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**Short Story**

**Lecture 3**

**“The Battler” (Part 2)**

**Ernest Hemingway (1898-1961)**

In light of the extraordinary circumstances we are living, I would like to start this lecture with a famous quote from Hemingway’s *The Old Man and The Sea*. He says, “*a man can be destroyed but not defeated*”. It is all about the spirit of defiance. You have been fighting for your lives for so long that I believe you will be capable to adapt to the new challenge we are facing today. I believe you are the kind of people who will be up to the challenge and take all the precautionary measures required to preserve the safety of yourselves and your beloved ones. Despite all the difficulties you have been through, you were not destroyed; therefore, be responsible and do not allow this global pandemic to defeat you.

Now, let us continue our discussion of “The Battler”. Last time, we did not put all our focus on the actions of the story. We talked about different ideas of the setting, the narrative techniques, the narrator, and something about the characterisation of Nick.

In relation to the narrative techniques, we explained and had examples of two techniques that are summary and exposition. In the summary, the

narrator would not tell you “to sum up, this is what happened” or “at the end, we have the events as follows.” Rather, if there is a long span of time that you do not need to know all its details, the narrator would summarise its events in a few words or sentences. Maybe nothing significant happened, or there is just one thing that you need to know about this period. We might have two hours of Nick Adams walking, but we do not need to know all about them, so the narrator tells us in one sentence that Nick kept walking by himself. In exposition, we have a scene about the background or some previous events that happened with the characters.

### **The Narrator**

We also discussed the ideas of the point of view, the narrator, and the author, and the difference between them. We have first-person narrator, third-person narrator, and authorial narrator. We said that the third-person narrator is neither the author nor any other characters, but it is a kind of mask, and we call it persona. The author uses this persona to provide the reader with the narration. The persona does not necessarily represent the ideas or views of the author as a human being.

### **The Images**

We also said that we have different kinds of images that address our senses as readers. We can have visual images that address our sight, or auditory images that address our hearing, or even images that address our Sense of smell. So, images in fiction are not only visual, but they can address all our senses. They even create the illusion of motion. On page 35 (hard copy) in the third paragraph:

**He came up the track toward the fire carefully.**

Here, we feel as if we see the fire, so this is something visual. We feel how Nick is walking carefully, and we can imagine him caught in the motion. These details—like the word carefully—are similar to directions in a play or a movie.

### **Scenes, Development of Action, and Structure**

In the beginning, we start with only one character, that is Nick, and this is the first scene.

Later, and after Nick walks, he meets Ad (Adolph), so we have two characters.

**The man sat there looking into the fire. When Nick stopped quite close to him he did not move.**

**“Hello!” Nick said.**

**The man looked up.**

**“Where did you get the shiner?” he said.**

**“A brakeman busted me.”**

**“Off the through freight?”**

**“Yes.”**

**“I saw the bastard,” the man said. “He went through here ’bout an hour and a half ago. He was walking along the top of the cars slapping his arms and singing.”**

**“The bastard!”**

This encounter marks the beginning of a new scene in the story. It represents a new development of the events. It is the end of the first journey with Nick alone, and now we have a new character and a new discussion.

Then, Bugs appears, and we have three characters (Nick, Ad, and Bugs). When Bugs comes, they start cooking, and here we have a new scene that is marked by Bugs' appearance. This scene ends when Bugs knocks Ad out, and the action takes another turn.

When Bugs knocks Ad out, we are left with two characters, Nick and Bugs. Although Ad is there, he is present only physically because he is unconscious. He is not participating in the action and discussion. This is a new scene.

Finally, Nick leaves, and in the last scene, we go back to one character which is Nick walking by himself.

Therefore, you can notice the story is divided into five main scenes that start with Nick walking alone in his journey of development, and it ends with Nick alone continuing his journey. The structure of the scenes serves the shape of its plot.

The first scene represents the exposition, where we get introduced to the protagonist, Nick. With the rising action, which is the second phase in the plot, we have an additional character that is Ad Francis. This character will help reaching the climax where we have three characters, Nick, Ad, and Bugs. In the climax we have the confrontation between Nick and Ad, where Bugs steps in to save the day and protect Nick. In the fourth scene we get back to having two characters, and the tension is being reduced. That is the falling action. Finally, we have the denouement, or what we call the resolution, where the story closes with Nick back on the track.

## **Exposition vs. Flashback**

In order to understand the difference between exposition and flashback, I would like you to read the following passage where Bugs tells Nick the story of Ad Francis:

**“He took too many beatings, for one thing,” the negro sipped the coffee. “But that just made him sort of simple. Then his sister was his manager and they was always being written up in the papers all about brothers and sisters and how she loved her brother and how he loved his sister, and then they got married in New York and that made a lot of unpleasantness.”**

We have the image “*sipped the coffee*” that addresses the senses of hearing and the smelling.

**“I remember about it.”**

**“Sure. Of course they wasn’t brother and sister no more than a rabbit, but there was a lot of people didn’t like it either way and they commenced to have disagreements, and one day she just went off and never come back.”**

**He drank the coffee and wiped his lips with the pink palm of his hand.**

Bugs is giving background information about one of the characters—Ad—and this is what we call “exposition”. Exposition is not a flashback. A flashback is an independent scene that belongs to the past. We actually see the scene from the past; we do not hear about it from present characters. In exposition, we hear about a past scene from the narrator or from one of the characters. It is like what we have in this scene where Bugs is present, and he is talking about Ad’s past. We do not go back in time and see Ad

himself in the past; we rather hear about his past from Bugs. This is an exposition, or an expository scene, that provides background information about one of the characters.

## Characterisation

Notice the grammatical mistake in Bugs' language when he says "*they was*". Good authors focus on the details of their characters, and this is what we call "characterisation". Sometimes, authors create a complete biography of their character. Even though this biography is not necessarily presented to the reader, it helps the author himself/herself understand their character. This is part of characterisation. Understanding the character is both about the physical appearance and the mental process.

Concerning the character of Nick, we know that he is a kid from Chicago as mentioned in the story. You can trace many details in the story that make us believe he is a white kid, and I want you find them while you are reading the story. As the protagonist of the story, we need to think whether he learned anything from the incident where he beaten off the train by the brakeman.

To decide on this matter we need to read the passage that describes Nick's encounter with Ad, which reads:

**The man sat there looking into the fire. When Nick stopped quite close to him he did not move.**

**"Hello!" Nick said.**

**The man looked up.**

**"Where did you get the shiner?" he said.**

**"A brakeman busted me."**

**“Off the through freight?”**

**“Yes.”**

**“I saw the bastard,” the man said. “He went through here ’bout an hour and a half ago. He was walking along the top of the cars slapping his arms and singing.”**

**“The bastard!”**

**“It must have made him feel good to bust you,” the man said seriously.**

**“I’ll bust him.”**

**“Get him with a rock sometime when he’s going through,” the man advised.**

**“I’ll get him.”**

**“You’re a tough one, aren’t you?”**

**“No,” Nick answered.**

**“All you kids are tough.”**

**“You got to be tough,” Nick said.**

**“That’s what I said.”**

**Then a couple of lines later:**

**He looked at Nick. “Sit down,” he said. “Want to eat?”**

**“Don’t bother,” Nick said. “I’m going on to the town.”**

**“Listen!” the man said. “Call me Ad.”**

**“Sure!”**

**“Listen,” the little man said. “I’m not quite right.”**

**“What’s the matter?”**

**“I’m crazy.”**

Ad is telling Nick, in a straightforward manner, that he is crazy. Now, let us compare this to the incident with the brakeman. The brakeman told Nick:

**“Come here, kid,” he said. “I got something for you.”**

**He had fallen for it.**

Nick had fallen for the brakeman because he seemed friendly. However, and suddenly:

**“Come here, kid, I got something for you.” Then wham and he lit on his hands and knees beside the track.**

People change suddenly from nice to wild. This is what Nick should have learnt from his experience with the brakeman. However, when he met Ad Francis, he does not seem to have learned this lesson. Ad tells him to sit, so he does so. Ad tells him that he is crazy, and Nick starts asking him about being crazy! Then Ad tells Nick to give him his own knife, and Bugs interferes. Ad’s reaction to this is important, and in order to understand it, we need to remember “The Muddy Road”. When one monk helped the beautiful lady, the other monk remains silent because he was thinking about the incident. In “The Battler”, we have something similar with the knife incident on page 38:

**Nick reached in the bag and brought out a loaf of bread. He cut six slices. Ad watched him and leaned forward.**

**“Let me take your knife, Nick,” he said.**

**“No, you don’t,” the negro said. “Hang onto your knife, Mister Adams.”**

This is a lesson! Bugs is trying to teach Nick a lesson here. However, what happened is that Ad kept thinking about the knife.

**Ad kept on looking at Nick. He had his cap down over his eyes. Nick felt nervous.**

During the previous conversation, Ad was still trying to digest Nick’s behaviour - not giving him the knife, which he sees as an insult.



**“How the hell do you get that way?” came out from under the cap sharply at Nick.**

**“Who the hell do you think you are? You’re a snotty bastard. You come in here where nobody**

**asks you and eat a man’s food and when he asks to borrow a knife you get snotty.”**

**He glared at Nick, his face was white and his eyes almost out of sight under the cap.**

**“You’re a hot sketch. Who the hell asked you to butt in here?”**

**“Nobody.”**

Nick was surprised, and he could only say one word! Until the moment when Nick felt nervous, he was not aware of the anger that was accumulating in Ad. It seems that he did not learn his lesson till now. Let us go to page 36: **He looked at Nick. “Sit down,” he said. “Want to eat?”** Nick was invited to sit with Ad in the same way he was invited by the brakeman. Still, he did not learn his lesson that he should not trust everything people tell him. It does not seem that Ad is evil by nature, but he said that he is crazy, and this is probably the reason of his change. When someone tells you that s/he is crazy, you should worry about that. You do not trust him/her because this is something serious. However, until this point, Nick seems to have learnt nothing from his previous experience on the train.

### **The Plot:**

As we said, the story starts with one character, then two, then three, then two again, and it ends with one. At the end, Nick is heading towards the next village. He is not there yet, but he is on the road, just like he started, and the road signifies a journey. This reflects a kind of plot where there is

no goal. Nick does not want to get married to his beloved one for example, or to free his father from another tribe that kidnapped him. The plot is not driven by something that Nick wants to achieve.

Nick Adams is not a hero in the literary sense. He is not a muscular person who would never lose a fight. However, in the story he is the protagonist. The protagonist is not necessarily a hero. S/He could be just a normal person. There was a time when authors focused all their fiction on heroic actions and the heroes who always have a noble goal to achieve. However, this does not represent the modern man. Think of our literal battler—Ad Francis—who was a champion. He was famous, but the society ruined his life. They said that he looked like his manager, so they considered them a brother and sister. However, as Bugs said, they were not a brother and sister no more than rabbits. We humans think that all rabbits are the same, so we might think of them all as brothers and sisters. Ad and his manager had similar facial features, but they were not brother and sister. Regardless, the society did not accept their engagement either way. This can lead us to the fact that sometimes, you do everything right, but an external factor might ruin everything for you. In this case, the external factor is the community and the society.

When it comes to Bugs, we know that he is African American or a “negro”, as described in the story. We know that he was in gaol where he met Ad Francis, and he was in prison because he killed a man. We know that he used to steal. He is sticking to Ad because he wants to be a gentleman. However, we can think that he is the one in charge. He said something about this on page 40:

**“Right away I liked him and when I got out I looked him up. He likes to think I’m crazy and I don’t mind. I like to be with him and I**

**like seeing the country and I don't have to commit no larceny to do it. I like living like a gentleman."**

This tells us something about how the society treats people like Bugs. He wants to have decent money; he is not asking for luxury. We can understand the situation of African Americans at that time, when the society did not help them have a good life. We understand that he is not a criminal by nature although we do not know why he killed a man. He found a friend, he liked him, and he is with him. They both face life together, but they are not heroes.

None of these three characters seems to be a hero, but they are all struggling to survive in one way or another. That is why you do not find a modern hero. We find normal human beings just like us who struggle to survive. Even our protagonist Nick is not a hero; he is not a forcing character because he does not lead the actions of the story. Most of the time he is reacting rather than acting. He is receiving rather than influencing others or taking initiative.

As we said, the plot is not focused on or directed towards a goal. It started with the road and ended with the road. You have to read the section of PLOT in the glossary to understand the different types. The plot of our story is a circular, it starts on the road, some actions happen, and then it ends on the road. Moreover, it starts with one character, then they become two, then three, back to two, and finally it ends with one character again. This is the kind of circular or helical plot that our story adopts.

### **The Context:**

An important idea that we should ask and wonder about is the word negro that is used in the story. Nowadays, this is a taboo and offensive

word, and it is considered an insult. The question is: How could Ernest Hemingway use this word more than one time in the story? Why would not he stick to the name that he gave to this African American character, i.e. Bugs?

The story was published in 1925, after the American president Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. In 1863, President Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation to free the slaves in the south, when “The Battler” was published, there was no slavery. Despite that, the mentality of racism was still dominant. These words were still OK because nobody would care. This is a realistic short story, and that is why Hemingway was free to use the word, whether he was with or against racism.

### **Beginning vs. Ending**

The beginning:

*Nick stood up. He was all right. He looked up the track at the lights of the caboose going out of sight around the curve. There was water on both sides of the track, then tamarack swamp.*

The ending:

*Nick climbed the embankment and started up the track. He found he had a ham sandwich in his hand and put it in his pocket. Looking back from the mounting grade before the track curved into the hills he could see the firelight in the clearing.*

At the end, Nick is climbing, he is still on the road, and he is looking back at the fire. The story started with the curve and ended with the curve.

This story is an initiation story, which means, according to the glossary, “a story in which the central character—usually young—is exposed to an aspect of reality and pushed toward maturity by the

*experience.*” The word initiate means to start. This definition applies to Nick, a character that is starting to develop due to the experience he went through during the time of the story.

That is all we want to know about “The Battler”, and for our next lecture, I want you to read “Cell One” by the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

**Believe in Yourselves!**