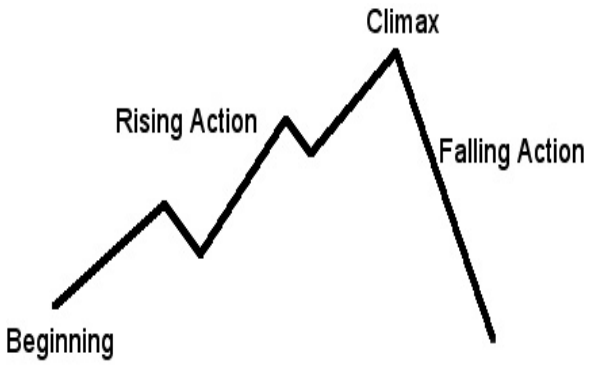
Chapter Two

Elements of Short story

2.1. Plot

Definition of Plot: Events that form a significant pattern of action with a beginning, a middle and an end. They move from one place or event to another in order to form a pattern, usually with the purpose of overcoming a conflict. The plot is more formally called a **narrative**.

Elements of Plot:



A. Beginning (Exposition)

1. **Plot Line:** a graph plotting the ups and downs of the central character's fortunes. A very conventional plot might look like the one above.

2. Initial Situation

A.Characters: Who are the central characters? What do they aspire to?

B.Setting: Where/when do the characters live? Does the setting contribute to the narrative?

C.Conflicts: What are the challenges facing the protagonist(s)? What are the conflict(s) that he or she (or they) will have to overcome?

The beginning is often called the **introduction** or **exposition**. By establishing the characters, setting and initial conflicts, the beginning "sets the scene" for the rest of the narrative. Dickens' famous opening line in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," is a classic piece of exposition that helps establish the social and political background of the novel.

B. Rising Action

Incentive Moment: Which event thrusts itself into the tension of the characters' situation and triggers the action of the story? A new event frequently jostles the smoothness of things and changes the course of action.

Episodes: After the introduction, a story usually presents a series of separate events in the plot, building from one situation to the next. A new episode (or scene) begins when the place and time change, or when something really important interrupts what has been happening. With each successive episode, the conflict becomes more and more intense, demanding some sort of resolution.

C. The Climax

It is the critical point at which the central character is about to win or lose all. When the probable outcome of the main conflict is finally revealed (i.e. the turning point), the story has reached its climax. In a Shakespearian tragedy, the climax occurs when the main character's "momentum" switches from success to failure. Beyond that point, the ending is inevitable. However, the climax does not mark the end of conflict**;** it only determines how the conflict will be decided. The climax usually occurs anywhere from 50% to 90% of the completed story.

D. Falling Action and Resolution

Falling Action (or Resolution or Denouement): the events that occur after the climax that tie up "loose ends"; they perform the necessary plot actions to fulfill the protagonist's fortunes that are now clear after the climax. It is a tricky part of a narrative to write as the author has to decide which parts of the plot to tie up and which to leave as questions for the reader to think about (or

leave for a future story). Part of the decision regarding what to tie up and what to leave open often depends on the extent to which the author wants to satisfy the reader's need for a sense of justice or closure.

Epilogue: the part that tells the reader what happens to the characters well **after** the story is finished. It's seen in longer narratives (like novels and movies) rather than short fiction, but even then it is only used occasionally.

2.2 Character and Characterization

2.2.1 Characters

Characters are probably the most important and fundamental element of fiction. In fiction, a character is an imagined person who participates in a story. The character is usually a person, but can also be a personal identity or a personified animal or subject (for example, see Orwell's Animal Farm or a voice that inhabits an object). When readers re-imagine these characters from fiction, they recognize human personalities in these characters that become familiar to us. If the fictional story is a work of art that imitates life, the characters in the work usually act in a manner that is consistent with the life that they imitate (as a side note, even in science fiction, even if the characters are not human, they still exhibit human emotion). The author of the story works hard to ensure that the characters behave in a consistent manner by showing the reader what motivates the characters to action. Because the author has gotten us to "suspend our disbelief" about this fictional story with these fictional characters, if a character should behave in an unexpected way - acts in a way contrary to what we have been led to believe about his or her personality or nature - the reader trusts that there was a reason for this change in behavior and that the author will let the reader know sooner or later.

There are several different types of characters that readers will find in literature. The main character is the eyes and ears of the reader - it is from this perspective (or point of view) that the reader will experience the story. The "main character" is expected that the author will either identify or empathize or sympathize with this character because the story is being told from this character’s point of view.

In addition to the "main character", authors also often utilize what is known as the minor characters. One good example is "stock character." Essentially, the stock character is a stereotyped character. Throughout the long history of our literature - from classical literature to the most contemporary literature - readers have been acquainted with many different stereotyped characters. These characters rely very heavily on either cultural types or names for their personalities, their speech, and various other characteristics. Generally, these stock characters could be described as literary archetypes; however, they are often much more narrowly defined. Stock characters are very important in fiction in that they provide characters in which more developed characters can interact with in ways that the audience is familiar. The idea behind stock characters is that the audience will recognize them immediately.

While stock characters are important in that the author can use them within the context of the story without having to dedicate time and space to develop the characters more fully, a good work of fiction will contain characters that the reader will see as unique individuals. The stock or stereotyped character has a single dominant virtue or vice or outstanding characteristic while the more developed characters tend to be multifaceted and unique just like the people that readers might meet every day in real life.

These unique and seemingly real individuals can also be characterized into different types of characters. These characters can either be **"flat" or "round"** characters depending upon how the author styles their character. Some critics use the terms **"static" and "dynamic"** when describing these types of characters. A flat or static character often only has one outstanding trait or feature that the audience can easily recognize. Flat characters are often stock characters, but they don't necessarily have to be. Just because a character is flat doesn't necessarily mean that the short story or novel is an inferior work of art - in fact, even in some of the greatest short stories or novels, the minor characters tend to be flat because to style them any other way would cost the author time and space and might also distract the reader from the main character as well.

In contrast to flat characters, fiction also has **"round" characters**. These characters are also often called "dynamic" characters. These characters are much more multifaceted than either stock or static characters. These characters are often more prominent in the story and the author uses more time and space to create the details that add depth to these characters. Depending upon

the point of view of the story, the reader sees this character as he appears to other characters in the story, as he appears to the narrator of the story, and/ or as he appears to himself within his own mind. This is how the reader experiences the character and gets acquainted with him or her in the context of the story. While flat or static characters tend to stay the same during the story, round or dynamic characters tend to change in the story - they learn, they become enlightened; they grow in wisdom, or deteriorate in mind and spirit. While events might happen around the flat or stock characters, they tend to happen to the dynamic character.

The name of the character is often very important to the development of the character. Often, names can give the reader clues about the characters nature or personality. For example, if a banker in a story was named "Robin Banks," would the reader be able to trust the character? What if a female character in a short story or novel was named "Faith?" What might that tell the reader? Often, the names of the characters are not this obvious. In literature, authors have developed the custom of using allusions to give the character his or her name. An allusion is a reference to a famous person, place or thing. For example, if an author were to name a character "Jezebel," what would the reader think about that character? Jezebel is allusion to the Old Testament. Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick*, often used these Old Testament allusions as well. For example, Captain Ahab from the novel *Moby Dick* is an allusion to Ahab, the King of Israel during the divided kingdom period in the Old Testament. Melville also named one of his characters "Ishmael" after a biblical outcast. The opening sentence of *Moby Dick,* "Call me Ishmael" sets the tone for the novel and also immediately gives the reader a clue about the nature and personality of the character. In short, a good name often reveals much about the nature or personality of a character.

While a good name might be the first step in developing good characters, authors also employ other methods to help them with characterization. One of the methods that authors use to develop their characters is the characters appearance. The author explains or describes the character's appearance to the reader so that the reader can draw inferences and make conclusions about the character. For example, if the author describes the character as being "clothed in sack cloth," what is he hoping that the reader will immediately think about the character? What if the character is described as being "tall and lanky but not skinny, hair neatly trimmed and parted on the side, wearing a gray flannel suit that seemed to be the fashionable uniform of the up and

coming in New York City?" Not only can the author lead the reader to draw conclusions about a character from the character's appearance, but the author can also provide clues about the character through dialogue. Dialogue is what the characters say and how they say it. The interactions that the characters have with other characters can tell the reader a lot about those characters and how they interact with others in their social milieu. While what the characters wear is important and what they say is also important, it is often what they do that is most important. Conventional wisdom tells us that "actions speak louder than words." It is often through action - what the character does and how he or she does it - that helps the reader to see into the character's nature and personality. Not only does the action of the character give the reader clues about this nature and personality, but the reaction of others - how the other characters see and treat the character - that also contributes to the reader's understanding.

Some critics use the term "protagonist" to describe a character. The protagonist drives the action of the story. Essentially, this character is responsible for taking the reader toward the story's ultimate end or goal. In the Western Literary Tradition, the protagonist is most often the main character in the story. In order for a story to have a protagonist, there must be an antagonist that opposes the protagonist and keeps him or her from reaching the story's ultimate goal. The antagonist can be a stock character, a flat character, or even a round character. Sometimes, the antagonist is a special kind of antagonist called a "foil." A foil is an antagonist that stands in stark contrast to the protagonist and the contrast between the two characters illuminates the nature and personality of both the protagonist and the antagonist. This idea of a "foil" is often very effectively used in comic books and graphic novels.

Throughout much of our literary history, the main character in a story was often portrayed as being heroic. The heroic qualities of the traditional hero often include bravery, skill, idealism, and sense of purpose. However, in more contemporary fiction, the main character of a novel or short story often lacks these heroic characteristics. Instead of a hero, these recent novels and short stories feature what critics call the "antihero." The antihero can be defined as being a protagonist in a novel or short story that lacks one or more of the traditional qualities found in the heroic tradition. The antihero is often portrayed as being a normal run of the mill inglorious inhabitant of the modern world. While the epic poets during the Heroic Age painted their heroic characters as being bold and decisive leaders of their people that personified the ideals of the

culture, modern writers often portray these antiheros as being loners who are just barely able to survive the modern world. Essentially, these are characters that lack character.

2.2.2 Characterization

Characterization is the process by which the writer reveals the personality of a character. Characterization is revealed through **direct characterization** and **indirect characterization**.

Direct Characterization *tells* the audience what the personality of the character is.

Example: "The patient boy and quiet girl were both well mannered and did not disobey their mother."

Explanation: The author is directly telling the audience the personality of these two children. The boy is "patient" and the girl is "quiet."

Indirect Characterization *shows* things that reveal the personality of a character. There are five different methods of indirect characterization:

Speech: What does the character say? How does the character speak?
Thoughts: what is revealed through the character's private thoughts and feelings?
Effect on others towards the character: what is revealed through the character's effect on other people? How do other characters feel or behave in reaction to the character?
Actions: what does the character do? How does the character behave?
Looks: what does the character look like? How does the character dress?

2.3 Conflict

Inserting conflict into your fiction is not quite as simple as inserting a fist-fight into the storyline. Conflict in fiction can be as diverse and as individual as you are. It can also be used effectively to heightened tension and increase suspense.

In many cases, the conflict within the story is the driving force towards the story goal. The need to overcome the conflict is often the central focus of the hero. The means to overcome that same conflict can then become a path to victory for the protagonist.

Yet not all conflict must be gut-wrenching, wrist-slashing, eye-popping suspense. Often, the more subtle forms of internal emotional conflict can impact upon a reader far more deeply.

According to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, it is:

1) To come into collision or disagreement; be contradictory; at variance or in opposition; clash
2) Discord of action, feeling or effect; antagonism or opposition as of interests or principles
3) A mental struggle arising from opposing demands or impulses

Conflict in a story does not have to be light sabers or laser guns, automatic weapons or explosions. It can be as simple as what clothes will our protagonist wear in the morning, or as deep as how far should modern science go? Conflict can also be an internal process. No matter where your story's conflict arises, every story must contain an element of it. The type of conflict used in each story depends largely on your target audience : age, sex, special interests, genre etc.

Conflict may be internal or external—that is, it may occur within a character's mind or between a character and exterior forces. Conflict is most visible between two or more characters, usually a protagonist and an antagonist/enemy/villain, but can occur in many different forms. A character may as easily find himself or herself in conflict with a natural force, such as an animal or a weather event, like a hurricane. The literary purpose of conflict is to create tension in the story, making readers more interested by leaving them uncertain which of the characters or forces will prevail.

There may be multiple points of conflict in a single story, as characters may have more than one desire or may struggle against more than one opposing force. When a conflict is resolved and the reader discovers which force or character succeeds, it creates a sense of closure. Conflicts may resolve at any point in a story, particularly where more than one conflict exists, but stories do not always resolve every conflict. If a story ends without resolving the main or major conflict(s), it is said to have an "open" ending. Open endings, which can serve to ask the reader to consider the conflict more personally, may not satisfy them, but obvious conflict resolution may also leave readers disappointed in the story.

a. Character against Character

"Character against character" conflict involves stories where characters are against each other. This is an external conflict. The conflict may be direct opposition, as in a gunfight or a robbery, or it may be a more subtle conflict between the desires of two or more characters, as in a romance or a family epic. This type of conflict is very common in traditional literature, fairy tales and myths. One example of the " character against character " conflict is the relationship struggles between the protagonist and the antagonist stepfather in *This Boy's Life*. Other examples include Dorothy's struggles with the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and Tom Sawyer's confrontation with Injun Joe in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.

b. Character against society

Where man stands against a man-made institution (such as slavery or bullying), "character against character" conflict may shade into " character against society". In such stories, characters are forced to make moral choices or frustrated by social rules in meeting their own goals. *The Handmaid's Tale*and *Fahrenheit 451* are examples of " character against society" conflicts. So is *Charlotte's Web*, in which the pig Wilbur fights for his survival against a society that raises pigs for food.

c. Character against nature

"Character against nature" conflict is an external struggle positioning the hero against an animal or a force of nature, such as a storm. The " character against nature" conflict is central to Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, where the protagonist contends against a marlin. It is also common in adventure stories, including *Robinson Crusoe.*

d. Character against self

With "character against self" conflict, the struggle is internal. A character must overcome his own nature or make a choice between two or more paths - good and evil; logic and emotion. *Bridget Jones's Diary* focuses on internal conflict, as the titular character deals with her own neuroses and self-doubts.

2.4 Point of View

Point of view is an element of fiction that is concerned with the source and scope of the *narrative voice.* The *narrative voice* is, essentially, the voice of the narrator telling the story. The story is told from the perspective of the narrator or speaker. It is important for the student of literature to make the distinction between the narrator of the story and the author of the story. The views of the narrator do not necessarily represent the views of the author. This *narrative point of view* is essentially how the story is told and who is telling the story.

There are many different variations of point of view. However, for the sake of simplicity, we can categorize these variations into three distinct categories. When an author uses the *first person point of view,* readers will the personal pronouns "I, me, mine, we." If an author uses this point of view to tell a story, readers will see the author as being a character within the story. An author can also use *second-person point of view.* This particular point of view is rarely used by authors because it must be written using the personal pronoun "you." One of the reasons that authors rarely use this point of view is because the author must project the action onto the reader. For example, an author may write: "Thorns from a blackberry bush are pulling at your camouflage pants as you walk slowly and silently into the valley below." What if the reader is from the city and has never walked a valley or been snared by a blackberry bush? How can that reader get into the story? Authors can also use *third-person point of view.* Authors use the personal pronouns "he, she, and it" when writing in third person. One of the strengths of using the *third-person point of view* is that the author is not limited by what a character in the story (the "I, me, mine" character) or the person reading the story (the "you") knows or understands. The narrator is not in the story when authors use *third-person point of view* - the narrator is instead outside the story.

The *first-person point of view* can also be broken down into additional categories. For example, if the narrator is the main character in the story, the point of view is called *first-person protagonist.* If the narrator is not the main character in the story, but is, instead, a minor character, the point of view is *first-person observer.*

In addition, the *third-person point of view* can also be broken down into additional categories. When authors use the *third-person point of view,* the story is not being told by a character in the

story, but is instead, told by an invisible observer. If this invisible observer gives the reader the thoughts going on in a character's mind, the invisible observer is called a *third-person omniscient narrator.*Loosely translated, the word *omniscient* means "all knowing." If this invisible observer only gives the reader information that one can see and hear - like the narrator is a video camera - then the invisible observer is called a *third-person dramatic narrator.*

The important thing to remember about point of view is that the author's choice about how to tell the story and through whose eyes the story is told has a significant effect on how the reader experiences the story. If an author uses *first-person,* to narrate the story, the author is limited by the character's observations and thoughts. In addition, the way in which the narrating character sees the world is the way in which the reader will be forced to see it. *Third-person point of view* enables the author to narrate the story from a position that is outside of the story itself. When an author uses a *third-person omniscient point of view,* the narrative voice can see everything including the thoughts and feelings of any of the characters. When the narrator appears to be "all knowing," the point of view is called *third-person omniscient.* When the narrator only appears to be "all knowing about one or two characters, the point of view is called *third-person limited* (or *selective*) *omniscience.* In addition, sometimes the narrator may add an occasional comment or opinion. This is called *editorial omniscience.* When the narrator only tells the reader facts that can be seen or heard (as if the narrator is taking on the role of a video camera), then it is called *third-person objective* point of view.

It is also important to remember that an author can emphasize different things using different points of view. If the story is told from the point of view of the main character, readers have access to the thought of the main character and can understand what motivates the character to do the things that the character does. If the author doesn't want us to have that knowledge, the author could use a minor character to tell the story or could tell the story using the *third-person objective.* Each of these points of view has limitations. Even the narrator with *total omniscience* can be problematic. For example, it requires a great deal of skill for the author to manage the actions as well as the thoughts of multiple characters within the parameters of the story. In addition, what if the plot of the story is dependent upon the reader not knowing everything? How can the author have an unreliable or naïve narrator using the *third-person total omniscient* point

of view? By artfully using point of view, authors make the reader see the world through that point of view. This is one reason why point of view is such an important element of fiction.

2.5 Setting

The time and location in which a story takes place is called the setting. For some stories, the setting is very important, while for others it is not. There are several aspects of a story's setting to consider when examining how setting contributes to a story (some, or all, may be present in a story):

a) **place** - geographical location. Where is the action of the story taking place?
b) **time** - When is the story taking place? (historical period, time of day, year, etc)
c) **weather conditions** - Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc?
d) **social conditions** - What is the daily life of the characters like? Does the story contain local colour (writing that focuses on the speech, dress, mannerisms, customs, etc. of a particular place)?
e) **mood or atmosphere** - What feeling is created at the beginning of the story? Is it bright and cheerful or dark and frightening?

2.6 Theme

The theme in a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. It is the author's underlying meaning or main idea that he is trying to convey. The theme may be the author's thoughts about a topic or view of human nature. It is an opinion statement suggesting the author's central insight or general comment about human nature or the human condition as conveyed through use of various figures of speech, such as: symbol, allusion, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, or irony.

Particularity and Universality are the two forms of themes. **Particularity** refers to the uniqueness or singularity of works. Such themes are less significant out of the place, time and condition in which they are written. Their value ability is determined be the so called mainly setting. On the other hand, **Universality** refers to the relevance or applicability of a fictional work to large groups of people across time and place.

Statements of theme are not topics, subjects, clichés, plot summaries or motifs. Theme need to be stated in sentence formulated only on the facts of the work. Examples of common themes from literature are:

- things are not always as they appear to be
- Love is blind
- Believe in yourself
- People are afraid of change
- Don't judge a book by its cover

2.6 Style

Style is the manner in which something is done. Style in literature suggests the choice of words and the way of tellinga story. Stlye includes not only diction but also other elements like descriptive details, figures of speech, symbolism, tone, sentence structure and the pace the story is told.

Diction refers to the choice of words. Certainly, the writer's selection of words is important. Is the writing vivid or flat? Does the writer find just the right word to use at the right place? Are his words long or short, formal or informal? Do they fit the subject matter?

Do the writer's characters sound the way they should? All these questions relate to diction and thus to style.

Connotation is one feature of diction. The connotation of a word is its implied meaning, the word's emotional effect. the connotation of the words an author selects can indicate his/her attitude, and can create an