**Page 1**

***Escape and Interpretation***

The first question to ask about fiction is: Why bother to readرید it? Withویت life as short as it is, with so many pressing demands on our time, with books of information, instruction and discussion دیس کاشن waiting to be read, why should we spend precious پرَشز time on works of imagination? The eternal answers to this question are two: enjoyment and understanding.

Since the Invention of language, men have taken pleasure in following and participating پارتی س پی تینگ in the imaginary adventures and imaginary experiences of imaginary people. Whatever - without causing harm - serves to make life less tedious تی دس , to make the hours اورز pass more quickly and pleasurably, surely شورلی needs nothing else to recommend it. Enjoyment and ever more enjoyment is the first aimِایم and justification of آو reading fiction.

But, unless fiction gives something more than pleasure, it hardly justifies itself as a subject of college study. Unless it expands or refines our minds or quickens our sense of life, its value is not appreciably greater than that of miniature min(ē)əCHər می نی چ golf, bridge, or ping-pong. To have a compelling claim onان our attention, it must yield یی الد not only enjoyment but understanding.

The experience of men throughثرو the ages is that literature may furnishفرنش such understanding and do so effectively-that the depiction diˈpikSH(ə)n دپکشن of imagined experiences can provide authentic insights. "The truest ترواست history," said Diderot of the novels of Samuel Richardson, "is full of Falsehoods فالس هودز, and your romanceرومنس is full of truths.تروس" But the bulk باکof fiction does not present such insights. Only some does. Initially این شلی , therefore, fiction may be classified into two broad categories: literature of escape and literature of interpretation.

ESCAPE LITERATURE is writtenریتن purely پی یور لیfor entertainment-to help us pass the time agree/ably. INTERPRETIVE LITERATURE is written to broaden برادن and deepen and sharpen our awareness of life. Escape literature takes us *away* from the real **Page 2**

world: it enables us temporarily ˈtempəˌrerəlē تم پره ر لی to forget our troubles. Interpretive literature takes us, through the imagination, deeper *into* the real world: it enables us to understand our troubles. Escape literature has as its only object pleasure. Interpretive literature has as its object pleasure *plus* understanding.

A story becomes interpretive as it illuminates ا یلو منیتس some aspect of human life or behavior. An interpretive story presents us with an insight-large or small-into the natureنی چر and conditions of our existence. It gives us a keener کینر awareness of what it is to be a human being in a universe sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. It helps us to understand our neighbors and ourselves.

Now, just as there are two kinds of fiction, there are also two kinds of reader. The immature ایمه چی یه or inexperienced reader seeksسیکس only escape. Even when he thinks he is reading for interpretation or some useful moral, he insists that what he reads return him always some pleasant ˈplez(ə)nt or excitingاکسایتینگ image of the world or some flattering image of himself. We all begin with fairy tales ˈtālēz ت ی لز. Our early reading experiences are likely to be with stories such as that of Cinderella, whose fairy godmother transforms a pumpkin پامپ کینand mice مایسinto coach- کووووچand-four, whose slim foot is the only one that fits the crystal slipper اس ل پر, who rises superior ساپری یر to her cruelکروال stepmother and taunting تان تینگstep-sisters to marry and "live لایو happily ever after" with the charming چارمینگ prince, and who, never for a moment anything but sweet and virtuous, ویر چواس forgives her former tormentors who tried to keep her a cinder girl.

There are many signs of the inexperienced ˌinəkˈspirēənst reader. He makes fixed demands of every story he reads, and he feels frustrated and disappointed disəˈpoin(t)əd unless these demands are satisfied ساتیس فاید. Often he sticks to one type of subject matter. Instead of being receptive to any story that puts human beings in human situations سی چو ایشنز , he reads only sports stories, Western stories, love stories, or crime کرایم stories. If he is willing to accept a wider range وایدر رنج . طیف وسیع ترof experience, he still wishes every story to conform at bottom to several strict اس ترکت- though perhaps unconsciously ان کانشزلی– formulated فورمی یو لیتد expectations. The most common of the expectations are: (1) a sympathetic hero (or heroine)-one with whom the reader can in imagination identify himself as he reads and whose adventures and triumphs ترایامفس he can share; (2) a plot in which something exciting is **Page 3**

always happening and in which there is a strong element of suspense; (3) a happy outcome that sends the reader away undisturbed əndəˈstərbd ان دس تربد and optimistic about the world in which he lives; (4) a theme – if the story has a theme - that confirms his already –held opinion əˈpinyən of the world.

There is nothing wrong with any of these characteristics as story elements. Significant fiction has been written ریتن with them all. The error lies in elevating these characteristics into a set of rigid rijid ری جید requirements that a story must meet to be enjoyed. Such limitations restrict rəˈstrikt drastically drastəklē درس تیک لی one's opportunity äpərˈt(y)o͞onədē اپر چو نیتی for expanding his experience or broadeningبرو دنینگ his insights. They reduce rəˈd(y)o͞os کاهش دادن .ری جیس one's demands on literature to a Formula fôrmyələ. فورمی یو لا

PLOT

PLOT is the sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed. It bears about the same relationship to a story that a map does to a journey jərnē. Just as a map may be drawn on a finerفاینر or grosser scale skāl اسکیل , a plot may be recounted with lesser lesər لسر or greater detail. It may include what a character says or thinks, as well as what he does. But it leaves out description and analysis and concentrates ordinarily on major happenings.

Conceivably a plot might consist merely mirlē of a sequence of related actions. Ordinarily, however, both the excitement craved by the beginning reader and the meaningfulness demanded by the mature məˈCHo͝or می چر reader arise əˈrīz out of some sort of CONFLICT- a clash of actions, ideas, desires, or willsویلز. The main character may be pitted against some other person or group of persons (man against man); he may be in conflict with some external force - physical nature, society səˈsīədē, or "fate fāt" (man against environment inˈvīrənmənt ), or he may be in conflict with some element in his own nature (man against himself). The conflict may be physical, mental, emotional, or moral. There is conflict in a chess game, where the competitors sitسیت quite still for hours, as surely SHo͝orlē as in a wrestling ˈres(ə)liNG match, emotional conflict may be raging within a person, sitting quietly in an empty room. The central character in the conflict, **Page 4**

whether he be a sympathetic or an unsympathetic person, is referred to as the PROTAGONIST prōˈtaɡənəst ; the forces arrayed against him, whether persons, things, conventions of society, or traits of his own character, are the ANTAGONISTS.

SUSPENSE سوس پنز is the quality in a story that makes the reader ask "What's going to happen next?" or "How will this turn out?" and impels him to read on to find the answers to these questions. Suspense is greatest when the reader's curiosity kyo͝orēˈäsədē کیوری استی is combined with anxiety aNGˈzīədē ان اکسایتی about the fate of some sympathetic character. Thus in the old serial movies, a strong element of suspense was created at the end of each episode by leaving the hero hanging from the edge of a cliff کلف or the heroine tied to the railroad tracks with the express train rapidly approaching. In murder mysteries, suspense is created by the question of who committed the murder. In love stories it is created by the question "Will the boy win the girl?" or "Will the lovers be re-united, and how?" In more sophisticated səˈfistəˌkādəd forms of fiction the suspense often involves not so much the question *what* as the question *why* - not "What will happen next?" but "How is the protagonist's behavior to be explained in terms of human personality and character?" The forms of suspense range from crude kro͞od to subtl sədle and may concern not only actions but psychological considerations əndəˈzī(ə)rəb(ə)l and moral issues. Two common devices for achieving suspense are to introduceاین ترو دیوس an element of MYSTERY میستری- an unusual set of circumstancesسر کیو مستنسز for which the reader cravesکریوز an explanation, or to place the hero or heroine in a DILEMMA - a position in which he must choose between two courses of action, both undesirableان دیزه / ربل . But suspense can be readilyردلی created for most readers by placing *anybody* on a seventeenth-storey window ledge or simplyسیم پلی by bringing together a physically attractive young woman and a man.

Closely connected with the element of suspense in a short story is the element of SURPRISE. If we know aheadاِ هد of time exactly what is going to happen in a story and why, there can be no suspense; as long as we do not know, whatever happens comes with an element of surprise. The surprise is proportional to the unexpectedness of what happens: it becomes pronounced when the story departs radically ˈradək(ə)lē from our expectation. In the short story suchساچ radical departure dəˈpärCHər is most often found in a surprise ending: one that reveals a sudden new turn or twist. **Page 5**

Whether or not a story has a surprise ending, the beginning reader usually demands that it have a HAPPY ENDING: the protagonist must solve his problems, defeat the villain ˈvilən شرور ویلن , win the girl, "live happily ever after." A common obstacle ˈäbstək(ə)l مانع confronting the reader who is making his first attempts to enjoy interpretive stories is that they often end unhappily. He is likely to label such stories as "depressing" and to complain that "real life has troubles enough of its own “or, conversely kənˈvərslē , that "real life is seldomسلدِم as unhappy as all that."

There is two justifications for the UNHAPPY ENDING. First, many situations چیin real life have unhappy endings; therefore, if fiction is to illuminate روشنiˈlo͞oməˌnāt life, it must present defeat as well as triumphترایمف trīəmf . The commercial sports-story writer usually writes of how an individual or a team achieves victory against odds ädz . Yet, if one team wins the pennantپَ ننت , eleven others must lose it, and, if a golfer wins a tournament, fifty or a hundred others must fail ف یل to win it. In situations like these, at least, success is much lessلِس frequent than failure ˈfālyərفیلر. Sometimes the sports writer, for a variantوراینت will tell how an individualاین دی وی جول lost the game but learned some important moral lesson - good sportsmanship, perhaps, or the importance of fair play. But here again, in real life, such compensations are gained only occasionally əˈkāZH(ə)nəlēاکاژنلی. Defeat, in fact, sometimes embitters a person and makes him less able to cope with life than before. Thus ذاس we need to understand and perhaps expect defeat as well as victory.

Secondسِکِن , the unhappy ending has a peculiar pəˈkyo͞olyərپی کیولار value for the writer who wishes us to ponder life. In the story with a happy ending the reader is sent away feeling فیل pleasantly if vaguelyوگلی ˈvāɡlē satisfiedفاید with the world and ceases سی سز متوقف to think about the story searchingly. The unhappy ending, on the other hand, may cause کاز him to brood over the results, to go over the story in his mind, and thus by searching out its implications ایمپلی ک یشن to get more from it. Just as we can judge men better when we see how they behave in trouble, so we can see deeper into life when it is pried پراید open for inspection. The unhappy endings are more likely to raise ریزsignificant siɡˈnifikənt issues. Shakespeare's tragedies reverberate rəˈvərbəˌrāt longer and more resonantly ری زاننت لی than his comedies. **Page 6**

CHARACTER

In the last chapter plot was considered apart from character, as if the two were separable. Actually, like the ends of a seesaw, the two are one substance; there can be no movement at one end without movement at the other. The two ends of the seesaw may be talked about separately, however and we can determine dəˈtərmən which element in any story is being emphasized - which end is up and which is down. As fiction passes from escape to interpretive the character end is likely to go up. The good reader is less interested in actions done by characters than in characters doing actions.

Reading for character is more difficult than reading for plot, for character is much more complex, variable and ambiguous amˈbiɡyo͞oəsام ب گیوسس . Anyone can repeat what a person has done in a story, but considerable skill may be needed to describe what a person is. Even the puzzles posed by detective story are less complex and put less strain on comprehension than does human nature. Hence, escape fiction tends to emphasize plot and to present characters that are relatively simple and easy to understand. The limited reader demands that the characters be easily identifiable and clearly labeled as good or bad; they must not be so complex as to tax his understanding.

Interpretive fiction does not necessarily renounce the attractive ا ترک تیوcentral character. It simply furnishes a greater variety of central characters, characters that are less easily labeled and pigeonholed پجن هولد , characters that are sometimes unsympathetic. Human nature is not often either black or white, and interpretive fiction deals usually with characters that are neither.

An author may present his characters either directly or indirectly. In DIRECT PRESENTATION he tells us straight اس تریت out, by exposition or analysis, what a character is like, or has someone else in the story tell us what he is like. In INDIRECT PRESENTATION the author ˈôTHər *shows* us the character in action; we infer what he is like from what he thinks or says or does. **Page 7**

The method of direct presentation has the advantages of being clear and economical, but it can never be used alone əˈlōn . The characters must act, if there is to be a story; when they do not act, the story approachesاپ روچز the condition of an essay اِ سِی. The direct method, moreover môrˈōvər موراور, unless supported by the indirect, will not be emotionally convincing. It will give us not a character but an explanation. The reader must be shown as well as told. He needs to see and hear and overhear. A story will be successful only when the characters are DRAMATIZED - shown speaking and acting, as in a drama. If we are really to believe in the selfishness selfiSHnəs of a character, we must see him acting selfishly. The successful writer must therefore rely mainly upon əˈpän اپان indirect presentation and may use it entirely.

In proportion prəˈpôrSH(ə)n پروپرشن to the fullness of their development, the characters in a story are relatively flat or round. The FLAT CHARACTER is characterized by one or two traits; he can be summed up in a sentence. The ROUND CHARACTER is complex and many-sided; he might require an essay for full analysis. Both types of character may be given the vitality that good fiction demands. Round characters live by their very roundness, by the many points at which they touch life. Flat characters, though they touch life at only one or two points, may be made memorable in the hands of an expert author through some جindividualizing ˌindəˈvij(o͞o)əˌlīz این دی وی چوال لایزینگ detail of appearance, gesture, jesCHər جستر or speech.

A special kind of flat character is the STOCK CHARACTER. The stereotyped sterēəˌtīpt figure ˈfiɡyər who has occurred so often in fiction, and his nature is immediately known. For example the strong silent sheriff, the brilliant detective of eccentric habits, the mad scientist who performs fiendish experiments on living human beings, the beautiful international spy of mysterious background, the comic Englishman with a monocle and an exaggerated Oxford accent, the handsome brave hero, the beautiful modest heroine, the cruel stepmother, the sinister villain with a waxed black mustache. Such stock characters are found very often in inferior fiction because they require neither imagination nor observation on the part of the writer and are instantly recognizable to the reader. Like interchangeable parts, they might be transferred from one story to another with little loss of efficiency əˈfiSHənsē . The really good writer, however, may take a conventional type and by individualizing touches create a new and memorable figure. Conon Doyle's Sherlock Holmes constructed کانس ترکتد **Page 8**

on a pattern often imitated since, but he outlives the imitations and remains in our imaginations long after we have forgotten the details of his adventures. In proportion as an author gives his characters such individualizing touches, they become less flat and accordingly اکوردینگلی əˈkôrdiNGlē less stock.

All fictional characters may be classified as static or developing. The STATIC CHARACTER is the same sort of person at the end of the story as he was at the beginning. The DEVELOPINC (or dynamic) CHARACTER undergoes a permanent change in some aspect of his character, personality, or outlook. The change may be a large or a small one; it may be for better or for worse wərs ; but it is something important and basic: it is more than a change in condition or a minor ˈmīnər ماینر change in opinion اپی نین . Cinderella is a static character, though she rises from cinder girl to princess.

***Theme سیم***

Daddy, the man next door kisses his wife every morning when he leaves for work. Why don't you do that?

Gracious,گری شس little one, I don't even know the woman.

Daughter, your young man stays until a very late hour. Hasn't your mother said anything to you about this habit of his?

Yes, father. Mother says men haven’t altered تغیر یافته ال تد a bit.

For the reader who contemplates the two jokes above, a significant difference emerges between them. The first joke depends only upon əˈpän a reversal rəˈvərsəl واژگونی of expectation. We expect the man to explain why he doesn't kiss his wife; instead he explains **Page 9**

why he doesn't kiss his neighbor's wife. The second joke, though it contains a reversal of expectation, depends as much more for its effectiveness on a truth about human life; namely, that *men tend to grow more conservative as they grow older,* or that *fathers often scold* skōld *their children for doing exactly what they did themselves when young.* This truth, which might be stated in different ways, is the *theme* of the joke.

The THEME of a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. It is the unifying generalization about life stated or implied by the story. To derive the theme of a story, we must ask what its central *purpose* is: what view of life it supports or what insight into life it reveals.

In many stories the theme may be equivalent əˈkwiv(ə)lənt to the revelation of human character. If a story has as its central purpose to exhibit iɡˈzibətنملیشکاه a certain kind of human being, our statement of theme may be no more than a concentrated description of the person revealed with an addition, “Some people are like this.” Frequently, however, a story through its portrayal ˌpôrˈtrā(ə)l of specific persons in specific situations will have something to say about the nature of all men or about the relationship of human beings to each other or to the universe yo͞onəˌvərs . Whatever central generalization about life, arises from the specifics spəˈsifik of the story, constitutes theme.

We must never think, once we have stated the theme of a story that the whole purpose of the story has been to yield yēld up this abstract statement. If this were so, there would be no reason ˈrēzən for the story: we could stop with the abstract statement. The function of the interpretive writer is not to state a theme but to vivify وی ویفای vivəˌfī it. He wishes to deliver it not simply to our intellects but to our emotions, our senses and our imaginations. The theme of a story may be little or nothing except as it is embodied ایم بادید and vitalized ˈvīdlˌīz وای د لایز by the story. Unembodied, it is a dry backbone, without fresh or life. **Page 10**

***Point of View***

### The primitive primədiv storyteller استور تالر, unbothered by considerations of form, simply spun **spin**

a tale تَ یل, “Once upon əˈpän اپان a time,” he began, and proceeded to narrate the story to his listeners, describing the characters when necessary, telling what they thought and felt as well as what they did, and interjecting comments and ideas of his own. The modern fiction writer is artistically more self-consciousکانشس kän(t)SHəs . He realizes that there are many ways of telling a story; he decides upon a method before he begins and may even set up rules for himself. Instead of telling the story himself, he may let one of his characters tell it for him; he may tell it by means of letters or diaries دایر ریز دفترچه ; he may confine himself to recording the thoughts of one of his characters. With the growth of artistic consciousness kän(t)SHəsnəs, the question of POINT OF VIEW, of who tells the story, and, therefore, of how it gets told, has assumed اسیومد especial iˈspeSHəlē importance.

To determine the point of view of a story we ask, “Who tells the story?” and “How much is he allowed to know?” and especially, “To what extent does the author look inside his characters and report their thoughts and feelings?”

Though many variations and combinations are possible, the basic points of view are four, as follows:

1. Omniscient آم نی سی ینت

2. Limited omniscient (a) Major character

(b) Minor مای نر character

3. First person (a) Major character

(b) Minor مای نر character

4. Objective

1. In the OMNISCIENT POINT OF VIEW, the story is told by the author, using the third person, and his knowledge and prerogatives are unlimited. He is free to go wherever he wishes, to peer inside the minds and hearts of his

**Page 11**

characters at will and tell us what they are thinking or feeling. He can interpret their behavior, and he can comment, if he wishes, on the significance of the story he is telling. He knows all اُل . He can tell us as much or as little as he pleases.

*Weary وی یری in every limb لمب ,* the ant tugged over the snow a piece of corn he had stored up last summer. *It would taste mighty good at dinner tonight.*

A grasshopper, *cold and hungry,* looked on. *Finally he could bear it no longer.* "Please, friend ant, may I have a bite of corn?"

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

"I sang from dawn till dark," replied the grasshopper, *happily un-aware of what was coming next.*

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

HE WHO IDLES ای دل WHEN HE’S YOUNG WILL HAVE NOTHING WHEN HE’S OLD.

The omniscient is the most flexible point of view and permits the widest scope. It is also the most subject to abuse ابی یوس . It offers constant danger that the author may character to character may cause kôz a breakdown in coherence or unity. Used skillfully come between the reader and the story, or that the continual kənˈtiny(o͞o)əl shifting of viewpoint from it enables the author to achieve əˈCHēv simultaneous sīməlˈtānēəs breadth and depth depTH . Unskillfully used, it can destroy the illusion iˈlo͞oZHən of reality that the story attempts to create.

2. In the LIMITED OMNISCIENT POINT OF VIEW, the author tells the story in third person, but he tells it from the viewpoint of one character in the story. The author places himself at the elbow of his character, so to speak, and looks at the events of the story through his eyes and through his mind. He moves both inside and outside this character, but never leaves his side. He tells us what this character sees and hears and what he thinks and feels;

**Page 12**

he possibly interprets the character’s thoughts and behavior. He knows everything about this character – more than the character knows about him-self – but he shows no knowledge of what *other* characters are thinking or feeling or doing, except for what his chosen character knows or can infer. The chosen character may be either, a major or a minor character, a participant or an observer, and this choice also will be a very important one for the story.

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

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

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

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

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

The limited omniscient point of view, since it acquaints us with the world through the mind and senses of only one person, approximates more closely than the omniscient the conditions of real life; it also offers a ready-made unifying element, since all details of the story are the experience of one person. At the same time it offers a limited field of observation, for the reader can go nowhere except where the chosen character goes, and there may be difficulty in having him naturally cognizant of all important events. A clumsy writer will constantly have his focal character listening at keyholes, accidentally overhearing important conversations, or coincidentally being present when important events occur.

3. In the FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW, the author disappears into one of

**Page 13**

the characters, who tell the story in the first person. This character, again, may be either, a major or minor character, protagonist or observer, and it will make considerable difference whether the protagonist tells his own story or someone else tells it.

*Cold and hungry, I watched the ant tugging over the snow a piece of corn he had stored up last summer. My feelers twitched, and I was conscious of a tic in my left hind leg. Finally I could bear it no longer. “Please, friend ant," I asked, "may 1 have a bite of your corn?”*

*He looked me up and down "What were you doing all last summer?" he asked, rather too smugly it seemed to me.*

*“I sang from dawn till dark," 1 said innocently remembering the happy times.*

*“Well," he said, with a priggish sneer, "Since you sang all summer, you can dance all winter."*

4. In the OBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW, the author disappears into a kind of roving camera. This camera can go anywhere but can record only what is seen and heard. It cannot comment, interpret, or enter a character's mind. With this point of view (sometimes called also the DRAMATIC POINT OF VIEW) the reader is placed in the position of a spectator at a movie or play. He sees what the characters do and hears what they say but can only infer what they think or feel and what they are like. The author is not there to explain. The purest example of a story told from the objective point of view would be one written entirely in dialog for as soon as the author adds words of his own, he begins to interpret through his very choice of words. Actually, few stories using this point of view are antiseptically pure, for the limitation it imposes on the author are severe.

The ant tugged over the snow a piece of corn he had stored up last summer, perspiring in spite of the cold. **Page 14**

A grasshopper, its feelers twitching and with a tic in its left hind leg, looked on for some time. Finally he asked, "Please, friend ant may I have a bite of your corn?"

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

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

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

Each of the points of view has its advantages, its limitations, and its peculiar pəˈkyo͞olyər uses. Ideally the choice of the author will depend on his story materials and his purpose. He should choose the point of view that enables him to present his particular materials most effectively in terms of his purpose. If he is writing a murder mystery, he will ordinarily avoid using the point of view of the murderer or the brilliant detective: otherwise he would have to reveal at the beginning the secrets he wishes to conceal till the end. On the other hand, if he is interested in exploring criminal psychology, the murderer's point of view might be by far the most effective. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, A. Conan Doyle effectively uses the somewhat imperceptive Dr. Watson as his narrator, so that the reader may be kept in the dark as long as possible and then be as amazed as Watson is by Holmes's deductive powers. In Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment,* however, the author is interested not in mystifying mistəfīiNG میس تی فیبنگ and surprising but in illuminating iˈlo͞ominādiNG the moral and psychological sīkəˈläjək(ə)l operations of the human soul سُولin the act of taking life; he therefore tells the story from the viewpoint of a sensitive sensədiv and intelligent murderer mərdərər.

***Symbol and Irony***

Most successful stories are characterized by compression. The writer’s aim is to say as much as possible as briefly as possible. This does not mean that most good stories are brief. It means only that nothing is wasted and that each word and detail is chosen for maximum effectiveness. The force of an explosion is proportionate to the strength and amount of powder used and the smallness of the space it is **Page 15**

confined in.

The writer achieves compression by exercising a rigid selectivity. He chooses the details and incidents that contribute most to the meaning he is after; he omits those whose usefulness is minimal. As far as possible he chooses details that are multi-valued - that serve a variety of purposes at once. A detail that expresses character at the same time that it advances the plot is more useful than a detail that does only one or the other.

This chapter will discuss two contributory resources of the writer for gaining compression: symbol and irony. Both of them may increase he explosive force of a story, but both demand awareness and maturity on the part of the reader.

A literary SYMBOL is something that means *more* than what it is. It is an object, a person, a situation, an action, or some other item that has a literal meaning in the story but suggests or represents other meanings as well. A very simple illustration is to be found in name symbolism. Most names are simply labels. Seldom does a name tell anything about the person to whom it is attached, except possibly his nationality. In a story, however, the author may choose names for his characters that serve not only to label them but also to suggest something about them.

More important than name - symbolism is the symbolic use of objects and actions. In some stories these symbols will fit so naturally into the literal context that their symbolic value will not at first be apparent except to the most perceptive reader. In other stories - usually stories with a less realistic surface - they will be so central and so obvious that they will demand symbolical interpretation if the story is to yield significant meaning. In the first kind of story the symbols *reinforce* and add to the meaning. In the second kind of story they *carry* the meaning.