

**МІНІСТЕРСТВО ОСВІТИ І НАУКИ УКРАЇНИ  
ПРИКАРПАТСЬКИЙ НАЦІОНАЛЬНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ  
ІМЕНІ ВАСИЛЯ СТЕФАНИКА  
КАФЕДРА АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ ФІЛОЛОГІЇ**

***THE GUIDE TO THE ANALYSIS***

Методичні рекомендації до аналізу  
творів сучасної американської літератури

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Вченої ради факультету іноземних мов  
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Методичні рекомендації допоможуть студентам глибше  
зрозуміти і детальніше проаналізувати твори американських  
письменників запропоновані для розгляду на семінарських заняттях.

Since mature reading is always a creative process in which the reader, in a sense, is matching his mind, experience, taste, and sense values with the writer's, there can be no absolute standards for judging the short story or any other kind of literature. But to grow in understanding, to enjoy and appreciate literature, a person needs to form some valid judgments about his reading.

If the passion and the emotion are the artist's distillation of experience, we may sensibly begin, as readers, by trying to feel, not analyze. Then we move with our feelings toward intellect.

If the creation of a story is an act of intense narrative compression, the reading of the same is an act of intense narrative abstraction. Our first task is to see the story whole, piercing its data and its substance, seizing its feeling. We must transcend time, place, occupation, or other local factors and considerations unifying the story in order to receive the story fully: to see any structure whole we stand back before becoming involved with detail at the expense of the overall view.

First, we ought to pursue the print for a total effect. Then we can read for a gathering-in of the parts that make the whole, the building units that form the structure. We can talk in terms of plot, characters, style, and setting, but the end – and the beginning – is not in explication but in emotion.

## PLOT.

In writing (especially a short story) an author usually brings together events which form a significant pattern of action with a beginning, a middle and an end – a plot. In many short stories this pattern involves one or more conflicts. Conflict may be of several types:

- 1) it may be based upon man's struggle against nature. For example, in Pearl Buck's story "The Enemy" the American sailor's efforts to survive against the sea and the rocks are an example of such a conflict.
- 2) it may pit man against man. In the same story we may observe the enmity of Sadao and the Japanese people towards the sailor, who to them all represents all Americans.
- 3) it may portray an interior struggle like Sadao's interior struggle in the same story as his sense of patriotic duty fights his training as a doctor.

As a rule, the more complex and rewarding plots are built around mental, emotional, and moral conflicts: they are tangled, relationships between people, moral dilemmas. As in the abovementioned story Sadao's

moral dilemma in which his feeling of duty to his country wars against his professional feeling about a human being who needs medical care.

However, plots involving physical conflict – war, exploration, escapes – often contain more excitement and suspense. In developing a conflict, the writer may use a time arrangement, telling about the events in the order in which they occurred. Or, he may bring in events which occurred earlier but are pertinent to the story, he may use the flashback technique. Thus, in “The Enemy” by having Sadao’s memory flash back to his past, Pearl Buck brings out both the extreme Japanese nationalism and his American education before she initiates her detailed account of the conflict, central to the story.

The author may also omit certain details, relying on information, previously given, to bridge the gap. For example, when Sadao is called to minister to the ailing General, the General’s first speech reads: “Of course... I understand fully. But that is because I once took a degree in Princeton. So few Japanese have.” The reader himself, realizing that Sadao has explained his dilemma to the General, supplies what has gone before.

Sometimes the plot of a story involves a reversal. During the first part, or rising action, one force is winning. Then there is a turning point – a climax- when the opposite force gains the ascendancy. After the reversal comes the last division of the plot – the falling action or denouement (literally, the untying of the plot) which shows the victorious force triumphant. Upon finishing the story, the reader may look back and see that at the point of climax he can tell whether the main character will succeed or fail in his struggle with the opposite force. This climax in the action, which is called the technical climax, must not be confused with the dramatic climax – the point of greatest excitement to the reader- although in some stories the technical and the dramatic climaxes coincide.

When the writer arranges his sequence of events in an effective order linked together in a chain of natural cause and effect consistent with the characters, and leading to a climax and a denouement that seem inevitable, we say that the plot has artistic unity – that it is a good plot.

## OUTPLOT ELEMENTS.

### Character.

One great merit of literature is that it acquaints us intimately with people of many kinds, from all countries and all ages. It also improves our

understanding even of people like those we know well. For while in the actual world we can only guess at our friends' or enemies' thoughts and feelings or speculate about their motives. From the storyteller, the dramatist, or the poet we can learn exactly what goes on in their minds and hearts. To learn why fictional beings act as they do, it is valuable to notice: 1) how the author acquaints us with his characters; 2) what their traits are; and 3) what their functions are in a story, play or poem.

1) The author may acquaint us with characters in several ways. He may straightforwardly inform us about a character's habitual way of behaving. The writer may so describe a character as to imply what sort of individual he or she is. Or an author may acquaint us with a character by showing us his dwelling. He may characterize by quoting typical speeches, by showing us how other characters react to a personality, by acquainting us with what goes on in the character's mind, and by showing the character in action.

If a character is of some importance, the author will probably use several of these methods.

2) Characters depending on their importance may have few or many traits. A minor character may display only one trait, for example, a hot temper. In developing more important characters the author will probably include many traits, and the reader needs to see both what these traits are and how they are interrelated.

To understand "The Enemy", for instance, you must know that Sadao is a patriotic Japanese and an affectionate family man; that he is a surgeon dedicated to saving life and a Japanese citizen impelled to turn an enemy over to the proper authorities; and that therefore he is drawn in two opposite directions.

3) The qualities which an author gives his characters may serve various functions. They may simply make people more "lifelike" than they would be without such qualities. They may make them more attractive or more unattractive to the reader. It's important because the reader's attitude toward fictional figures "involves" him in his reading. Certain traits may motivate an incident which is part of action; for example, the cowardice of Sadao's servants in "The Enemy" causes them to abandon their master and mistress. Or certain traits of the main character may cause the whole plot in a narrative to take the form it does.

### **Setting.**

Setting is the representation of place and time in an imaginative work. Since it helps us picture scenes and actions vividly, the setting can

do much to make characters and actions real to us. And in handling setting, a skilled author can do more than describe the physical background of a poem, drama or short story. For setting can help shape the events that take place, aid the reader to understand the mood of a character or the twist of a plot, establish an emotional effect, and at times serve to underline the meaning of a story. Such uses of settings are called functional. For example: the plot of "The Enemy" gains plausibility through the setting of the story. Because on the particular evening on which the American appears from the sea there is a mist, because there is an island close to the shore, and because Sadao's home is isolated from the fishing villages, the reader finds it possible to believe that a wounded man could be washed ashore unseen by anyone but Sadao and his wife, and could be helped to escape. The details of setting may be fused with the theme and become an integral part of the whole.

### **Theme.**

Sometimes years after we have read a story, a novel, a poem or a play, it again flashes into mind. With most of the details erased by time, a strong general impression still remains. In recalling "The Enemy", for example, we may find that we have forgotten the names of the characters and the intricacies of the plot, but we remember that in this story an individual shows that the healing code of a doctor is more important than national prejudice. What we are recalling is the theme, the basic idea that underlies a piece of imaginative literature and gives it a meaning larger than the work itself.

Some imaginative works written purely to entertain, to suggest a single impression, or to create a mood or an emotion may be said not to have a theme. But many literary works have a purpose deeper than the mere telling – a theme, a concept which is developed memorably. Neither poet nor prose writer ever regards the expression of a theme as his total purpose in writing. In fact, as far as poetry is concerned, probably only a very poor poet would start with a theme and try to weave a poem around it. A poem or a story develops from a startling impact, from an unexpected glimpse of beauty, from any aspect of living that awakens the imagination and arouses the emotions and then grows with the theme as its core. The reader, shocked into awareness by the writer's emotion, perceives the general idea behind the specific details, and so grasps the theme. How does the theme develop in a story or a play? In some cases the author has a comment on life to make. He feels his comment to be significant and true.

To communicate it to the reader, he creates in his imagination a segment of life so appealing to our senses, our emotions, and our imaginations that we too may feel its significance and truth. But not all themes develop in this way. Sometimes an author creates a character that seems to grow just as a living person does, and from the personality of this imaginative character the theme develops. Occasionally a setting may suggest a theme. The theme of the story or play may be thought as its skeleton; the setting, characters and action as its living flesh and blood. Sometimes the reader confuses plot with theme, forgetting that plot has relation only to a particular story while theme, is the basic idea to be abstracted from the fusion of plot, characters and setting. In many stories the theme is relatively easy to find. But sometimes, as in William Saroyan's "The Oyster and the Pearl", the reader is left wondering just what meaning the author is trying to bring out.

### **Tone.**

A skilled craftsman blends plot, setting, character and language in a literary work to form a unified whole. But because the writer, like all other individuals, is a personality with his own likes and dislikes, the stamp of his emotional reactions will affect all these elements. This attitude of an author as evident in his work is called tone.

The author's attitude toward characters, actions, settings and feelings may be revealed explicitly or implicitly. It is explicit when he states it directly to the reader, implicit when he conveys his attitude indirectly. Many modern writers of narrative use implicit rather than explicit methods to suggest emotional reactions. In this case the connotative words convey the tone. In many cases the writer of lyric poetry explicitly states his attitude. The "I" he creates may be an idealized version of the person he actually is or may differ in various ways, but the tone of the poem will reflect to some extent his own emotional reaction. And even though Conrad Aiken in "One Star Fell and Another" attributes the idea to an unidentified "he" the reader senses that the reaction expressed is that of the poet himself.

To grasp the full meaning of a work of literature, the reader must learn to sense its tone. It may be comic, tragic, witty, satirical, sentimental, disillusioned, disinterested, idealistic, or a combination of several of these.

It is not difficult to grasp that an author's tone is tragic, comic, or idealistic, but an ironic tone is by its very nature more difficult to detect. The word irony comes from the Greek *eiron* – a type character in ancient



comedy. This character was a wise person who assumed the guise of a simpleton. By extension, irony has come to refer to writing in which a wise author plays at being stupid. He says one thing while actually meaning another. The clues to what he really means are to be found in the way he uses language, portrays characters, describes events or expresses attitudes. His intent may be to shock or to amuse, to hide a grim comment on life under a light tone, or through banter to provoke a reform; but an approach is indirect. Sinclair Lewis brilliantly sustains an ironic tone throughout "The Hack Diver".

### **Narrative point of view.**

The point of view from which a story is told determines the extent to which a reader is allowed to peer into the minds of the characters. Since the artistic unity of a piece of fiction may depend to a great degree on this aspect of telling a story. That's why deciding what point of view to use is one of the first and most important considerations a writer must face.

The three following points of view, with variations, are the choices open to the writer:

1. The personal point of view of a participant. When a story is unfolded in the first person by one of the characters involved, the point of view is personal. The narrator may be merely a bystander, or like a young soldier in Hemingway's "In Another Country", he may be an important character.
2. The objective point of view. When an author tells us what his characters do and say but not what they think, his narration of events is called objective.
3. The omniscient point of view. When an author, writing in the third person, tells us what goes on in the minds of his characters, his point of view is omniscient (knowing all); if he enters the mind of only one character, his point of view is partially omniscient.

One of the outstanding characteristics of modern literature is the indirect way stories are told. To a greater extent than their predecessors, modern writers suggest or imply more than they tell. Earlier writers like W. Irving and N. Hawthorne told directly how their characters felt. They frequently interrupted their narratives to comment on the significance of events. But a modern writer, like Irwin Show is more apt to show how a

character feels and to let events speak for themselves. This technique makes a great demand on the reader to grasp an author's implications.

In brief and tightly written stories a reader must be able to infer character traits, conflicts and theme from sparse details.

## DISCUSSION GUIDES.

A. To evaluate the artistry of a work of literature:

1. Consider first of all the plot.
  - a) Does it have a well-defined beginning, middle and end or is it closer to the sketch-from-life genre? Explain.
  - b) To what extent does the plot depend upon coincidence?
  - c) Does the story have a surprise ending?
  - d) To what degree is the plot treatment typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century innovations?
2. Conflict may be physical, moral, or emotional.
  - a) What is the nature of the conflict in the story?
  - b) Does it grow naturally out of the characters or situations the story presents?
3. Identify the central character in the story and describe his traits.
  - a) Do you wish you knew more about his thoughts and feelings or more about his actions, speeches, appearance?
  - b) How much must you infer about the character? How much are you told directly?
  - c) Would you say the narrative point of view unifies and lends proper emphasis to the characterization. Why?
4. Setting may be functional or may merely set the scene.
  - a) Determine whether the setting is or is not functional?
  - b) To what extent does the author use descriptive details to develop the setting?
  - c) Are these details realistic or romantic? Are they symbolic?
  - d) What century is the story laid in?
  - e) What is the season (interior)? Why is the season (interior) appropriate to the story?
  - f) Relate to the setting the message from the main character's mood.
5. Does the story have a theme? Explain:
  - a) To what extent does this story make you think?
  - b) Does it increase your understanding of individuals, of social problems, of some facet of living? What is the theme of the story?
6. The tone of a story is often related to its theme.

- a) Would you identify the tone of the story as comic, tragic, witty, satirical, sentimental, disillusioned, idealistic, or a combination of several of these?

How is tone related to theme in the story?

7. On the basis of the points you have just examined, would you evaluate this story as artistically fair good or excellent?
8. Define the narrative point of view. Prove your opinion.

B. There are short stories and novels of horror or detection, of science or local color. Some of them are humorous, historical allegorical, psychological, naturalistic, or romantic. To which of these broad categories does this one belong? Explain.

C. To what extent does the story reflect the experimentation, attitudes, and interest in psychology typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature?

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The following questions will help you determine how well you understand the plot of "The Enemy" by Pearl Buck:

1. What is the importance to the plot of "The Enemy" of each of the following: a) Sadao's American training; b) his intense nationalism; c) the old General's illness?
2. Speaking of Japanese surgeons the General says: "The best ones have been trained by Germans and would consider the operation successful even if I died... It seems a pity that we cannot better combine the German ruthlessness with the American sentimentality. Then you could turn your prisoner over to execution and yet I could be sure you would not murder me while I was unconscious".
  - a) What light does this statement throw on Sadao's attitude toward his American prisoner from the moment of finding him until his recovery?
  - b) How does it show that the General recognizes Sadao's dilemma?
  - c) What solution to the dilemma does the General offer?
3.
  - a) What is the technical climax of "The Enemy"?
  - b) What is the dramatic climax?
4. What conflict or conflicts is the story built upon?

Some questions which will help to understand the role of characters and characterization in the narration:

1. a) Which characters display a single trait each during the course of the story?  
b) Why is each shown as having only a single trait?  
c) Which characters have several or conflicting traits?
2. What means does the author use to characterize the main character? (citing instances of various methods from the text).
3. What justification is there for the author's including the detailed description of the nature, the interior of the house.
4. What actions make the main character attractive/unattractive to the reader? Justify your answer. List the characters in the order of their attractiveness. Justify your listing.
5. What traits of the main character is the ending justified by?

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Some questions which will help to understand the tone of Sinclair Lewis' story "The Hack Driver":

1. The narrator of "The Hack Driver" is a Supreme Court justice recalling an experience he had as a young man. Why is this a good situation for the use of an ironic tone?
2. In describing his meeting with the hack driver, the narrator comments: "They are so ready to help a stranger, those villagers" (page 72, column 1, paragraph 6).
  - a) At what point did you realize that this comment and the passage from which it is taken are ironic?
  - b) Locate similar passages throughout the story and explain why they are ironic.
3. How do these passages prepare for the ending of the story?

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Scott Fitzgerald "The Perfect Life".

To increase understanding:

1. Find in the text the paragraphs describing the impression John Granby's ideas made on Basil. Characterize the tone established in these paragraphs and discuss the way the author creates it.

2. Examine the differences in Basil's behavior before and after his meeting John Granby
3. Examine the temperaments, minds and moral dispositions of the characters of the story.
4. What is Basil's moral dilemma? What explicit information given in the story helps you answer this question? What that is relevant is implied?
5. What part does Jobena play? Does she emerge as a true individual or does she seem to be a stereotype? Justify your stand. What might have been Fitzgerald's purpose in portraying her as he did?
6. What attitude does Fitzgerald have towards the characters who populate this story? Does he pass any moral judgments upon them? Explain.
7. Some of Fitzgerald's critics claim he is as deluded by his characters' motives and behavior as the characters themselves. Basing your answer on the impressions you have gained from reading "The Perfect Life" do you agree or disagree with this criticism? Explain why.
8. During the course of the story dancing develops a symbolic significance. What does it symbolize?
9. Did the ending come as a surprise to you? Does Fitzgerald give any prior indication of what Basil's final action will be or is the ending a mere trick one?



Irwin Shaw "The Dry Rock".

To increase understanding:

1. Since "The Dry Rock" by Irwin Shaw is told from the objective point of view, the speech of various individuals is extremely important in establishing character.
  - a) Describe the speech of Rusk, Tarloff, Fitzsimmons, and Helen.
  - b) With which character are you most sympathetic? Why?
  - c) List the other characters mentioned in order of the sympathy you feel for which, ending with the least sympathetic character.
  - d) Explain why recognizing sympathetic and unsympathetic characters is important in understanding a story.
2.
  - a) Relate the speech of each character to the details Shaw gives about the appearance, dress, and manner of each.
  - b) How do such details strengthen the impression created by the characters' speech?
3.
  - a) State the theme of "The Dry Rock".

- b) Describe the conflicts developed in the story.
- c) How does each conflict underscore Shaw's theme?
4. Do you think that the characters in this story are used symbolically? Explain.
5. What is Shaw protesting against in "The Dry Rock"? Explain why you approve or disapprove of this protest.
6. One of the outstanding characteristics of modern short stories is the indirect way they are told. To a greater extent than their predecessors, modern writers suggest or imply more than they tell. Reread the first three paragraphs of "The Dry Rock". The dialogue states that a man and his wife are late for a dinner party. The characters are named; the immediate setting is a taxicab. But much more is implied. From what Helen says and how she says it we may infer that she is an impatient social-climber. From what Fitzsimmons says we may infer that he is a rather harried business man who attaches less importance to the dinner party than his wife does but who, nevertheless, is anxious to placate her. We also detect the first clues to the conflict that will develop between them. Find these clues.
7. Is the characterization of Tarloff more or less dependent upon implication than the characterization of Helen? Explain.
8. How much of the theme of "The Dry Rock" were you able to infer before reading that Tarloff was "deserted on the dry rock of principle?" Was this summation necessary to your understanding? Explain.



John Cheever "The Sutton Place Story".

To increase understanding:

1. In the opening paragraphs of the story how does Cheever show that Deborah saw too little of her parents.
2. What can you say about the Tennysons' way of living?
3. What is the narrative point of view of "The Sutton Place Story"?
4. During the course of the story Renée's attitude to Deborah changes. How does it change?
5. Did Deborah's nurse take good care of her? What way did they spend time in?
6. Why did Katherine consider that her daughter had the sense of security?
7. What kind of games did Deborah prefer?

8. Comment on the following: "Deborah named all her dolls and her pleasures after Renée".
9. What did Deborah's escape make her mother think about?
10. Do you think the way the Tennysons treat the girl may change after the incident? Justify your answer.

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John Updike "Gesturing".

To increase understanding:

1. How does the story reveal Updike's interest in psychology?
2. Reread page 117, paragraph 2 "But she... old together". How does this passage give you deeper insight into Richard's mental confusion?
3. Why is the story entitled "Gesturing"?
4. Review the characterization of Richard and Joan and trace the implications that provide important clues to their traits and to the nature of their conflict.
5. Updike gives a detailed description of the reflection. What is it done for? What mood does Richard's attempt "to analyze the logic of window replacement" create?
6. Updike remarks that Richard "could not in solitude stop performing". How does this statement reveal Richard's real feelings?
7. The details of Joan's appearance are frequent and vivid in the story. What is the function of this portraiture?
8. Comment on: "... she would never stop gesturing within him, never".