The main structural difference between a comic short story and a written joke could perhaps be defined by saying that the joke restricts itself to a minimum of narrative material and puts much more emphasis on the 'leap' which the reader has to make in order to understand its pointed witticism. As examples of

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<sup>1</sup>B. Pannwitt, op. cit., p. 476.

the type of the comic short story we may cite Roald Dahl's The Champion of the World<sup>1</sup> or many stories in the volume The Best American Humorous Short Stories.<sup>2</sup> As long as the author's attitude of laughing and of causing laughter is the comic short story's main element it is confined to the artistic significance which can be attained in the middle layers. A shift towards a stress on the final layers is conceivable and would provide the story with greater artistic weight until, gradually, a new type was created.

Grotesque Short Stories. The grotesque short story seems to be definable by the author's attitude of making the familiar world appear unfamiliar, releasing into a disturbing dance elements of the beautiful, the "wanton," the "bizarre," the "terrible," or elements which might "excite disgust."<sup>3</sup> In The Masque of the Red Death the type is clearly represented. At the same time, however, Poe's story does not exhaust itself completely in the middle layer of tone. It is its meaning in the final layers which lifts it above the type of the merely grotesque short story.<sup>4</sup>

The Macabre Short Story. If it is acceptable to say that the author's attitude underlying a grotesque story is one of distorting the familiar, it is perhaps also possible to say that the macabre tone is achieved by the author's pretending that the terrible, bizarre, ghastly and capricious is in fact the normal and familiar. His ironical detachment allows him to level things, which in the reader's mind rouse the most contradictory reaction, into one

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<sup>1</sup>(1959), in Roald Dahl, op. cit., pp. 206-233.

<sup>2</sup>Robert N. Linscott (ed.), The Best American Humorous Short Stories (New York: Random House, Inc., 1945).

<sup>3</sup>E. A. Poe, The Complete Tales, p. 271.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. in particular Kermit Vanderbilt, op. cit.

level of tone, the tone of macabre detachment. Roald Dahl is a master of this short story type. His volume Kiss Kiss<sup>1</sup> contains a series of stories of this type, two of which have been discussed above.<sup>2</sup> What distinguishes the macabre short story from longer forms of macabre fiction is the fact that the macabre tone, in the short form, finds a concentrated expression in a pivot towards which the story is consistently organized. In William and Mary<sup>3</sup> this pivot is Mary's question, when she will be allowed to take 'William' home with her. In Pig<sup>4</sup> it is the final moment in the hero's life. Like these two stories the macabre story often employs the device of a final shock by which the reader is suddenly made aware of the possibility that the world of the terrifying is only seemingly removed from his everyday experience and may emerge anywhere and anytime.

The Feuilleton Short Story. As the term suggests the feuilleton short story emerges from a particular sphere of journalism. It is determined by its light-hearted, usually witty conversational tone and an underlying chatting mood. Serious questions of man's existence are deliberately kept out of its world or are changed into something less serious by the predominant playful tone. A well-written feuilleton short story demands great skill as to the arrangement of narrative detail and depends, to a large extent, upon elegant style. The author of the feuilleton short story usually restricts his work intentionally to the exploitation of one particular sphere within the middle layer of tone. Its potential value is in its purely aesthetic effect. A serious handling of metaphysical, existential, or religious questions does not lie within the narrow

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<sup>1</sup>Roald Dahl, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, pp. 298-300.

<sup>3</sup>Roald Dahl, op. cit., pp. 19-46.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 184-205.

confines of this type. Its more serious relative is a type of short story called "Arabeskenkurzgeschichte" (arabesque short story) by Höllerer in his typological article on this genre.<sup>1</sup> Höllerer gives as a typical example of the type of the arabesque short story the Yugoslav writer Vladan Desnica's The Story of the Monk with the Green Beard.<sup>2</sup> Stylistic arabesques in the process of telling the story determine its appearance. What distinguishes it from the feuilleton short story is that the capricious style is used to enigmatize what is presented to a certain extent and that through the arabesque presentation some seriousness may suddenly be perceived.

#### 4. The Character-Formula Story

The wider type of the character story is extremely flexible. It is in the hands of an artist that such stories as Willa Cather's Paul's Case<sup>3</sup> or James Thurber's The Secret Life of Walter Mitty<sup>4</sup> are created. In the popular version, however, which also seems to have been, if not introduced, at least immensely promoted by O. Henry, a

condescending exploitation of banalities about types of people - a militant pessimist, an inevitable cop, a romantic and winning creature, a languid but virile young man - provides the interrelationship of characters which makes up the plot.<sup>5</sup>

Although in the type of the character-formula story the middle layers become transparent to a certain degree to reveal universals, the selection of

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Höllerer, "Die kurze Form der Prosa," Akzente, III (June, 1962), pp. 226-245.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in W. Höllerer, op. cit., p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. above, pp. 309-311.

<sup>4</sup>(1937), in Matlaw and Lief, op. cit., pp. 1-5.

<sup>5</sup>Howard Baker, op. cit., p. 581.

general ideas offered in the final layers is usually shallow. Good and evil are too obviously separated, the driving forces too simple. It is this kind of platitude which reveals the character type as a naïve and banal misrepresentation of complex human possibilities. The Western story, science fiction, and adventure stories, the horror story, and the cliché-dream-world story, they all employ types of people which, in the type of the character-formula story, are the main constituents.

That "no sharp technical line divides the literary short story itself and the popular short story"<sup>1</sup> seems evident. Evident, however, for a reason which contradicts Beck's argument. As has been pointed out, lines are irrelevant analogies in a phenomenological and typological discussion. Even three-dimensional analogies (e.g. 'centres of gravity') complicated by the concept of movement (e.g. 'certain stories move towards types') are merely simple and inadequate tools for the complex undertaking of interpreting and classifying pieces of art. It is only after a careful analysis of a story's structural details and their function within the whole and a sensitive interpretation of its meaning in different layers that a classification, not the drawing of a dividing line, should be attempted.

A careful reading and rereading of modern short stories is of particular importance, as many modern writers often give their work the disguise of an ironically matter-of-fact tone or the surface presentation of a banal situation. It is only to the sensitive reader that such stories suddenly reveal their significance in the final layers and their artistic weight and value.

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<sup>1</sup>W. Beck, op. cit., p. 56.

## CHAPTER XI

### SHORT STORIES WHICH HAVE THEIR MAIN END IN THE FINAL LAYERS

#### 1. Limit-Situation Stories

By far the majority of modern short stories of high artistic value appear to be limit-situation stories. The term should be understood flexibly enough to comprise not only stories which are confined to the immediate presentation of a particular limit-situation, but also stories which, besides other narrative phases, have a limit-situation as their organizing pivot towards and from which the story is structured. In limit-situation stories adults are confronted with the demand of some choice, a choice which may or may not be made, or with a sudden revelation, or children and adolescents are initiated into some knowledge. Such significant moments which are able to constitute the centres of short stories and determine their structures may emerge from everyday or even banal situations. Limit-situation stories achieve their artistic significance through the manner in which an individual concrete human situation is presented and allowed to appear in the middle layers and in which this situation becomes meaningful beyond its individual presentation and appearance as suggesting a limited number of general ideas in the final layers. An author may give a certain prominence to any structural detail in the middle layer. His emphasis on one or more of the other layers usually provides the reader with clues by means of which a story can be understood and determined structurally as well as typologically.

a. Presented Reality in the  
Limit-Situation Story

Time. A representative number of short stories employ a significantly limited time. This type of limit-situation story has its potentiality in the fact that the author, by means of time-montage, can force into his limited span of time past or future time phases without infringing upon the rules of brevity. Time-montage can be artistically used as a device of breaking the chronological nexus of before and after for a particular thematic rearrangement. The narrated phases of different time levels are arranged then towards or from the structure-making pivot of the immediately presented limit-situation. The fact that artistic objects such as shattering grief (e.g. in Chekhov's Lament) and utter despair (e.g. K. Mansfield's Life of Ma Parker), typical themes of the modern short story, demand emotional density and tension which cannot be effectively kept up over long stretches of narrative time seems to tend towards brevity.<sup>1</sup> Story types like Höllerer's "Augenblickskurzgeschichte"<sup>2</sup> (momentary short story), a type which appears in stories like Hemingway's Old Man at the Bridge<sup>3</sup> or Hills Like White Elephants<sup>4</sup>, and "Überblendungskurzgeschichte"<sup>5</sup> (fade-over short story) such as Hemingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro could be incorporated here. Strictly limited time spans are

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Poe's demand of "unity of effect," discussed above, p.

<sup>2</sup>W. Höllerer, op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>3</sup>(1938), in E. Hemingway, The Short Stories, pp. 176-178.

<sup>4</sup>(1927), in E. Hemingway, The Short Stories, pp. 371-376.

<sup>5</sup>W. Höllerer, op. cit., p. 239.

meaningfully enriched by the devices of time-montage in stories such as Ambrose Bierce's An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, Katherine Anne Porter's The Jilting of Granny Weatherall, Katherine Mansfield's Life of Ma Parker, Ilse Aichinger's Spiegelgeschichte (Mirror Story), Ernest Hemingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro, Wolfgang Borchert's Mein bleicher Bruder (My Pale Brother) or Die Küchenuhr (The Kitchen Clock)<sup>1</sup> and others. One of the logical consequences of this technique is the suppression of clock-time in favour of mind-time to delineate a character's consciousness as convincingly as possible. In such limited spans of time a hero's recognition of truth can be presented with great immediacy and impact. To give his story wider significance the author filters his fictional reality through a layer of symbolism. Thus the presented span of time can be given, in addition to its topical value, universal validity in the final layers.

Space. A representative number of short stories employ a significantly limited space. The story's spatial restriction is inclined to add to the limit-situation's quality of compulsion and makes the character's attitude appear the more convincing. Spaces like a pot-hole (Gerd Gaiser's Laß dich doch einmal hinauf), an Indian shanty (Hemingway's Indian Camp), the back-room of an old lady's flat (E. Wharton's Mrs. Manstey's View), a death bed (K. A. Porter's The Jilting of Granny Weatherall), a cot (Hemingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro), or the limited space in front of an open grave (Stephen Crane's The Upturned Face) considerably heighten the type's poignancy. Space-montage can be used, like time-montage, to pack reality and meaning into the short form without violating the laws of brevity. Höllerer's type of the "Überblendungskurzgeschichte"<sup>2</sup> (fade-over short story) should be mentioned again

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<sup>1</sup>(1947), in W. Borchert, op. cit., pp. 220-222.

<sup>2</sup>W. Höllerer, op. cit., p. 239.

here, as time-montage is usually at the same time space-montage. It is through the presentation of an individual limit-situation within a significantly limited space that brevity of form and universality of theme are achieved by writers of the short story in a most aesthetically satisfying manner.

Action. According to an excellent article by Friedman<sup>1</sup> a short story may have a short or a long action, a static or dynamic structure. Stories such as Hemingway's Hills Like White Elephants have static structures, whereas Faulkner's Barn Burning<sup>2</sup>, Hemingway's The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber or Ten Indians<sup>3</sup> are characterized by dynamic structures. A static story

simply shows its protagonist in one state or another and includes enough to reveal to the reader the cause or causes of which the state is a consequence, [whereas] a dynamic story brings its protagonist through a succession of two or more states and thus must include the several causal stages of which these states are the consequences.<sup>4</sup>

Although a static story will normally tend to be shorter than a dynamic one, its final form depends upon the technical presentation of its static or dynamic structure. It very rarely occurs that a static structure is expanded to novel length, as is the case with Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway. On the other hand dynamic structures which normally tend towards greater length can be forced into the short story form by technical devices such as a contracted scale. Within a large action which has been compressed to the size suitable to a short story

<sup>1</sup>Norman Friedman, "What Makes a Short Story Short?," Modern Fiction Studies, IV (1958), pp. 103-117.

<sup>2</sup>(1934), in J. A. Thurston, op. cit., pp. 223-239.

<sup>3</sup>(1927), in E. Hemingway, The Short Stories, pp. 429-434.

<sup>4</sup>N. Friedman, op. cit., p. 108.

contracted and expanded scales may still be effective, as less important parts will be summed up and significant stretches will be given a representation tending towards expansion. In Tolstoi's The Death of Ivan Ilich for example the large action of a life time is condensed to heighten the effect of the hero's final awareness, a situation which is presented on an expanded scale. An entire life is understood as empty (contracted scale) and juxtaposed to the final vision of truth (more expanded scale). Tolstoi's story is related to the novel by the size of its action. It is, however, more closely related to the short story, because, through the narrative techniques employed, its actual length and final form are more those of a short story.

For the limit-situation story Friedman's results are of considerable significance. Static and dynamic structures are likewise determined by the centre of gravity of the presented singular limit-situation. And it is, perhaps, the author's very concentration on presenting man in a limit-situation which is the cause for the technical results which Friedman has put forward so convincingly. One might ask where the organizing structural pivot is to be found in a static story such as Hemingway's Hills Like White Elephants. A possible answer is that, as the whole story is restricted to present nothing but a limit-situation, the organizing structural pivot is the very kernel of the couple's dilemma, the unmentioned yet clearly suggested question of abortion. Through this structural centre and through a series of details leading up to it appears the lack of genuine communication and love on the part of the man.

The static type of the limit-situation story appears to come closest to the full presentation of a limit-situation. It seems on the other hand that it is the author's concentration on a convincing presentation of a final limit-situation which enables him to give the dynamic structure its meaningful condensation.

It is of considerable importance for the limit-situation story to achieve weight in the final layers through the transparency of its immediate action as well as through the implication of an enveloping action. Whereas it shares the need for a transparent action with the novel, the postulate of an enveloping action is particularly its own. The complex world of a novel appears to be more a self-sufficient universe. The short story, however, can gain significance, if it is provided with an anchor outside the narrow frame of its action. Faulkner's A Rose for Emily for example has as its enveloping action the general decay of the American South, Frank O'Connor's Guests of the Nation the wider conflict between two countries, in D. H. Lawrence's The Rocking-Horse Winner<sup>1</sup> it is the mother's world and attitude towards money and life which form the enveloping action.

As the type of the limit-situation story presents man in a significant moment of choice or recognition or in a series of external events having such a moment as a structuring unit, outer action will necessarily tend to give way to inner or mind action. This may not appear to be true at a first and careless reading which takes for granted that the surface action is the story's main end. However, as soon as the limit-situation is recognized as the story's structuring unit which provides the important clues for an understanding in the final layers, the reader will realize that the outer action is subject to the inner action of the hero's reaction to the challenge of a particular limit-situation. The realistically presented action is one of the devices by which the author roots his story firmly in the outer reality of common experience and by doing so enigmatizes its actual meaning.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Gordon and Tate, op. cit., pp. 228f.

Character. The recession of external action as the story's main narrative element is paralleled in the limit-situation story by a yielding of the conventional active main character to the "passive"<sup>1</sup> hero. In the formula adventure story it is still the protagonist who determines, to a large extent at least, the outcome of the action. Obstacles are introduced to demonstrate the hero's superior qualities rather than to reveal man as what he is, capable of failing as well as succeeding. The protagonist of the limit-situation story is usually merely allowed to be active in that he can make or refuse to make a choice, to accept a recognition, or reject it. The most convincing "passive" heroes in limit-situation stories are children and adolescents.<sup>2</sup> The limit-situation in which they suddenly find themselves usually forces upon them some new knowledge and understanding of what surrounds them; hence the adequate term 'initiation story.' As examples we may cite Joyce's The Sisters, Araby<sup>3</sup>, and An Encounter<sup>4</sup>, Sherwood Anderson's I Want to Know Why<sup>5</sup>, I'm a Fool<sup>6</sup>, and Death in the Woods<sup>7</sup>, Katherine Mansfield's The Garden Party<sup>8</sup>, Hemingway's Up in Michigan<sup>9</sup>, My Old Man<sup>10</sup>, which is a variation of the theme treated by Sherwood Anderson in I Want to Know Why, Hemingway's The End of Something<sup>11</sup>, Indian Camp, and The Killers, Faulkner's That Evening Sun,

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<sup>1</sup>Theodore A. Stroud, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>(1914), in H. Levin, op. cit., pp. 35-40.

<sup>4</sup>(1914), ibid., pp. 29-35.

<sup>5</sup>(1919), in Burrell and Cerf, op. cit., pp. 722-729.

<sup>6</sup>(1921), ibid., pp. 712-721.

<sup>7</sup>(1933), in Current-Garcia and Patrick, American Short Stories, pp. 390-401.

<sup>8</sup>(1922), in Katherine Mansfield, op. cit., pp. 65-87.

<sup>9</sup>(1921), in E. Hemingway, The Short Stories, pp. 179-184.

<sup>10</sup>(1925), ibid., pp. 289-303.

<sup>11</sup>(1925), ibid., pp. 203-209.

Eudora Welty's A Visit of Charity<sup>1</sup>, Robert Penn Warren's Blackberry Winter<sup>2</sup>, Sean O'Faolain's The Trout<sup>3</sup>, V. S. Pritchett's The Saint<sup>4</sup> Graham Greene's The Basement Room<sup>5</sup>, or J. D. Salinger's For Esmé - With Love and Squalor.<sup>6</sup>

The main characters in these stories undergo a change from a state of innocence and not yet knowing to a state of experience and at least partial understanding. A scar, slight or marked, is left, and the stories suggest that the process of receiving wounds and retaining scars is man's process towards maturity.

Adult protagonists are usually presented as free to allow a recognition of some truth to determine their attitude or to reject it. Characters who accept a recognition revealed to them in a limit-situation as valid are for instance Ivan Ilich in Tolstoi's story, Mr. Duffy in Joyce's A Painful Case, Elizabeth in Odour of Chrysanthemums, Gabriel in The Dead, the protagonists in John Steinbeck's Chrysanthemums<sup>7</sup> and The White Quail<sup>8</sup>, Harry in Hemingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro, or the narrator in Frank O'Connor's Guests of the Nation.

A small group of limit-situation stories presents protagonists who reject the validity of a recognition forced upon them and do not allow

<sup>1</sup>(1941), in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., pp. 396-401.

<sup>2</sup>(1946), in J. A. Thurston, op. cit., pp. 585-604.

<sup>3</sup>(1947), in Frank O'Connor (ed.), Modern Irish Short Stories (The World's Classics; London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 167-172.

<sup>4</sup>(1947), in Current-Garcia and Patrick, op. cit., pp. 413-424.

<sup>5</sup>(1948), in Derek Hudson (ed.), Modern English Short Stories (The World's Classics, second series; London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 133-166.

<sup>6</sup>(1950), in J. D. Salinger, For Esmé - With Love and Squalor and Other Stories (London: Love and Malcomson Ltd., 1965), pp. 85-110.

<sup>7</sup>(1938), in John Steinbeck, op. cit., pp. 7-21.

<sup>8</sup>(1938), ibid., pp. 22-37.

it to determine their attitudes. Eveline in Joyce's story of the same title is one such character. Confronted with an existential choice she is unable to free herself from the paralysis of her father's home and rejects her fiancé and a new life in a more promising future.

A further group comprises stories in which the protagonist does not become aware of the full recognition which the presented limit-situation would have given a more perceptive character. In this special case the final recognition is confined to the sensitive reader. Examples are stories such as Melville's Bartleby, Chekhov's Darling<sup>1</sup>, Joyce's Counterparts<sup>2</sup>, Ring Lardner's Haircut, Faulkner's A Rose for Emily, or A. E. Coppard's Fifty Pounds.<sup>3</sup>

It has been pointed out a few times that character development cannot be the aim of the genre of the short story in the way it can be in longer fictional forms. However, a certain limited development can be mastered, as is convincingly demonstrated in Willa Cather's Paul's Case or in Aiken's Silent Snow, Secret Snow. Norman Friedman shows that the type of short story presenting character development finds an antitype in stories dealing with the "degeneration of character."<sup>4</sup> Friedman compares this pattern as it is employed in Conrad's An Outpost of Progress<sup>5</sup> with its exploitation in Heart of Darkness. In the first story, which can be regarded as closely related to the type of the proper short story as to its form

<sup>1</sup>(1898), in Anton Chekhov, Selected Stories, trans. Jessie Coulson (The World's Classics; London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 254-270.

<sup>2</sup>(1914), in H. Levin, op. cit., pp. 75-83.

<sup>3</sup>(1927), in Phyllis M. Jones, op. cit., pp. 157-176.

<sup>4</sup>N. Friedman, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>5</sup>(1898), in Joseph Conrad, Tales of Unrest (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), pp. 124-170.

and limited complexity, the characters of Kayerts and Carlier are weak and "shallow to begin with"<sup>1</sup> and "deteriorate swiftly and surely when brought to the acid test"<sup>2</sup> of African wilderness. Kurtz, the protagonist of the nouvelle, if one restricts Marlow to his function as narrator, is a "paragon of moral character before his surrender to the abyss."<sup>3</sup> Conrad, quite obviously, is much more convincing and aesthetically satisfying in his longer story. This fact can be used to argue that character developments, if they are to display complexity and, thus, verisimilitude, are more appropriate material for longer fictional works.

One aspect should be stressed once more which appears to be neglected somewhat in formal criticism on the short story. The modern short story and in particular the limit-situation short story presents single, marked character traits rather than portrayals. The limit-situation story is apt to underline certain single features within the protagonist when he is challenged by an individual situation. To transfer the term enveloping action<sup>4</sup> onto character treatment one could perhaps say that in the limit-situation short story single significant traits are given prominence which may suggest an enveloping complex character.

To repeat once more one phenomenon in the evolution of the modern short story, the device of character description has gradually given way to devices of suggestion. Indirect devices such as scenic-objective presentation (e.g. The Killers, Hills Like White Elephants), symbolically charged objects and situations (e.g. the horses in Dorothy Parker's Big Blonde<sup>5</sup> or the shrike in Wallace

<sup>1</sup>N. Friedman, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Gordon and Tate, op. cit., pp. 451f.

<sup>5</sup>(1929), in Jaffe and Scott, op. cit., pp. 39-61.

Stegner's Butcher Bird<sup>1</sup>), or naming (e.g. Thomas Mann's Tobias Nindernickel, where the protagonist's name is used as title and contains in nuce the structure and theme of the story) are able to replace partly or fully the means of direct description.

Partial characterization, suggestion and fragmentary presentation are the typical features of the limit-situation story. It is a type which appears particularly well-suited to interpret fragments of modern man's condition. It is in limit-situations that splinters of the nature of man are most honestly revealed and it is the limit-situation story which gives artistic form to this phenomenon.

b. Presentation of Fictional Reality  
in the Limit-Situation Story

Point-of-view. Modern short stories sometimes reveal their specific qualities best through the technique of the point-of-view employed.<sup>2</sup> Great possibilities for the genre seem to lie in the handling of this device. Although all possible techniques of point-of-view are found in the modern short story, the use of an unreliable narrator appears to be particularly promising. It is only in a short piece of fiction that such an intricately multilayered technique can be consistently employed by the author and fully grasped by the reader. As has been demonstrated stories such as Melville's Bartleby, Faulkner's A Rose for Emily or Ring Lardner's Haircut, through the device of an unreliable narrator, achieve greater complexity and meaning than would appear possible in

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Theodore A. Stroud, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. above, Part II, Chapter VII, 4.

such brief works. The reader, if he wishes to understand the whole multilayered fictional reality and its universal meaning, is called upon to re-read the story with a new, more sceptical attitude to the narrator and to what he offers.

One subtype of the first-person narrator story not mentioned yet is the epistolary form of the short story. As it depends on a sequence of letters, this form tends to lend itself more readily to a longer treatment. Examples of epistolary short stories are Thomas B. Aldrich's Marjorie Daw<sup>1</sup>, E. V. Lucas' The Decorations<sup>2</sup>, Ring Lardner's Some Like them Cold<sup>3</sup>, and, at least to a certain degree, Thomas Mann's Der Tod<sup>4</sup> (The Death), a very brief story in which the author has employed as a basic pattern the last entries in a diary. The major differences between an epistolary novel and an epistolary short story are differences in outer form and complexity. The inner and outer world which is unfolded in the rich sequence of letters in the novel is contrasted with a small world suggested fragmentarily by a limited number of letters which concentrate on the pointed presentation of a significantly limited action, limited character traits, and limited general ideas.

One can conclude that whatever device of point-of-view is employed in the limit-situation story it is a significantly limited point-of-view. The complexity which can be achieved by the use of an unreliable narrator is not due to a widening of point-of-view; on the contrary, it is an even stricter confinement of the narrator's powers of perception which, to the sensitive reader, makes the story appear meaningful beyond its immediately presented reality. The nature of the restricted point-of-view

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<sup>1</sup>(1873), in Burrell and Cerf, op. cit., pp. 299-315.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Sister Maura, op. cit., p. 287.

<sup>3</sup>(1924), in J. A. Thurston, op.cit., pp. 50-66.

<sup>4</sup>(1897), in Thomas Mann, Sämtliche Erzählungen, pp. 54-59.

in the genre of the modern short story has been adequately described by Strong, when he says,

the modern short story writer is content if, allowing the reader to glance at his characters as through a window, he shows them making a gesture which is typical: that is to say, a gesture which enables the reader's imagination to fill in all that is left unsaid.<sup>1</sup>

Tone. A device which is closely linked to point-of-view is tone or the author's attitude to his fictional reality and the reader. It is, in particular, an ironical authorial attitude which appears to be of decisive significance to the limit-situation story. Whereas the reader's orientation is relatively easy within a long fictional work, because there are plenty of check points within its complex world, his orientation in the limit-situation short story is complicated by two factors. On the one hand the very subject matter of this type of story is a human situation often broken out of an intelligible chain of events.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand an often merely suggestive language, achieved through an ironical detachment on the part of the author, adds to the fragmentary appearance of the limit-situation story. If such an unrooted splinter of a possible human experience is then enigmatized by some device of irony, it does indeed need a sensitive and cunning reader to feel and analyse his way through towards the story's final meaning.

Irony may appear for example as a discrepancy between the banality of the surface action and the weight of its underlying content (e.g. in Joyce's Araby), between the banality of events leading up to a tragic climax and this particular tragic climax (e.g. in Hemingway's The Capital of the World, a tragic-ironical initiation story), between the

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<sup>1</sup>L. A. G. Strong, op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. e.g. the open beginning and open ending in Hemingway's Hills Like White Elephants.

shallow reality presented by the narrator and the deeper reality appearing through this presentation to the reader (e.g. in Lardner's Haircut), or between a character's intentions and beliefs on the one hand and his actual achievements and the truth on the other (e.g. in Joyce's A Painful Case or Somerset Maugham's Rain<sup>1</sup>).

In the successful limit-situation story irony is not employed for its own sake, but as one of many interlinked devices adding to the general theme of man on the threshold between an inauthentic and an authentic existence. If this aim is achieved in an artistically satisfying manner, the disguise of irony is capable of providing the small world of the limit-situation story with additional meaningful complexity.

c.       The Filter Which Makes the Presented Reality and its Presentation Appear as Meaningful in the Final Layers: The Layer of Symbolism

Symbolism could be called the short story's greatest potentiality. It is through this device that an artist can set the short story almost in rivalry with the novel. This may sound exaggerated, as the colourful variety of the novel's world, its broad flux, its weight and the complexity of its presented reality and universal validity cannot be achieved within the narrow limitations of the short story. This novelistic complexity may be challenged, however, by a poetic complexity gained through symbolism.

Symbolism in the type of the limit-situation story is restricted to allowing the realistically presented reality to appear as more meaningful in

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<sup>1</sup>(1921), in Jaffe and Scott, op. cit., pp. 121-161.

the final layers. If the filtering layer of symbolism becomes self-sufficient so that the world offered in the middle layers loses its resemblance to the reality of preconceived situations in the reader's mind, a different type of story is reached, the symbolic-parabolic short story. It is called symbolic, as symbolism determines its structure. The term parabolic seems to be justified, as a story which does not immediately correspond to the reader's preconceptions of reality appears to demand that its symbolic appearance and content be forced back onto that reality by way of parabolic comparison. The term parabolic is not understood here merely in its narrow sense as derived from the classical biblical parables, but in a wider meaning comprising also the type of the "open parable."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The Symbolic-Parabolic Short Story

Richard M. Eastman sets the type of the "open parable"<sup>2</sup> or symbolic-parabolic short story in the terminology used here apart from the classical or "closed parable."<sup>3</sup> In the closed parable "the ethical analogy which is the animating idea of the parable remains clearly distinguishable beneath a consistent narrative surface,"<sup>4</sup> whereas in the open parable the "instability of detail hinders the reader in making out a simple analogic structure."<sup>5</sup> Once again the fact has to be stressed that the

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<sup>1</sup>Richard M. Eastman, "The Open Parable: Demonstration and Definition," College English, XXII (1960), pp. 15-18.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

symbolic-parabolic short story, like other short story types, is a type which is generally approached to a greater or lesser degree by individual stories. Kafka's stories such as Metamorphosis, A Hunger-Artist, In the Penal Settlement, or A Country Doctor come as close to this type as seems possible. So do Dylan Thomas' early stories such as The Visitor<sup>1</sup>, The Lemon, or The Map of Love.<sup>2</sup> E. M. Forster's The Story of a Panic and The Celestial Omnibus, D. H. Lawrence's The Man who Died<sup>3</sup> or The Rocking-Horse Winner could be mentioned here. Even Shirley Jackson's The Lottery can be regarded as belonging to the symbolic-parabolic short story rather than to any other type, as the final incident cuts its connections with the real world in the middle layers and allows the reader to establish a connection only parabolically from a symbolic reality back to his everyday experience. A fine example of this type of story is provided by Richard M. Eastman himself with The Phantom Ship<sup>4</sup>, a story which he uses to demonstrate and define his term "open parable." The term symbolic-parabolic short story has been preferred in this typology as it allows for a wider interpretation and comprises enough hybrids to appear as a symbolic alternative to the middle layer stories and the type of the limit-situation story.

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<sup>1</sup>(1935), in Dylan Thomas, op. cit., pp. 108-119.

<sup>2</sup>(1937), ibid., pp. 216-224.

<sup>3</sup>(1929), D. H. Lawrence, Love among the Haystacks, pp. 125-173.

<sup>4</sup>(1960), Richard M. Eastman, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

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CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF STORIES

1811	Unexpected Reunion	J. P. Hebel
1832	Roger Malvin's Burial	Nathaniel Hawthorne
1835	Young Goodman Brown	Nathaniel Hawthorne
1836	The Minister's Black Veil	Nathaniel Hawthorne
1837	Dr. Heidigger's Experiment	Nathaniel Hawthorne
1839	The Fall of the House of Usher	E. A. Poe
1842	The Overcoat	Nikolai Gogol
1842	The Masque of the Red Death	E. A. Poe
1843	The Birthmark	Nathaniel Hawthorne
1844	Rappaccini's Daughter	Nathaniel Hawthorne
1856	Bartleby	Herman Melville
1868	The Luck of Roaring Camp	Bret Harte
1868	A Problem	Henry James
1868	The Romance of Certain Old Clothes	Henry James
1873	Marjorie Daw	Thomas B. Aldrich
1877	A Simple Heart	Gustave Flaubert
1878	Rose Agatha	Henry James
1881	Brooksmith	Henry James
1886	The Lament	Anton Chekhov
1886	The Death of Ivan Ilich	Leo N. Tolstoi
1889	The Lagoon	Joseph Conrad
1889	The Open Boat	Stephen Crane
1889	A Death	Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf
1889	La Mère Sauvage	Guy de Maupassant
1891	An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge	Ambrose Bierce
1891	The Boarded Window	Ambrose Bierce
1891	Mrs. Manstey's View	Edith Wharton
1892	Grenville Fane	Henry James
1892	The Visits	Henry James
1893	The Middle Years	Henry James
1894	Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes	Conan Doyle

1895	The Altar of the Dead	Henry James
1897	Death	Thomas Mann
1898	The Darling	Anton Chekhov
1898	An Outpost of Progress	Joseph Conrad
1898	The Turn of the Screw	Henry James
1898	Tobias Mindernickel	Thomas Mann
1899	Paste	Henry James
1899	The Real Right Thing	Henry James
1900	The Upturned Face	Stephen Crane
1900	Miss Gunton of Pough- keepsie	Henry James
1900	The Tree of Knowledge	Henry James
1900	The Two Faces	Henry James
1902	Heart of Darkness	Joseph Conrad
1902	The Story in It	Henry James
1904	The Mission of Jane	Edith Wharton
1905	The Gift of the Magi	O. Henry
1907	Love of Life	Jack London
1911	Odour of Chrysanthemums	D. H. Lawrence
1911	Shredni Vashtar	Saki (H. H. Munro)
1911	The Country of the Blind	H. G. Wells
1912	Death in Venice	Thomas Mann
1913	The Judgment	Franz Kafka
1914	The Story of a Panic	E. M. Forster
1914	The Celestial Omnibus	E. M. Forster
1914	Araby	James Joyce
1914	Counterparts	James Joyce
1914	The Dead	James Joyce
1914	An Encounter	James Joyce
1914	A Painful Case	James Joyce
1914	The Sisters	James Joyce
1916	Metamorphosis	Franz Kafka
1917	Better to Die	Andor Gábor
1919	I Want to Know Why	Sherwood Anderson
1919	A Country Doctor	Franz Kafka
1919	In the Penal Settlement	Franz Kafka
1920	Paul's Case	Willa Cather
1921	I'm a Fool	Sherwood Anderson
1921	Up in Michigan	Ernest Hemingway
1921	Rain	Somerset Maugham
1922	The Horse-Dealer's Daughter	D. H. Lawrence

1922	Life of Ma Parker	Katherine Mansfield
1922	The Daughters of the Late Colonel	Katherine Mansfield
1922	The Fly	Katherine Mansfield
1922	The Garden Party	Katherine Mansfield
1924	The Most Dangerous Game	Richard Connell
1924	A Rose for Emily	William Faulkner
1924	A Hunger Artist	Franz Kafka
1924	Some Like Them Cold	Ring Lardner
1924	The Outstation	Somerset Maugham
1925	Indian Camp	Ernest Hemingway
1925	My Old Man	Ernest Hemingway
1925	The End of Something	Ernest Hemingway
1925	Disorder and Early Sorrow	Thomas Mann
1926	The Killers	Ernest Hemingway
1926	The Rocking-Horse Winner	D. H. Lawrence
1927	Fifty Pounds	A. E. Coppard
1927	Silver Circus	A. E. Coppard
1927	Hills Like White Elephants	Ernest Hemingway
1927	Ten Indians	Ernest Hemingway
1929	Ex Parte	Ring Lardner
1929	The Man Who Died	D. H. Lawrence
1929	Big Blonde	Dorothy Parker
1930	War	Luigi Pirandello
1930	Maria Concepción	Katherine Anne Porter
1930	The Jilting of Granny Weatherall	Katherine Anne Porter
1931	Kneel to the Rising Sun	Erskine Caldwell
1931	The Hound	William Faulkner
1931	That Evening Sun	William Faulkner
1931	Guests of the Nation	Frank O'Connor
1932	Silent Snow, Secret Snow	Conrad Aiken
1933	Death in the Woods	Sherwood Anderson
1934	Barn Burning	William Faulkner
1934	Dr. Martino	William Faulkner
1934	The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze	William Saroyan
1934	Roman Fever	Edith Wharton
1935	The Visitor	Dylan Thomas
1936	The Capital of the World	Ernest Hemingway
1936	The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber	Ernest Hemingway

1936	The Snows of Kilimanjaro	Ernest Hemingway
1936	The Lemon	Dylan Thomas
1937	The Map of Love	Dylan Thomas
1937	The Secret Life of Walter Mitty	James Thurber
1938	The Old Man at the Bridge	Ernest Hemingway
1938	Flight	John Steinbeck
1938	The Chrysanthemums	John Steinbeck
1938	The Red Pony	John Steinbeck
1938	The White Quail	John Steinbeck
1938	The Leader of the People	John Steinbeck
1939	The Wall	Jean-Paul Sartre
1941	A Visit of Charity	Eudora Welty
1943	The Law	Thomas Mann
1946	Blackberry Winter	Robert Penn Warren
1947	My Pale Brother	Wolfgang Borchert
1947	The Kitchen Clock	Wolfgang Borchert
1947	The Trout	Sean O'Faolain
1947	The Saint	V. S. Pritchett
1948	Supper	Tadeusz Borowski
1948	The Basement Room	Graham Greene
1948	The Lottery	Shirley Jackson
1950	Traveller, if You Come to Spa ...	Heinrich Böll
1950	For Esmé - With Love and Squalor	J. D. Salinger
1951	A Sunrise on the Veld	Doris Lessing
1952	Mirror Story	Ilse Aichinger
1955	The Pot-Hole	Gerd Gaiser
1956	The Man Whom I Killed	Gerd Gaiser
1959	Pig	Roald Dahl
1959	The Champion of the World	Roald Dahl
1959	William and Mary	Roald Dahl
1960	The Phantom Ship	Richard M. Eastman

A D D E N D A

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