Unit Two—Components and Point of View

In this unit we are going to learn two very important aspects of short fiction writing, its prose components and point of view. All semester long we will be adding tools into our toolbox for writing stories. You will use these two in every story you write.

Prose Components

We'll start by explaining the prose components of fiction. Let's look at a passage near the climax in the second section of Sherwood Anderson's "Godliness," one of your assigned stories:

> Every morning he counted the pigs. "Four, five, six, seven," he said slowly, wetting his finger and making straight up and down marks on the window ledge. David ran to put on his trousers and shirt. A feverish desire to get out of doors took possession of him. Every morning he made such a noise coming down stairs that Aunt Callie, the housekeeper, declared he was trying to tear the house down. When he had run through the long old house, shutting the doors behind him with a bang, he came into the barnyard and looked about with an amazed air of expectancy. It seemed to him that in such a place tremendous things might have happened during the night. The farm hands looked at him and laughed. Henry Strader, an old man who had been on the farm since Jesse came into possession and who before David's time had never been known to make a joke, made the same joke every morning. It amused David so that he laughed and clapped his hands. "See, come here and look," cried the old man. "Grandfather Jesse's white mare has torn the black stocking she wears on her foot."
>
> Day after day through the long summer, Jesse Bentley drove from farm to farm up and down the valley of Wine Creek, and his grandson went with him.

There are five components to fictional prose and they are all represented here.

The first we'll discuss is **summary**. Summary is when you take narrative action and condense it. One of the things we'll learn about writing stories is how to pace them—how to distribute narrative action onto language. Summary allows us to put much narrative action in a few number of words. Look at the first sentence of the second paragraph, "Day after day through the long summer, Jesse Bentley drove from farm to farm up and down the valley of Wine Creek, and his grandson went with him" This habitual action, spread across a long summer, occupies one sentence. Summary is a necessary component of stories but when you use it in too great a proportion, you end up *telling* the story instead of *rendering* it. When a writing teacher says, Show, don't tell," the teacher is saying that you are using too much summary and not enough of our next component, dramatic action.

Dramatic action is the prose component used to narrate action as it happens in the "here and now" of the story. (Not quite here and now because most stories use past tense; call it the action

of the "there and then." In the passage above, "he said slowly wetting his finger and making straight up and down marks on the window ledge" is dramatic action, as is "David ran to put on his trousers and short." Dramatic action is the engine that moves the story forward. When the story stops to afford the reader an extended view, we are in the descriptive component.

Description is the component that helps dramatic action "show." It's when the author provides an in-depth look at an aspect of the story—it could be an action, a character, the setting, the weather…anything really in the story. In the passage above, "he came into the barnyard and looked about with an amazed air of expectancy. It seemed to him that in such a place tremendous things might have happened during the night," is description except for five words. Can you determine which five words are not description? Anderson is describing the way David looked at barnyard. The description tells us something about the optimistic, carefree attitude David has compared to the Calvinist pessimism of his grandfather. If Anderson went on to tell us everything David saw, such as a red wheelbarrow glazed with rainwater beside the white chickens, that would be description too.

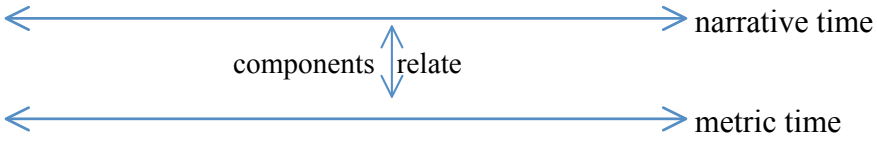
Exposition is a component that relays information that is not directly present in the story. In the passage above, Anderson briefly introduces a character, Henry Strader. Henry makes a cameo in the story and his cameo serves to reinforce the sweetness and light David brings to Jesse's farm. We are told that, "before David's time [Stader] had never been known to make a joke." Yet when David arrives he "made the same joke every morning." This information, that Stader had never been known to make a joke, is established *outside* narrative time and then brought *inside* the story to throw a certain light over the proceedings. Expository writing is writing that explains. Exposition in a story explains something. In this case it explains something about Henry Stader. By the way, bad television writing disguises exposition as dialogue because, unless there's a voiceover, there can be no exposition. You know dialogue is exposition in disguise when you hear a character say, "Hello, Uncle Pete who I have not seen in five years on account of your being locked inside a solitude pod in Kearney, Nebraska."

After we learn that Henry Stader never tells jokes, we discover that he tells a joke every day to David, "'See, come here and look,' cried the old man. 'Grandfather Jesse's white mare has torn the black stocking she wears on her foot.'" David is so bright he injects humor into the humorless soul of Stader. By the way, when a character speaks in a story as Henry does here, that is **Dialogue**. Simply put, dialogue is when characters speak.

Components and Time

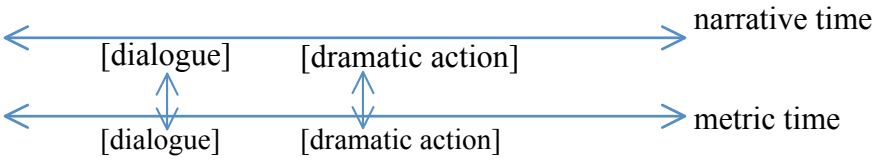
These are the five components of prose fiction. You probably won't think of them consciously as you write and they certainly don't need to be used in any set ratio, but it useful to be conscious of them in revision and analysis.

As I thought deeper about these components, I discovered something very interesting about their nature. To explain this, I'll draw two number lines. The first will be narrative time—how narrative is distributed across the language in a story. We'll call this "narrative time." The second timeline will be time as its measured by clocks. We'll call this "metric time." What I discovered is that each of these components can be discussed as determining a relationship between narrative and metric time. Let me demonstrate.



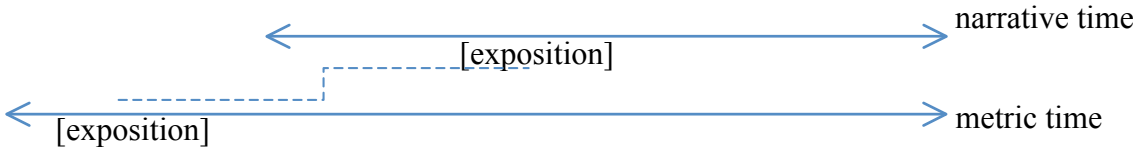
Let's look at these relationships. First off, **summary**. Summary takes a long segment of metric time and reduces it to a short segment of narrative time:

For both **dramatic action** and **dialogue**, the relationship between the narrative time and metric time is roughly isomorphic; that is, there is a one-to-one relationship between the two. What happens in real time is narrated as it occurs:



Description often stops time, then magnifies and analyzes an aspect of the story. One point of metric time is given as much narrative time as it needs. How many words do you need to describe the whiteness of the whale?

You probably can figure out what **Exposition** is. Exposition is a kind of report from a segment of metric time before narrative time begins:



It is very interesting that the constituent components of fictional prose each signify a relationship from time to narration. This reminds us that metric time (which is itself a fiction--but you don't want me starting in on spacetime because I won't stop) is how we experience life. If you need to recreatein language the experience of living, managing time is your first priority. And that is what the components of fictional prose do—they manage narrative time.

Point of View

If the components of fictional prose allow us to experience narrative time, what is the means by which these components open to us as readers? Answering this question takes us to the heart of writing fiction. Let's sketch out how narration takes place.

Imagine that every store takes place in a universe separate from ours. We'll call it "the fictional universe." What is the means by which we communicate with the fictional universe? There has to be a sender, a channel, a message, and a receiver. The sender is the narrator; the channel is language; the message is the story, and the receiver is (for the most part) the reader. The narrator is sender of the story.

There are five levels of point of view:

First Person Point of View is when the sender, the narrator is also a character in the story. The operative pronoun the character uses is "I" as in "I woke up and found myself at the breakfast table with an elephant." First person allows the narrator to establish an intimate relationship to the reader because the narrator is a participant in the story. Because the first person narrator established intimacy, be aware that this benefit is also a cost. The narrator is a participant in the events of the story so cannot be counted to accurately relate those events. When this occurs in the extreme, the narrator is called an **unreliable narrator**. At the end of Eudora Welty's story, "Why I Live at the P.O." the narrator relates:

> But oh, I like it here. It's ideal, as I've been saying. You see, I've got everything cater-cornered, the way I like it. Hear the radio? All the war news. Radio, sewing machine, book ends, ironing board and that great big piano lamp--peace, that's what I like.

We recognize that this is not true. Sister has spent the entire story at the center of the maelstrom of a chaotic family life; that's where she thrives. She ends the story in isolation.

Second Person Point of View is when the narrator narrates the story *to* a character, most often, the main character in the story. The operative pronoun here is "you," as in "You woke up and found yourself at the breakfast table with an elephant." Second person is rarely used but it creates an interesting tone. It establishes more distance for the narrator than first person, yet is close enough to be as if the narrator is talking to himself after the events in order to gain perspective. In addition, it can also hint at an accusatory tone, as if building the case against the narrator. It can also be seductive, as used in Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

Before I present the passage from Calvino's novel, though, I want to make an important distinction (and then complicate it!). The audience for a second person narration is *not* the reader. So it is not like a 18th century novel that begins with "Gentle Reader, I am about to relate

to you the perigrinations of a man who found himself at breakfast with a proboscis-nosed pachyderm." When the reader is addressed *as reader*, we still must determine the entity telling us the story in order to determine what the point of view is. Calvino likes to play games in fiction (more on this later), so in his novel, the second person is addressed to the reader *who is a character:*

> In the shop window you have promptly identified the cover with the title you were looking for. Following this visual trail, you have forced your way through the shop past the thick barricade of Books You Haven't Read, which were frowning at you from the tables and shelves, trying to cow you.

There are three levels of **Third Person Point of View**. In third person point of view, the narrator narrates. What determines the level of third person narration is how much information does the narrator have about the narrative proceedings.

If the narrator knows *everything* about the proceedings, then the narrator is **Third Person Omniscient**. "Omniscient" means to be all knowing. The narrator knows what hapopened before the proceedings, what happens after; the narrator knows what's in the hearts and minds of all the characters as in, "He got out of bed after a dream about boat docks he was leaping from. He found himself, both stunned and amused, at the breakfast table with an elephant. The elephant was thinking, 'What? No marmalade.'" Obviously, if the narrator knows what an elephant thinks, we have an omniscient narrator.

The third person omniscient narrator achieves a God-like position of the proceedings. It renders judgments as well as narrating action, describing emotional states and motivation. Popular in Victorian literature when England was at the height of its empire, it is not as frequently used. In this passage from Anderson's "The Teacher," the last sentence, we know we are encountering an omniscient narrator. Can you tell why? "Then he slept and in all Winesburg he was the last soul on that winter night to go to sleep."

If the narrator's omniscience is limited to one person (in a novel it may be more than one) the point of view is called **Third Person Limited Omniscience**. The character that the omniscience is limited to is called **the means of perception** character. The name is also the definition: what we perceive in the story is a version of what the means of perception character perceives. If you narrate a character in one room, you cannot relate what's going on in another room. Think of the camera that follows the character. Sometimes the camera shows what the character is doing; sometimes the camera shows us exactly what the character sees, but the camera does not lose focus on the means of perception character.

The means of perception character should be established early, for that character is the anchor, the agent of the story. In Anderson's story, "Mother," the point of view is established as George Willard's mother. In one passage the narrator describes a scene in the alley where the mother casts her gaze, "in the alley the gray cat crouched behind barrels filled with torn paper and broken bottles above which flew a black swarm of flies." Note that the narrator can narrate anything about the alley but since George's depressive mother is the means of perception character, what we see in the alley reflects her state of mind—dark and broken.

It is important to recognize that once the point of view is established, the narrator does not have to mediate parts of the story that reflect the character's consciousness. Anderson does

not write, “She saw in the alley…” because the reader knows that she is the lens through which the imagery of the story is captured. This is also shown in a passage from “Indian Camp,” by Ernest Hemingway. The story is third person limited omniscience with a young boy, Nick Adams, as the means of perception character. Nick’s dad, a doctor, has brought him along to an Indian Camp to help a young woman having a difficult labor. Nick’s dad has to improvise a c-section using his pocket knife and Nick observes the whole thing:

> Later when he started to operate Uncle George and three Indian men held the woman still. She bit Uncle George on the arm and Uncle George said, "Damn squaw bitch!" and the young Indian who had rowed Uncle George over laughed at him. Nick held the basin for his father. It all took a long time.

Is the narrator making an objective comment about how long the operation took? No, what we experience is what Nick experiences and *to him* it all took a very long time. What the narrator gives us is the view of events mediated through Nick’s consciousness. That is third person limited omniscience.

If the narrator knows only what can be observed, the point of view is **Third Person Detached**. There is no narration of thoughts, feelings, consciousness in third person detached. As Sargent Friday from the old cop show *Dragnet* used to say when speaking to frantic witness, “Just the facts, mam.” “A man woke up, walked to the kitchen and sat down at a table with an elephant” is third person detached. We’ll look more closely at third person detached in a few chapters when you are asked to write a detached story.

A Few More Notes on Point of View

Before you sit down to write, you need to decide what your point of view will be. It will depend on a variety of factors, how close to the action you want your reader, which character you want the reader to identify with, and the substance of the story itself. Once you have made a choice though, you must stick to it. Beginning writers often make the mistake of switching point of view (most often with a change in the means of perception character) in the middle of the story. Have a telos for choosing the point of view you choose, then stick with it.

The mid-week assignment has to do with the components. The final story will engage your creative imagination and, of course, demands that you choose a point of view.

Story Models and Assignments—Unit 2

There are a number of things to pay attention to in this first story.

First, let's look at subtext:
How does light serve as a subtext here, from the beginning to the end?
How are the Indians portrayed?
What is Uncle George's role? Where is he at the end?
Why does Nick feel at the end as if he'll never die? What is it about father son relationships?

I'll comment on third person limited in a few places in the story.

Indian Camp by Ernest Hemingway

At the lake shore there was another rowboat drawn up. The two Indians stood waiting.

Nick and his father got in the stern of the boat and the Indians shoved it off and one of them got in to row. Uncle George sat in the stern of the camp rowboat. The young Indian shoved the camp boat off and got in to row Uncle George.

The two boats started off in the dark. Nick heard the oarlocks of the other boat quite a way ahead of them in the mist. The Indians rowed with quick choppy strokes. Nick lay back with his father's arm around him. It was cold on the water. The Indian who was rowing them was working very hard, but the other boat moved further ahead in the mist all the time.

"Where are we going, Dad?" Nick asked.

"Over to the Indian camp. There is an Indian lady very sick."

"Oh," said Nick.

Across the bay they found the other boat beached. Uncle George was smoking a cigar in the dark. The young Indian pulled the boat way up on the beach. Uncle George gave both the Indians cigars.

They walked up from the beach through a meadow that was soaking wet with dew, following the young Indian who carried a lantern. Then they went into the woods and followed a trail that led to the logging road that ran back into the hills. It was much lighter on the logging road as the timber was cut away on both sides. The young Indian stopped and blew out his lantern and they all walled on along the road.

They came around a bend and a dog came out barking. Ahead were the lights of the shanties where the Indian bark-peelers lived. More dogs rushed out at them. The two Indians sent them back to the shanties. In the shanty nearest the road there was a light in the window. An old woman stood in the doorway holding a lamp.

Inside on a wooden bunk lay a young Indian woman. She had been trying to have her baby for two days. All the old women in the camp had been helping her. The men had moved off up the road to sit in the dark and smoke cut of range of the noise she made. She screamed just as Nick and the two Indians followed his father and Uncle George into the shanty. She lay in the lower bunk, very big under a quilt. Her head was turned to one side. In the upper bunk was her

husband. He had cut his foot very badly with an ax three days before. He was smoking a pipe. The room smelled very bad.
This is not an objective comment on the smell but of Nick's reaction to it.

Nick's father ordered some water to be put on the stove, and while it was heating he spoke to Nick.

"This lady is going to have a baby, Nick," he said.

"I know," said Nick.

"You don't know," said his father. "Listen to me. What she is going through is called being in labor. The baby wants to be born and she wants it to be born. All her muscles are trying to get the baby born. That is what is happening when she screams."

"I see," Nick said.

Just then the woman cried out.

"Oh, Daddy, can't you give her something to make her stop screaming?" asked Nick.

"No. I haven't any anaesthetic," his father said. "But her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they are not important."

The husband in the upper bunk rolled over against the wall.

The woman in the kitchen motioned to the doctor that the water was hot. Nick's father went into the kitchen and poured about half of the water out of the big kettle into a basin. Into the water left in the kettle he put several things he unwrapped from a handkerchief.

"Those must boil," he said, and began to scrub his hands in the basin of hot water with a cake of soap he had brought from the camp. Nick watched his father's hands scrubbing each other with the soap. While his father washed his hands very carefully and thoroughly, he talked.

"You see, Nick, babies are supposed to be born head first but sometimes they're not. When they're not they make a lot of trouble for everybody. Maybe I'll have to operate on this lady. We'll know in a little while."

When he was satisfied with his hands he went in and went to work.

"Pull back that quilt, will you, George?" he said. "I'd rather not touch it."

Later when he started to operate Uncle George and three Indian men held the woman still. She bit Uncle George on the arm and Uncle George said, "Damn squaw bitch!" and the young Indian who had rowed Uncle George over laughed at him. Nick held the basin for his father. It all took a long time.
Took a long time to Nick.

His father picked the baby up and slapped it to make it breathe and handed it to the old woman.

"See, it's a boy, Nick," he said. "How do you like being an interne?"

Nick said. "All right." He was looking away so as not to see what his father was doing.

"There. That gets it," said his father and put something into the basin.

Nick didn't look at it.

"Now," his father said, "there's some stitches to put in. You can watch this or not, Nick, just as you like. I'm going to sew up the incision I made."

Nick did not watch. His curiosity had been gone for a long time.
Notice the use of the phrase "a long time" to remind us that Nick had been too terrified to watch.

His father finished and stood up. Uncle George and the three Indian men stood up. Nick put the basin out in the kitchen.

Uncle George looked at his arm. The young Indian smiled reminiscently.

"I'll put some peroxide on that, George," the doctor said.

He bent over the Indian woman. She was quiet now and her eyes were closed. She looked very pale. She did not know what had become of the baby or anything.

"I'll be back in the morning." the doctor said, standing up.

"The nurse should be here from St. Ignace by noon and she'll bring everything we need."

He was feeling exalted and talkative as football players are in the dressing room after a game.

"That's one for the medical journal, George," he said. "Doing a Caesarian with a jack-knife and sewing it up with nine-foot, tapered gut leaders."

Uncle George was standing against the wall, looking at his arm.

"Oh, you're a great man, all right," he said.

"Ought to have a look at the proud father. They're usually the worst sufferers in these little affairs," the doctor said. "I must say he took it all pretty quietly."

He pulled back the blanket from the Indian's head. His hand came away wet. He mounted on the edge of the lower bunk with the lamp in one hand and looked in. The Indian lay with his face toward the wall. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged the bunk. His head rested on his left arm. The open razor lay, edge up, in the blankets.

"Take Nick out of the shanty, George," the doctor said.

There was no need of that. Nick, standing in the door of the kitchen, had a good view of the upper bunk when his father, the lamp in one hand, tipped the Indian's head back.

Go back to the earlier paragraph—when Nick's dad shines the lantern's light on the husband, Nick sees the scene exactly as it's described.

It was just beginning to be daylight when they walked along the logging road back toward the lake.

"I'm terribly sorry I brought you along; Nickie," said his father, all his post-operative exhilaration gone. "It was an awful mess to put you through."

"Do ladies always have such a hard time having babies?" Nick asked.

"No, that was very, very exceptional."

"Why did he kill himself, Daddy?"

"I don't know, Nick. He couldn't stand things, I guess."

"Do many men kill themselves, Daddy?"

"Not very many, Nick."

"Do many women?"

"Hardly ever."

"Don't they ever?"

"Oh, yes. They do sometimes."

"Daddy?"

"Yes."

"Where did Uncle George go?"

"He'll turn up all right."

"Is dying hard, Daddy?"

"No, I think it's pretty easy, Nick. It all depends."

See how dialogue can reveal Nick's thoughts?

They were seated in the boat. Nick in the stern, his father rowing. The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It

felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning.

In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing; he felt quite sure that he would never die.

Anderson's book Winseburg, Ohio *is a classic of modernist short fiction. This book, and the next we read* Dubliner's *are also compendiums of the short fiction form. We can discern many technuqes in these stories. They also produce a significant amount of esthetic pleasure. In this story, which serves as an overture of the collection, some truths are told that will be shown through the rest of the stories.*

The Book of the Grotesque by Sherwood Anderson

THE Writer, an old man with a white mustache, had some difficulty in getting into bed. The windows of the house in which he lived were high and he wanted to look at the trees when he awoke in the morning. A carpenter came to fix the bed so that it would be on a level with the window.

Quite a fuss was made about the matter. The carpenter, who had been a soldier in the Civil War, came into the writer's room and sat down to talk of building a platform for the purpose of raising the bed. The writer had cigars lying about and the carpenter smoked.

For a time the two men talked of the raising of the bed and then they talked of other things. The soldier got on the subject of the war. The writer, in fact, led him to that subject. The carpenter had once been a prisoner in Andersonville prison and had lost a brother. The brother had died of starvation, and whenever the carpenter got upon that subject he cried. He, like the old writer, had a white mustache, and when he cried he puckered up his lips and the mustache bobbed up and down. The weeping old man with the cigar in his mouth was ludicrous. The plan the writer had for the raising of his bed was forgotten and later the carpenter did it in his own way and the writer, who was past sixty, had to help himself with a chair when he went to bed at night.

In his bed the writer rolled over on his side and lay quite still. For years he had been beset with notions concerning his heart. He was a hard smoker and his heart fluttered. The idea had got into his mind that he would some time die unexpectedly and always when he got into bed he thought of that. It did not alarm him. The effect in fact was quite a special thing and not easily explained. It made him more alive, there in bed, than at any other time. Perfectly still he lay and his body was old and not of much use any more, but something inside him was altogether young. He was like a pregnant woman, only that the thing inside him was not a baby but a youth. No, it wasn't a youth, it was a woman, young, and wearing a coat of mail like a knight. It is absurd, you see, to try to tell what was inside the old writer as he lay on his high bed and listened to the fluttering of his heart. The thing to get at is what the writer, or the young thing within the writer, was thinking about.

The old writer, like all of the people in the world, had got, during his long life, a great many notions in his head. He had once been quite handsome and a number of women had been in love with him. And then, of course, he had known people, many people, known them in a peculiarly intimate way that was different from the way in which you and I know people. At least

that is what the writer thought and the thought pleased him. Why quarrel with an old man concerning his thoughts?

In the bed the writer had a dream that was not a dream. As he grew somewhat sleepy but was still conscious, figures began to appear before his eyes. He imagined the young indescribable thing within himself was driving a long procession of figures before his eyes.

You see the interest in all this lies in the figures that went before the eyes of the writer. They were all grotesques. All of the men and women the writer had ever known had become grotesques.

The grotesques were not all horrible. Some were amusing, some almost beautiful, and one, a woman all drawn out of shape, hurt the old man by her grotesqueness. When she passed he made a noise like a small dog whimpering. Had you come into the room you might have supposed the old man had unpleasant dreams or perhaps indigestion.

For an hour the procession of grotesques passed before the eyes of the old man, and then, although it was a painful thing to do, he crept out of bed and began to write. Some one of the grotesques had made a deep impression on his mind and he wanted to describe it.

At his desk the writer worked for an hour. In the end he wrote a book which he called "The Book of the Grotesque." It was never published, but I saw it once and it made an indelible impression on my mind. The book had one central thought that is very strange and has always remained with me. By remembering it I have been able to understand many people and things that I was never able to understand before. The thought was involved but a simple statement of it would be something like this:

That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.

The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his book. I will not try to tell you of all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carelessness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful.

To me, this is meta-commentary on the telos Anderson has set out for himself. Recalling Plato, he implies, through the writer, that truth is beauty. Unlike Plato, though, this truth seems multitudinous and even contingent.

And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them.

So there is a relation between character and the truth that the character represents.

It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.

How does a truth become a falsehood? Rip it from its context, deny its contingent nature, cling to it as if it were yours, and the truth makes you grotesque. If you see the truth and not the world, you are grotesque.

You can see for yourself how the old man, who had spent all of his life writing and was filled with words, would write hundreds of pages concerning this matter. The subject would

become so big in his mind that he himself would be in danger of becoming a grotesque. He didn't, I suppose, for the same reason that he never published the book. It was the young thing inside him that saved the old man.
How does the young thing in us save us from being grotesques? Could it be that the qualities of youth—an openness to experience, our creativity, and imagination prevents us from clinging to our truth at the cost of experiencing life in its beautiful complexity?

Concerning the old carpenter who fixed the bed for the writer, I only mentioned him because he, like many of what are called very common people, became the nearest thing to what is understandable and lovable of all the grotesques in the writer's book.

In this story we see how Anderson moves a story forward according to metaphorical (making comparisons) considerations. I'll also comment on some of the passages that denote a judgmental third person omniscience that conducts social analysis as well as storytelling.

Paper Pills by Sherwood Anderson

HE was an old man with a white beard and huge nose and hands. Long before the time during which we will know him, he was a doctor and drove a jaded white horse from house to house through the streets of Winesburg. Later he married a girl who had money. She had been left a large fertile farm when her father died. The girl was quiet, tall, and dark, and to many people she seemed very beautiful. Everyone in Winesburg wondered why she married the doctor. Within a year after the marriage she died.

The knuckles of the doctor's hands were extraordinarily large. When the hands were closed they looked like clusters of unpainted wooden balls as large as walnuts fastened together by steel rods.
When we first encounter his hands they are compared to wooden balls and walnuts.
He smoked a cob pipe and after his wife's death sat all day in his empty office close by a window that was covered with cobwebs. He never opened the window. Once on a hot day in August he tried but found it stuck fast and after that he forgot all about it.

Winesburg had forgotten the old man, *(third person omniscient)* but in Doctor Reefy there were the seeds of something very fine. Alone in his musty office in the Heffner Block above the Paris Dry Goods Company's store, he worked ceaselessly, building up something that he himself destroyed. Little pyramids of truth he erected and after erecting knocked them down again that he might have the truths to erect other pyramids.
Do you recognize the young thing inside Dr. Reefy? He destroys his truths after he erects them. This prevents him from becoming a grotesque.

Doctor Reefy was a tall man who had worn one suit of clothes for ten years. It was frayed at the sleeves and little holes had appeared at the knees and elbows. In the office he wore also a linen duster with huge pockets into which he continually stuffed scraps of paper. After some weeks the scraps of paper became little hard round balls, and when the pockets were filled he dumped them out upon the floor. *(Wooden balls, walnuts, now paper balls of truths.)* For ten years he had but one friend, another old man named John Spaniard who owned a tree nursery. Sometimes, in a playful mood, old Doctor Reefy took from his pockets a handful of the paper

balls and threw them at the nursery man. "That is to confound you, you blathering old sentimentalist," he cried, shaking with laughter.

The story of Doctor Reefy and his courtship of the tall dark girl who became his wife and left her money to him is a very curious story. It is delicious, like the twisted little apples that grow in the orchards of Winesburg. *(The story the omniscient narrator is about to tell is compared to little, twisted apples.)* In the fall one walks in the orchards and the ground is hard with frost underfoot. The apples have been taken from the trees by the pickers. They have been put in barrels and shipped to the cities where they will be eaten in apartments that are filled with books, magazines, furniture, and people. *(Social analysis showing the shift in the center of American life from rural regions to urban centers—also an important subtext of "Godliness" and the development of corporate farming.)* On the trees are only a few gnarled apples that the pickers have rejected. They look like the knuckles of Doctor Reefy's hands. *(The story, Dr. Reefy, and the twisted apples are now all related.)* One nibbles at them and they are delicious. Into a little round place at the side of the apple has been gathered all of its sweetness. One runs from tree to tree over the frosted ground picking the gnarled, twisted apples and filling his pockets with them. Only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples.

The girl and Doctor Reefy began their courtship on a summer afternoon. He was forty-five then and already he had begun the practice of filling his pockets with the scraps of paper that became hard balls and were thrown away. The habit had been formed as he sat in his buggy behind the jaded white horse and went slowly along country roads. On the papers were written thoughts, ends of thoughts, beginnings of thoughts.

One by one the mind of Doctor Reefy had made the thoughts. Out of many of them he formed a truth that arose gigantic in his mind. The truth clouded the world. It became terrible and then faded away and the little thoughts began again.
In danger of becoming a grotesque, and the world receding, Dr. Reefy regains his perspective in little truths.

The tall dark girl came to see Doctor Reefy because she was in the family way and had become frightened. She was in that condition because of a series of circumstances also curious. *The narrator also knows the story within this story, how the girl became pregnant.*

The death of her father and mother and the rich acres of land that had come down to her had set a train of suitors on her heels. For two years she saw suitors almost every evening. Except two they were all alike. They talked to her of passion and there was a strained eager quality in their voices and in their eyes when they looked at her. The two who were different were much unlike each other. One of them, a slender young man with white hands, the son of a jeweler in Winesburg, talked continually of virginity. *(What does he want to do if all he tyalks about is virginity?)* When he was with her he was never off the subject. The other, a black-haired boy with large ears, said nothing at all but always managed to get her into the darkness, where he began to kiss her.

For a time the tall dark girl thought she would marry the jeweler's son. For hours she sat in silence listening as he talked to her and then she began to be afraid of something. Beneath his talk of virginity she began to think there was a lust greater than in all the others. *(It became qrotesque.)* At times it seemed to her that as he talked he was holding her body in his hands. She imagined him turning it slowly about in the white hands and staring at it. At night she dreamed that he had bitten into her body and that his jaws were dripping. She had the dream three times,

then she became in the family way to the one who said nothing at all but who in the moment of his passion actually did bite her shoulder so that for days the marks of his teeth showed.

After the tall dark girl came to know Doctor Reefy it seemed to her that she never wanted to leave him again. She went into his office one morning and without her saying anything he seemed to know what had happened to her.

In the office of the doctor there was a woman, the wife of the man who kept the bookstore in Winesburg. Like all old-fashioned country practitioners, Doctor Reefy pulled teeth, and the woman who waited held a handkerchief to her teeth and groaned. Her husband was with her and when the tooth was taken out they both screamed and blood ran down on the woman's white dress. The tall dark girl did not pay any attention. When the woman and the man had gone the doctor smiled. "I will take you driving into the country with me," he said.

For several weeks the tall dark girl and the doctor were together almost every day. The condition that had brought her to him passed in an illness, but she was like one who has discovered the sweetness of the twisted apples, she could not get her mind fixed again upon the round perfect fruit that is eaten in the city apartments. In the fall after the beginning of her acquaintanceship with him she married Doctor Reefy and in the following spring she died. During the winter he read to her all of the odds and ends of thoughts he had scribbled on the bits of paper. After he had read them he laughed and stuffed them away in his pockets to become round hard balls.

We end the story with the round shapes that began the story. This time, though, they are paper pills that ease them both in her illness.

Mid-week Assignment

By Wednesday you should compose a brief scene using the components of fictional prose we discussed in the chapter: Exposition, summary, dramatic action, dialogue, description. Let the components lead your scene. I'll demonstrate in a moment. In addition, in order to prepare for the major assignment, choose as the main character someone you know (it doesn't have to be someone you know well). Put them in a scene you have never experienced them in. In other words, make up a situation that will be totally fictional. Nonfiction character, fictional situation. Post it in your journal and in the comment section.

Example

Exposition:	*Polo had been hunting deer for three years.*
Summary:	*He walked Deer Run trail from 4am watching for them.*
Dramatic action:	*His ears perked up and he tensed, but the noise was only a squirrel scampering around.*
Dialogue:	"*I hate squirrels," he said to the oak tree.*
Description:	*His front teeth were sharp; his back teeth ground down with worry.*
Dialogue:	*"A deer would be tasty," he said.*

Summary: *He was in the forest all afternoon.*
Dramatic Action: *He walked back down the trail toward home, dejected.*

Description: *It was as if he had pissed off the forest god who would not provide any hairy meat.*

Exposition: *Fortunately, the town in which he lived had an organic grocery store which frequently stocked venison patties and steaks.*

It took me just a few minutes to construct this. It's not great literature, but it demonstrates a mastery of the components of prose fiction.

How To Do It

1. List the components of prose fiction—twice—in any order you want.

2. Fill the form you have set out for yourself by writing a scene in the order of the components.

3. Use as the main character someone you know (on any level).

4. Include conflict somewhere in your scene.

5. When you're done you should have constructed a unified scene with a variety of components.

Qualities of a Good Assignment

1. *It includes each component twice.*

2. *It demonstrates proper understanding of the components.*

3. *It has a character at the center.*

4. *It is a completely developed scene.*

5. *It demonstrates creativity.*

Final Assignment

By Monday you should compose a story (three to five pages is a good target) that I call "Nonfictional/Fiction." One element of the story, where it takes place, a character, an action, any aspect of the story at all ought to be nonfiction, the rest should be fictional. In other words, there ought to be a dose of reality in an otherwise created world. This story helps you to think about turning what you know into a point of departure for what you don't know—the rest of the story. Your reader should not be able to tell what the "true" part of the story.

I'll also read the story closely for its handling of point of view. Remember, have a telos for choosing the point of view you choose.