

# The 'mystery' of the short story

Ernest Hemingway. *IN OUR TIME* (1925)

## INTERCHAPTER VII

While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh Jesus Christ get me out of here. Dear Jesus please get me out. Christ please please please Christ. If you'll only keep me from getting killed I'll do anything you say. I believe in you and I'll tell everyone in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear Jesus. The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and sheerful and quiet. The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody.

Scholes, Robert. *Textual Power. Literary Theory and the Teaching of English*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

1. READING → to construct a whole world from a few indications, fill in gaps, make temporal correlations, perform essential activities such as writing 'ghost chapters' and taking 'inferential walks' (Umberto Eco)

- Summary of events → **TEXT WITHIN TEXT**

2. INTERPRETATION → failures of reading; a feeling of incompleteness; a concealed or not obvious level of meaning that can only be found by an active, conscious process of interpretation.

- Discussion of the meaning or theme → **TEXT UPON TEXT**

3. CRITICISM → to open the way between the literary or verbal text and the social text in which we live.

In criticizing → **TEXT AGAINST TEXT**

# 1. READING

- FICTIONAL CODING (generic codes) → a story; continuity of character; continuity of action; repetition of words
- CULTURAL CODING (cultural codes) → language; construction of a scene, a world, from the words on the page.
- PERSPECTIVE → points of view

# 2. INTERPRETATION

- THEMATIZING OF A TEXT → from the specific events narrated to a more general level of social types and ethical **values**. Ex. “It’s about this soldier in a trench” to “It’s about fear” , or shame, or betrayal, or hypocrisy, or human frailty, or ...
- The unsaid, the implied, or even the repressed (repetitions, oppositions, cultural information) → making connections between a particular verbal text and a larger cultural text

### 3. CRITICISM

- Collective judgement
  - It's a man's story
  - “Our”
  - “extratextual” concerns (prostitution and war; cultural sanctioning of these institutions)
  - The down-to-up movement X up-to-down movement
  - Naturalistic attitude X objective detachment of the narration  
→ modernist work of art
  - Naturalism → aestheticism
- Study and thought → “Criticism is ‘against’ other texts insofar as it resists them in the name of the critic’s recognition of her or his own values.” (Robert Scholes. *Textual Power*. New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1985)

STORY

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graph LR; STORY[STORY] --- EVENTS[EVENTS]; STORY --- CHARACTERS[CHARACTERS]; EVENTS --- Deep[Deep narrative structure → Syntagmatic, governed by temporal and causal principles]; EVENTS --- Surface[Surface narrative structure → Paradigmatic, based on static logical relations among the elements]; CHARACTERS --- Traits["- A paradigm of traits"]; CHARACTERS --- Complexity["- Complexity → allegorical figures, caricatures"]; CHARACTERS --- Development["- Development"]; CHARACTERS --- InnerLife["Penetration into the 'inner life'"];
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EVENTS

Deep narrative structure →

Syntagmatic, governed by temporal and causal principles

Surface narrative structure →

Paradigmatic, based on static logical relations among the elements

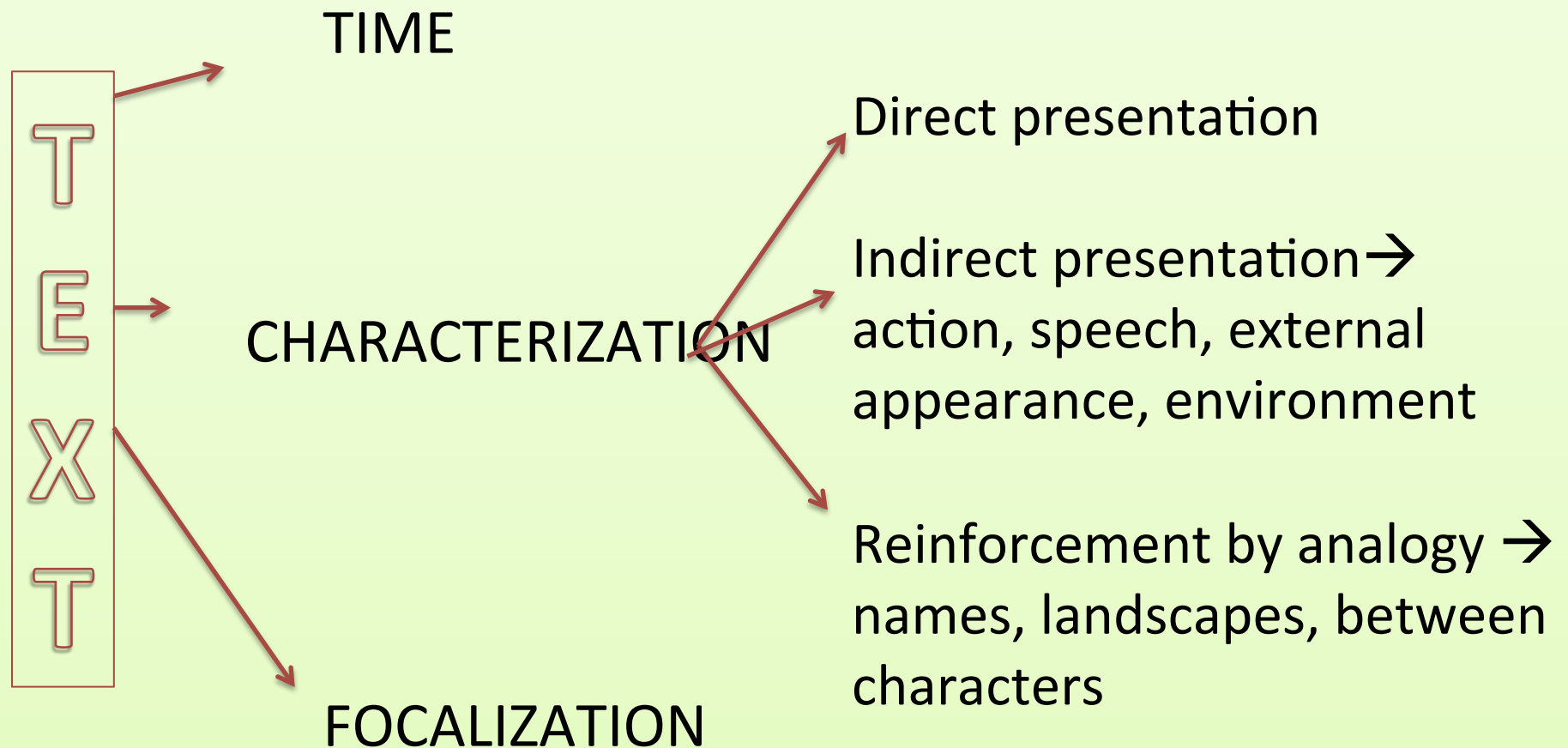
CHARACTERS

- A paradigm of traits
- Complexity → allegorical figures, caricatures

- Development

Penetration into the 'inner life'

- Repetition
- Similarity
- Contrast
- Implications
- Forster → 'flat characters' & 'round characters'



# Frank O'Connor

(1903-1966)

- Most famous definer of short story after Poe
- Frank O'Connor → 'little man' (neither satiric, nor heroic), 'submerged population group'
- Defeat → "ultimately it seems to mean defeat inflicted by a society that has no signposts, a society that offers no goals and has no answers. The *submerged population* is not submerged entirely by material considerations; it can also be submerged by the absence of spiritual ones" (p.86)
- Identification



# Frank O'Connor

- “outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society, superimposed sometimes on symbolic figures whom they caricature or echo” (p.87).
- “there is in the short story at its most characteristic something that we do not often find in the novel – an intense awareness of human loneliness” (p.87)
- Single moment of peculiar significance; something springs from single detail and embraces past, present and future.
- Three necessary elements: exposition, development and drama
- “[t]he modern novel has been called the novel without a hero, but the short story never had one”
- hero at point of crisis → “[t]he novel presumes a normal society, while the short story does not”
- Romantic, non-conformist view
  - Second story here – why critics have been drawn to short story?

# Main Ideas

- Novel deals with 'life'; Short story deals with 'fragment of life'
  - Quantitative difference read as qualitative difference
- Novel deals with 'multiplicity'; short story deals with 'singularity'
- Novel deals with 'whole hog' (entirety); short story deals with 'sample' (metaphoric/metonymic relation with whole)