PLOT

All fiction consists of five main elements: Plot, Character, Setting, Style and Theme.

Of these plot is the structure of an action as presented in fiction. It is rather a series of connected events moving through three logical stages, the beginning, the middle and the end. The beginning of a plot action is called the exposition and the middle, the complication, which in turn moves towards the moment of highest tension called climax. The beginning of an action always presents us with a situation in which there is some element of instability, some conflict. In the middle of the action there is a period of readjustment of forces in the process of seeking a new kind of stability. In the end of the...

action some point of stability is reached, the forces that have been brought into play, have been resolved.

Some critics differentiate a plot from the narrative by emphasizing that what happens in the story from beginning to end, constitutes the story's narrative, while events in their casual relationship constitute the plot of the story. In other words, if in a narrative we ask "and then", in a plot we ask why?.

E.M. Forster comments:
"The King died and then the queen died is a story. The king died and then the queen died of grief is a plot. A plot is also a narration of events but with this difference that the emphasis falls on causality". Mr. Kenneth Kempton meant the same thing when he explained that the plot structure of a story is the arrangement of events in sequential as well as in consequential pattern.

The most important questions in the analysis of plot are fairly simple but their answers may be highly significant. The basic question is this: What happens?


The second question concerns structure. How are the incidents ordered? Chronological order is not always the method, and certain effects can be obtained only by deviating from strict chronological sequence. Flashback is one such effect made possible solely by such deviation. We are all familiar with the flashback or cutback in which the temporal sequence of the narration is abruptly suspended and we move back to events which occur in time prior to what we have regarded as the beginning of our story. Often this device is employed largely for expository reasons to increase our understanding of how shape our attitudes towards the action which is recounted in conventional sequence. The events revealed in this fashion are intrinsic to the central action. In these instances the order of the plot does not coincide with the order of narration, and so the story teller as it were does not begin at the beginning of his story.

How the chronological sequence of incidents gets violated by the introduction of flashbacks is clearly brought out in the stories, 'Anru Irvu', 'Kopalarupam', 'Gayanalka mayakkam' etc.

In the first story we are shown the incidents that happened in the king's court in the morning through
the technique of flashback. The king questions his minister, Mañikkavacakar about the expenditure of the money given to him for purchasing horses and as the latter could not explain it, orders him to be thrown into the prison. Just then, news pour in that a fresh set of horses with majestic mien are heading towards the palace and in joy the Pandya orders the release of his minister. All these events are projected through the reminiscences of the king. A similar method is seen in the story 'Kopalapuram' also, wherein the central character muses upon some unhappy incidents that occurred in his life sometime back. 'Cayankāla mayakkam' provides another instance of a narrative told in the form of recollections.

The flashback is not the only method which upsets the chronological pattern of events. Instead of recording the flashback through the medium of a character, the author himself sometimes disrupts the time sequence of the incidents by sketching the story from the tail-end upwards. We come across such a pattern in the story 'Conna col'. It begins with what should be the last episode of the story viz. the exit of the land-lord Cuppu Pillai and his family from the village after disposing of their properties and then goes on exploring the causes for their ruin.
Another context wherein the author is compelled to violate the chronological order of narration, is in the portrayal of two incidents which are supposed to occur simultaneously in the same story. Instances are provided by the stories 'Vālkai' and 'Sitti' ("Attainment")

In 'Vālkai', the author depicts a discourse by a band of theosophists first, and the merry indulgence of the gypsies next which events are in fact supposed to happen more or less simultaneously.

'Sitti' is another instance of this type. In the first chapter, it tells about the exit of Čēppakarāman Pillai and the subsequent internal strife between his relatives. The second part exclusively focusses upon his solitary sojourn until he meets a sanyasin who undertakes to take him to the Himalayas. The third chapter again reverts to the tussle among the family members while the fourth and the last chapters deal with his return to Tirucentur and his reunion with his family. In focussing alternatively upon the landlord and his relatives in the village, the author is only depicting a set of simultaneous occurrences which are recorded one by one in the story. We thus see chronological order of narration violated in all these instances.
The third question one should ask about plot is this: "What is the function of the plot in the specific story at hand? That is, is the plot the focus of attention as it is in adventure and action stories, and suspense mysteries, or is it a tool to unmask character as in... or is it used to convey a theme, an attitude toward life as we find in the following stories.

In any story the plot runs the customary course of complication, conflict, climax and denouement (resolution). In some stories we get the closed plot; in some others the open plot; while certain others are straight narratives with little or no serious complication. Closed plot is one in which we get a definite resolution of conflict. About forty out of the ninety and odd stories of Putumaipittan are found to possess closed plots.

4. Putumaipittan — 'Tunpakkeni', 'Nacakarakumpal', Futiyama nantan, Futiyakuntu etc.
5. — Payam, Kolaikaran Kai, Cevvay tosem.
6. — Kalyani, Sitti, Falsaam Pillai etc.
7. — Ninaivuppatai, Valkai etc.
8. K.L. Knickerbocker — 'Interpreting Literature'
Writers use closed plots either to reveal character or to demonstrate some general truth.

We may cite Putumalipittan’s ‘Palvannam Pillai, Kalyani’, ‘Conna Col’ etc. as typical illustrations of close-plotted stories which emphasize character. The first one focusses upon the eccentric behaviour of a middle-class employee who makes a hell of his home by his peevishness and stubbornness, while ‘Kalayani’ tries to dissect the mind of a married, rustic belle who falls for a young artist. ‘Conna Col’ is woven round rather an idealized character, Cuppu Pillai, who prizes honour more than his life.

As examples of stories that use closed plots for demonstrating some general truth, we may cite the following.\(^9\) The first one is a treat on the psychology of women with an emphasis on their artful nature. ‘Sitti’ demonstrates how grave is the problem of true asceticism and what a mockery it becomes when immature persons step into the field without proper self-introspection. ‘Kopalayyankar manaivi’ is a vindication of the general truth that in the race between the husband and wife to

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9. Muttal Venu, Sitti, Kopalayyankar manaivi, Vali, Vadhamallikai, Tani Oruwanukku, etc.
too his or her way of life, the woman is the ultimate winner. 'Tani Cruvanukku' exemplifies the truth that so long as there is a wide gulf between our precept and practice and our intellect is overshadowed by blind superstition, there is no redemption for man from the quagmire of poverty and ignorance.

There are some stories which, though they present an appearance of having closed plots are found on closer analysis to possess open plots only. Putumalippittan's 'Manita yantiram' is an instance. Minaksicuntaram Pillai, a petty accountant in a grocery store, who has spent more than 40 years in the job, gets obsessed with an idea of going over to Ceylon in order to earn money. One night he leaves for the railway station and buys a ticket for Tuticorin. He has with him about Rs.40/- taken from the store without the knowledge of the proprietor, and when he meets a policeman on the platform he gets a shock as if he is caught red-handed in the act of stealing and fumbling some silly excuses he retreats from the station.

In the story the complication arises when Minaksicuntaram Pillai's friend speaks about an acquaintance of theirs, who has amassed much wealth by doing
business in Ceylon. This naturally sparks off a desire in the needy man to make a trip to the island and return as a lakhier. But the thought of leaving his present employer causes a struggle in his mind between his loyalty to his master (code) and his ambition to better himself (desire). With an indecisive mind he proceeds to the station to catch the train, where he meets his old friend, a policeman. This stirs up an unconscious fear and guilt in him and he instantly decides to hurry back home. In fact it is the climax of the story. But what about the denouement or resolution of the conflict? It is evident that his basic ambition to go over the Ceylon remains unfulfilled and his inner conflict between the code and desire is resolved only temporarily.

Compared to the close-plotted stories, Putumalippitan's stories with open plots are far fewer in number. 10 In the first story, the hostility between Citamparam Pillai a mirasdar, and his followers who have arrayed on one side, and Marutappan, the barber, on the other, does not come to a close even after the latter

10. Instances: Mācakārakumpal, Kaṭavulin Pritiniti, Iraṇṭu Ulakankal, An Cinkam etc.
leaves the village. Maraikkayar, an influential businessman, now challenges the mirasdar, regarding the ownership of the land. Evidently, the basic conflict which centres round a small plot of land does not get resolved even after the exit of the barber from the scene. In ‘Katavulin pritini’ the mental conflict of the protagonist ‘Guppu Sastrikal’ remains unresolved till the end. In the second story the conflict between the mental agony of Rëjam resulting from her husband’s senseless behaviour and her love and attachment for him that forbid her from openly expressing her disapprobation, forms the ‘motif’. Similarly the reunion of Cima and Rukmini in the final phase of the story ‘An Cïkam’ is no solution to the problem posed viz. whether the couple were able to lead a happy married life thereafter. Rukmini goes off her head and could not recognise even her beloved Cima. As the main complication in this story is left unresolved. ‘An Cïkam’ is another instance of an open plotted story.

As illustrations of the third category that consists of simple direct narratives with little or no serious complication we may cite the following stories. 11

The first story is a satirical dig on the present day dowry system and the marriage custom prevalent among the Hindus which do not allow the couple to get acquainted with each other before their marriage. It is a form of social contract executed by the parents on behalf of their wards. So, why not it be better called a sexual barter, since one party pays the other money in the form of dowry for getting sexual gratification? As the plot rendering of the story involves no complication, it is classified under the narrative genre. A similar characteristic is observed in the story ‘Katavulum Kantacamippillayum’ also. Here the author laughs in his sleeves at the human frailties and idiosyncrasies. Kantacamippillai the protagonist, assumes the job of a city guide and takes his guest, God in human form, round the city and initiates Him into the vagaries of human nature as reflected in the conduct of persons drawn from different levels of human strata. God ultimately comes to the inescapable conclusion that it is far easier to give them boons than live among them on the earth putting up with their silliness and crookedness. ‘Orunț Kalintatu’ is another narrative that picturizes the hardships a story writer has to endure in order to pass a day in his life. The main focus is
upon the abject poverty of the present day authors who dream of earning a livelihood from literary pursuits. The plot consists of trivial actions devoid of any moment of serious tension, complication or conflict.

In dwelling upon the nature of plot it would be highly profitable to know the difference between traditional and non-traditional plotting. First of all, plot or the selection and the arrangement of incidents in a story is basic and a story or play is inconceivable without it. However plot in the sense of incidents involving considerable passion or physical action as in quarrels, fights and journeys, figures more prominently in earlier than in recent literature. This is called the traditional plotting. One reason why plot of physical action is so characteristic of the literature of the past, is the strength of the oral tradition.

The new stories on the other hand may be built around a single episode and even that may be implied, not delineated. Incident or action in modern fiction has always been interpreted to mean mental as well as physical action. In the modern story physical action may be minimal or entirely absent, while greater emphasis
is laid upon mental action and this is termed as non-traditional plotting. For non-traditional plot there is no precise beginning, middle, or end. The primary concern is with the significance of events rather than with the events themselves. Narration is interior and 'vertical' rather than exterior and 'horizontal'. In fact we cannot tell the story in these narratives and communicate more than a superficial orientation.

This characteristic of modern fiction ie. the absence of traditional plot or story-telling development is observed in a number of sotries of Putumaipittan. For instance is there really any worthwhile story to narrate in any of these following stories? 12 Do any of these have a precise beginning, middle, or end? All of these in fact look like slices cut from the middle of a serial, and the interaction of characters and situations is more pronounced in these stories than the events themselves. The narration gets interior and vertical rather than exterior and horizontal, with the author exposing the working of the mind of the protagonists in these stories. We, in fact, become gradually aware of the hidden desires

12. Valkai, ninaiuppatai, orunal kalintatu, Kaṭitam, Manitayantiram, Cankutevanin Tarmam etc.
of the chief characters. When the significant action and conflict lie within the central character, we may rightly infer that the author uses the plot to reveal character. 13

Among the stories of Putumaipttan, 'Nacakara-kkumpal' and 'Sitti' are noteworthy for their unique possession of plots that are spatially circular in pattern. The action of the first story starts with the arrival of a bus in the village from which alights the only son of Dr. Visvanatha Pillai, a retired civil surgeon, and a prominent member of the locality. Then again the action of the story closes with the departure of the same young man in the same bus at the same place.

In "Sitti" also we see a plot of similar structure. The story opens with the landlord Cempaka-Raman Pillai renouncing his hearth and home in favour of asceticism and closes with his return to this place of departure after a lapse of ten years, thus completing a spatial circle. The 'Gentleman from San Fransisco' by Ivan Bunin is a good illustration of such a type of plot. 14

13. Examples: 'Cuppayilapillayin katalkal', 'Uellammal' etc.
The constituent elements of plot are classified as follows:

**Conflict:** The word action in a story is used in its broadest sense to include not only physical but mental activity also. The purpose of any story is to interest the reader so that the characters and events will arouse his feelings. One way of rousing feelings or emotions is by creating conflict or friction among the characters. By depicting these conflicting forces, the reader's sympathy or antipathy is generated. This kind of dramatic conflict remains the core of the plot in a good number of stories. It reaches its greatest intensity at the climax of the story and is then resolved either happily or tragically.

Generally four types of conflicts are traced in fiction.

1. Man Versus himself - internal conflict; here the conflict is psychological.
2. Man Vs. another character - social conflict.
3. Man Vs. his environment or outside circumstances - physical conflict.
4. The reader Vs. a character. In this type of conflict the reader instead of identifying himself with the central character arrays himself against the latter. It is rather a conflict within the mind of the reader.
A story may present one or more conflicts in which case one of them will be the main conflict while the others are minor ones. Even when more than one conflict is traced in a story it is not at all imperative that all of them should produce tension. These minor conflicts are usually sketched in lightly, for, in a short story there is no room for a thorough exploration of more than one central conflict.

Psychological conflicts are always implied and we become aware of them only through emotions, the characters exhibit or the actions they perform. For instance, we note that Minaksiuntaram Pillai the protagonist of the story 'Manitayantiram' is projected having a vacillating mind as one/who could not actually decide upon going to Ceylon when circumstances favour him. A petty accountant in a grocery store and a poor man he has dreamt all along of sailing to Ceylon, which was considered as a veritable 'Eldorado' for adventurers and entrepreneurs, in those days. Yet when the moment arrives for translating his idea into action, conflict besets his mind - a conflict between his desire to embark on his new venture and loyalty to his employer, or, to put it better, between code and desire. This struggle
is apparent through out his stay inside the railway station. The clerk at the ticket counter reacts sharply when his voice gets inaudibly low out of nervousness while asking for a ticket to Tuticorin. Similarly when his police friend calls him from behind on the platform he is unconsciously startled thus revealing his nervous tension in him. His hasty retreat from the station is evidently the result of the conflict operating in his mind.

In the story 'Kalyāṇi' the internal conflict of the woman is brought out in her rushing to the temple to find solace for her troubled mind in the presence of the deity. She is seised with an inner struggle between her infatuation for the young artist, and her attachment to her marital code and social conventions. That her marital obligations finally triumph over her desire is evident from her refusal to elope with her lover.

The story "Nicamum Nīnaippum" exemplifies two types of conflicts, one physical (between Mr. V.P. & the proof reader Rāmalinkam) and the other psychological, which is the major conflict in the story. (vide part II of the story).
Social conflicts form the basis of the stories 'Nēacakārakkumpal', 'Tunpakkeni' and 'Tani Gruvanukku' all of which portray man pitted against man in jealousy, illwill and animosity. These stories of course do show psychological conflicts but they shade off into the background when the physical struggle between the characters emerges as the dynamic force that gives momentum to the story. 'Nēacakārakkumpal' is built around a struggle between a low caste barber and a landlord. An arrogant landowner Gītamparam Piḷḷai is instigated by Cuppu Piḷḷai, one of his henchmen to buy a plot of land from a labourer who had already promised to sell it to the barber. It causes rivalry and creates bad blood among the parties. The poor barber is given a good thrashing by the land-lord and as a 'vendetta' against this brutal act, he immediately becomes a convert to Islamic faith and leaves the village once for all.

'Tani Gruvanukku' deals with a low-caste labourer who is hounded out of his village by the so called selfrighteous people for an offence of theft. The poor man hides himself and starves for days together. Finally he dies out of exhaustion and hunger while the whole village celebrates a grand feast in honour of their deity. Here the conflict between the poor man
and the villagers is the linchpin of the story.

'Tunpakkeni' a long short story or 'nouvelle' as it is often called, depicts the heart-rending tale of a 'Pariah' woman whose life is one long chapter of struggle against unscrupulous schemers.

The third type of conflict i.e. physical conflict where man fights with his environment is rarely found in the stories of Putumaipittan. Perhaps the solitary exception is provided by the story 'Payam' which tells how an English man had to fight for his life in the midst of sand-storms in the deserts of Africa and also how a rural family in the French jungles had to spend a sleepless night in fear of a ghost.

The fourth type of conflict viz. the reader Vs. a character is illustrated by the stories 'Kotukkappuli-maram', 'Ancinkam' and 'Viparita Ācaī'. The first one is about a wealthy Protestant Christian John Denver Swamidas who thought he observes faithfully the religious rites like attending prayer-meetings in the church every Sunday, violates the very spirit of his religion by refusing charity to the poor. The incongruity between his precept and practice, and his inhuman behaviour
towards the little girl who picks up a fruit in his compound, do not endear him to the readers. In the story 'Tincinkam', the reader gets furious towards the character Srinivasa for his failure to come forward and own the responsibility for the young life growing in the womb of the innocent girl Rukmini. Similarly we detest the central character of the story 'Viparita Acai' for his lack of scruples in robbing the chastity of his friend's wife.

A good plot has its moments of tension and they are mainly the product of conflict. Though conflict contributes to the dramatic element in fiction, we must remember that fiction is not always dramatic. It would be appropriate here to clarify the word dramatic. It can mean one of the following three: (1) It is used to make a distinction between the essay which presents abstract ideas and the story which presents a theme through characters in action. All stories by their very nature have this dramatic quality. (2) The word dramatic is used also to mean the dramatic method used in a scene where characters present themselves with their own words. Hemingway's "The Killers" uses dramatic scene almost exclusively while Putumaiyittan's "Nadakarakkumpal" uses
it for a major part of the story. (3) Finally the word is used to indicate the tension created by the conflict of the characters in action. The action is dramatic we say when we are stirred emotionally and suspended in a state of expectancy.

Just like conflict, contrast is another technical device employed as a key method in fiction. The author H.W. Leggett would call it the "contrast of codes", and go on to explain it thus: "A large part of the interest in fiction may be found in the actual expression or comparison of codes, but its dramatic element arises from conflict of codes and desires either between individuals or groups or classes or above all within the minds of individual characters".  

The following stories derives their interest chiefly from the contrast of codes presented in them. It does not mean however that they lack conflicts, but the conflicts mostly psychological, are too feeble to produce any tension of intensity.


16. Iraňtu Ulakankal, Girpiyin narakań, Orunäl Kalintatu, Köpäleyyankar manai, Valkai Mayavalai, Sitti, Itu meşin yukan'.
'Irañtu Ulakankal' depicts the life of a college professor of science, one Ramacamippilai and his modest wife Rajam. The professor is a bookworm and lives in a world of his own with petty and snobbish ideas about health, hygiene, family life and such matters. He is so engrossed in his absurd and imaginary world that he ignores the feelings and sentiments of his pretty wife. While she hankers after his affection and love, her husband simply offers her unpalatable dishes of long sermons and preachings. The difference in the codes of life of the husband and wife forms the basic structural pattern of the story.

'Cirpiyin Narakam' illustrates the contrast of codes between Phylarx the greek warrior and Ātan, the Tamil sculptor in their conception about the utility of art. The Greek holds that all art ultimately is created by man for his own use while the Tamil artist believes that art deserves to be consecrated at the altar of God, the architect of the Universe. 'Gopalayyankar Manaivi' is yet another study in the contrast of codes. While Ayyenkār is a strict vegetarian, his wife a shepherd woman craves for non-vegetarian diet which she could not cook in the house. How this problem of dietary
difference is finally tackled forms the subject of this humorous story.

'Vāzhkai' is another narrative which focusses upon the contrast between the ways of life of some theosophists and a set of vagabonds. The first one is artificial and urbanized, while that of the vagabonds is gay and care-free.

Besides the contrast of codes in fiction, the feature of contrast is often employed to produce what is called the irony of situation. Among modern writers it is said that Henry James best exemplifies the extreme subtle effects to which irony can be put. It is a dramatic device introduced into the core of fiction and fundamental to its intention and structure. Where it governs the point of view it is an irony of statement; where it is introduced into a dramatic scene or event it is an irony of situation.

Irony of statement

Some of the story-titles like 'Nalla Vēlaikkāran' Mahāmaṇḍanam', 'Tyākaṃurty', 'Nyāyam', 'Ān Cinkam',

'Ponnakaram' may be pointed out as instances of irony of statement. Here, contrast, the very essence of irony, is evolved by these appellations which mean the very opposite of what they signify externally. When a bad servant like Raman Nar is praised as 'Nalla Velaikkaran', what else is it other than irony? Again don't we notice, blatant irony in extolling a despicable coward as 'Ai cinkam'?

Ironic of situation

It may be defined as the discrepancy between what we expect the outcome of an action to be, and the actual outcome. It denotes a contrast between what is done and intended, said and meant, between appearance and reality, expectation and fulfilment, and between the professed and actual. Irony of situation forms an integral part of the plot in a good number of stories.

The short skit 'Kuppanin Kañavu' illustrates the irony generated by the wide contrast between the rikshapuller's dream and fulfilment. Discrepancy between the professed and the actual, characterizes the conduct of Mr. V.P., of the story 'Nicanum Ninaippum', who resolves at one moment to resist the pressure of unscrupulous publishers, but surrenders to them on their terms and
conditions, at the next. In the story 'Nyāyam' irony arises from the fact that while the cart-driver tends the mare like his own child he is sentenced by the magistrate on a charge of cruelty towards the animal. It is ironical again that the very same magistrate who prays for forgiveness before God could not himself forgive the poor jutkawala for his minor offence despite the latter's plea for mercy.

Irony of situation forms the core of another story titled 'Kopālapuram' which is narrated in the first person. The protagonist writes a story in which an young man is supposed to pen a love letter to his paramour, Lakshmi, by name. The manuscript of this epistle drafted by the narrator and intended to be used in the novel accidently falls into the hands of a mirasdar in the village who is a friend of the writer-protagonist of this story and whose pretty daughter bears the name Lakshmi. As the lady is already married, the letter creates a havoc in the family by causing a rift between Lakshmi and her husband and the innocent girl consequently commits suicide. Here is irony arising from discrepancy between what is done and intended.

Dramatic irony or Sophoclean irony is a term often applied to speeches or actions which the audience
understands in a sense different from the sense in which the dramatic characters understand them. The story 'Mahāmacānam' offers a very good example of this dramatic irony. It tells about the death of an old beggar on the side walk in the Mount Road, Madras, during the peak hours of human traffic. His companion who is attending upon him pours water into the parted mouth of the beggar which he gulps down with much difficulty. Even though the tragedy is being enacted in the busiest quarter, the only observer of this drama is a little girl of four, whose hovering eyes accidently fall upon the scene. Out of wonder and curiosity, without a bit realizing the gravity of the incident the girl moves near the dying man and watches the scene in amusement. Here the contrast between what the girl perceives and what the readers understand produces the Sophoclean irony.

Coincidences

Coincidence forms the convenient peg for hooking the plot of many a story. The defence which is some times offered for its free use, that coincidences do happen in real life is no justification at all for introducing them in fiction, for, as Hudson says, that the obverse of the

dictum that truth is stranger than fiction is that fiction should not be so strange as truth. It is an accepted fact in the world of fiction that coincidence is illegitimate when it functions to solve the fictional problem i.e. when the events which bring about the resolution of a plot have no logical connection with the preceding events. It so happens that when coincidence is abused by writers, all sorts of unexpected things happen, while the characters in their stories turn up again and again at the right moment and in the place where they are wanted. In short, coincidences are often used to bail the author out of the difficulties, he sometimes experiences in framing plausible and convincing situations. Some authors consider pure coincidence not objectionable unless it leads to extremely fortunate or unfortunate results as in some of the novels of Dickens on the one hand, or of Hardy on the other. The coincidence one finds in the stories 'Aneinkam' and 'Katsavulum Kantamacampillayum' are basic and integral to the texture of the plot. But in the other two stories 'Sitti' and 'manitayantiram' though coincidence change the course of the plots they cannot be said to be vital and indispensable as the nature of the protagonists of these stories is such

that there is a likelihood of these characters changing their course of action even if there were no such coincidences in their life. In 'An cinkam' coincidences are used both for setting up a problem and solving the problem. When Čima comes upon his wife accidentally on the riverbed and keeps company with her for sometimes, she conceives and creates a problem for the whole family. This problem is solved only when he meets her again by accident amidst her wandering in the streets of Madras and takes her away home. So here, the first coincidental meeting sets up a problem while the second one solves it. Both the meetings, however, are fundamental to the story as they shape the course of events.

In the second story 'Kaṭavulūm Kantacamippillayum' the coincidental encounter between God and the layman forms the basis on which the edifice of the plot is raised. To put it the other way, there would have been hardly a story at all had this meeting not taken place. Kantacamippillai takes God round the city of Madras initiating him into the complications of the modern society.

The story 'Sitti' describes the rash and futile attempts of a man who embarks upon the path of renunciation without proper initiation or mental preparedness. The author indirectly warns us that asceticism is not a pleasing
to be toyed with as it is the privileged possession of only a select few. The central character Ceppakaram Pillai is described as hearing the voice of his dead father beckoning him off and on. It may perhaps be a symbolic representation of the man's homely ties. So it is highly probable that even if he does not come across his brother-in-law in the precincts of the temple, he might have found some other excuse to return home so long as the inner voice keeps calling him.

In the last story we see the protagonist Minaksicuntaram Pillai greeted by his friend a policeman on the platform, which immediately makes him alter his plan and decide to return home. In fact the author has drawn him as a man of vacillating type who cannot make up his mind easily. We could infer from his nervous movements that he is subconsciously searching for an excuse in order to change his plans. This excuse is provided by the sight of the policeman and even if the accidental meeting had not taken place, he would have found some other reason to abandon his idea of making the trip. So in the two stories listed above, coincidences are used as mere pegs to hook on the events and cannot be claimed as indispensable.
In all these stories coincidences are naturally and smoothly interwoven into the fabric of the plot. Charles Dickens probably might have had in mind such coincidences when he said, "Where the accident is inseparable from the passion and action of the character, where it is strictly in tune with the entire design of the story it seems to me as it were an act of divine justice".

Suspense and Surprise ending

Most stories emphasize plot, character, or theme and they are conspicuous for one of the three. Generally stories of plot or stories of contrivance as they are often called, depend upon the twin elements of suspense and surprise for acquiring their dramatic quality. When the protagonist is permitted to share with the reader the knowledge of his danger, it is called simple suspense, while his ignorance of the very danger that threatens him, a knowledge of which is shared by the reader and the author, is called complex suspense. 21

A feeble type of complex suspense is discernible in the tales 'Cevvaytosem' 'Brama Rakas' and Payam.

while the detective mystery Dr. Campat, is an instance of simple suspense where the narrator himself commits a murder and feigns ignorance about the crime till he is exposed in the end. Among these stories, 'Cevvaytosam', an 'eerie' tale that revolves round the baffling question of the existence of ghosts, offers the maximum suspense.

'Payam' speaks about the adventure of an English man among Egyptian deserts and jungles of France, where he undergoes woeful and terrible experiences which teach him finally that fear is the greatest foe of man.

'Dr. Campat' follows the pattern of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creations. The discovery of a murder in the story is followed by clues, false accusation, investigation, the construction of a hypothesis and then finally the solution. The revelation of the identity of the culprit comes as a shocking surprise to the reader.

The element of surprise-ending in nicely handled in the stories Nācakārakkumpal, 'Tiranta Jenna', 'Vāṭāmallikai' and 'Cankutevanin Tarmam'. No one could predict that the barber Marutappan in the first story, would embrace Mohammedanism as a vendetta against the atrocities perpetrated in the name of casteism. In fact we are taken by surprise at this dramatic turn of events. Similarly in
the anecdote 'Tiranta Jennal' the revelation that the haggard looking visitor to the cafe is no other than the millionaire of the town gives us a battering shock. Who would expect the 'tragedenne' of the story 'Vatamallikai' to terminate her life call of a sudden? Similarly we are taken by complete surprise at the munificence of the high way robber 'Cankutevan' who doles out a bagful of coins to the old woman.

E.M. Förster in his book 'Aspects of the Novel' says that characters to be real ought to run smoothly but a plot ought to cause surprise. But it must be borne in mind that though the authors like O'Henry and Somerset Maugham have handled well these twin elements of suspense and surprise ending, there are writers like Chekhov and Tolstoy whose works barely reveal these traits and yet are acclaimed as great masterpieces. There is no harm in employing surprise endings provided they are expressive and functional, validated by the story quite unlike those found in the stories of O'Henry where they become mere tricks which tax our credulity. For instance the barber's conversion to Islam in the story Nācakārakkumpal though surprising, is however found to be fully validated by the preceding events.

The Beginning and Ending

The modern short story is described as just a flash, a dramatic few minutes or an hour catching some human struggle at crisis. There is a great deal of truth in this. The short story is indeed a highly compressed form of art. One aspect of this compression is the beginning, another, the ending. It is common axiom among the short story critics that the story writer's first care should be to know how to make a beginning and if the first stroke be vivid and telling, the reader's attention will be instantly won.

Putumalipittan's stories show two distinct types of opening. Either the chief character is straight away introduced to the reader, or the story opens with a description of its locale. The majority of his stories come under the first category. As instances of stories with 'locale' description in the beginning, we may cite the following. The leisurely pace with which they start and the insipid description of places and people as found in certain stories like 'Putiyakuntu' remind us faintly of the novels of the early writers like Vai.Mu. Köthainayaki Ammal.

23. Instances: Anmai, Kaṭitam, Vali, Sitti, Nācakārakupal etc.
"Gripakaraman Pillai was possessed of a sudden impulse to renounce the world", this is how the story 'Sitti' opens. It suggests two things. First it is an implied promise that the informant has interesting news to tell us as to the why and wherefore of the renunciation. Who is there amongst us, that could read the aforesaid sentence without immediately becoming possessed by a consuming desire to know more? Secondly the opening line indirectly gives us a hint as to the rash and impulsive decision of the protagonist taken without mature consideration.

The staccato phrases occurring in the opening lines of some stories hold out a promise that something substantially interesting is on the follow. "Have you heard of the Golden City?" - this is the introductory line of the story 'Ponnakaram'. Again just see how the opening line of "Nonti" reacts upon the readers. "I had this experience a few days back". - It is but natural that we would be curious to know what this experience is. Arouses curiosity in the opening of the stories is really a mark of good craftsmanship. "To hold out an alluring promise or to rouse the tantalizing itch of curiosity is one of the few irresistible ways of opening a story" says Alfred G. Ward.25

How does the author fare in his story ending? Every tale naturally ends in accordance with its own deepest sense and quite in consistence with the nature of the chief character. Still an author has some scope for shaping the end as artistically as his genius would permit him. Nietzsche, the celebrated German philosopher is reported to have remarked that it needs a genius to give the touch of inevitableness to the conclusion of any work of art.26

In some stories, the theme is revealed in the last lines. "There is nothing like fear to match fear": this is the last line of the story, 'Payam'. Similarly the closing line of the story 'Anta Muṭṭal Venu' is an ironic comment on the hypocritical nature of women which incidentally is the theme of the narrative also. The final sentence of the story 'Orunāl Kalintatu' makes an oblique reference to the pathetic plight of the authors who have taken to writing as a means of livelihood. The quintessence of the subject matter treated in some stories is reflected in their closing lines. Refer the last line of the story Kalāyaṇī. "A bubble in the life-stream of Kalyāṇi broke up". If we go on expanding the idea contained in this

line a full story will open itself before us. Similar
is the function of the closing line of the story 'Sitti'
which tells us that with the fading out of "Cantalka
Camikal Canpakarāma Pillai came alive once again. The
staccato phrase at the close of the story Ponnakaram,
"Is not the word chastity a pure fabrication and non-
sense? Lo! there is the golden city"! asks the readers
to halt just for a minute and listen!

So far, only the performance of a successful
artist at his desk has been shown. "Even the great Homer
nods", thus goes the popular saying. It is therefore
no great surprise that even a good artist like Putumai-
ppittan nods occasionally. The author-comments found in
the form of tags, or epilogues as they are called, at the
close of some of these stories disturb the organic unity
of the short story form, however much they may be inter-
esting otherwise. "I do not know if Rukmini recognised
him later on" (Ancinkam). "What can we do? Life is like
that" (Putia Kunto). "Such things are very common in the
Hindu Society which always has a ready stock of explana-
tions to offer for man-made evils". (Tyākamūrti). "Is
there any one in our country who is such a fool as to
deny himself, the pleasure of a sumptuous meal?"
(Vinayakacaturti). Do any of these tags blend with the
main body of the stories? Definitely not. They serve rather as anti-climaxes to the stories concerned.

**Techniques that modify the structure of the plot.**

**Time:** Long considered as one of the three great Aristotelian concepts of unity (time, place and action) in the dramatic art, time is an essential factor in contributing to the compactness of the short story. As Edith Wharton points out, the effects of compactness and instantaneity sought in the short story are attained mainly by the observance of two unities — the traditional one of time and the modern one of vision. The time or scale as it is sometimes called is determined by the question, how long should the particular story be? "The ideal short story time-span would seem to be a period not much longer than the time it takes to read the story", remarks Kenneth Kempton. Though it is seldom attainable it will remain ever as a target for young aspirants to aim at.

It is an accepted norm in the literary world that the events of a novel may cover years while the events of short story—extend only a few hours or at the

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the most a few days. Still we find some successful short stories treating of events that cover a time-span of years. How is this done?

There are only two possible ways of tackling this problem. One of the ways of foreshortening the fictional time is to render the sense of the past by a series of flash backs; the other is by the adoption of the technique of immediacy, 29 which makes the past, seem present to the reader by superimposing "on continuum" a pattern of emotional consequence which, for the reader abolishes the pattern of time. In other words this is an illusion of continuity of events which so engross the mind of the reader that he scarcely feels the gaps of periods intervening two successive occurrences. Here motives, thoughts and emotions of the characters make far better transition than such cliches as 'after five years' or 'four hours later' etc.

A random analysis of some of his stories would reveal that Putumaiippitān's sense of time element in his short stories is commendable. How much time for instance, do the incidents of the story 'Oru Nāl Kalintatu' consume? Probably not more than an hour or so. The action of the horror mystery 'Cevvaytosam' is

29. K. Kempton. Short Stories for Study. p.27.
comprised within a short span of two hours i.e. from 10-12 at mid-night. The story "Cankutevan Tarmam" takes not more than an hour at dusk, while the short anecdote 'Thirantha Jennal' very nearly scores the ideal mark set by Kenneth Kempton, i.e. the time taken for the events more or less approximates the time consumed in reading the story. The events of the story 'Manitayantiram' are covered in less than an hour.

The author applies successfully the technique of immediacy in his stories 'Tumpakkeni', 'Apu cinkam' 'Sitti', 'Nacakarakkumpal', 'Putiya Kuntu' etc. which cover a longer period. In the first story the narration of the war of attrition between the in laws is so engrossing, that the reader is most likely to skip over the mention of the passing of fifteen years in the life of the girl. Similarly the description of the quarrels among the members of 'Cempakaraman Pillai's family helps us to forget conveniently the passage of ten long years, and keep us, engrossed in the story.

Cut-backs or flash-backs which are so commonly found in the present day commercial stories are not so common in the writings of Putumalipittan. Instances are provided in his narratives 'Vinayakacaturti' and Gayankalamayakkam.
2. **Point of view or focus of narration**

Every story is told by somebody. For example, the story 'Tunpakkeni' though written by Putumaippittan is apparently told by an unnamed narrator who, although he does not participate in the events narrated, not only knows all about the character’s past but also looks into the minds of characters and relates their talks. Again "Anta Mutṭal Venu" is told by narrator and the tale he narrates is one his friend Laksmanan has told him some time back. So the narrator here is not a witness to the happening. On the other hand the story 'Kopalapuram' is concerned directly with the narrator as the chief character, and therefore he is a witness to the incidents related in the story.

An author must choose a point of view from which he will tell his story. His choice is perhaps analogous to the poet’s choice of free verse, blank verse or rhyme and the choice will contribute to the total effect that the story will have. For instance the story 'Nicanum Ninaippum' is written from an author omniscient point of view, wherein we come into contact with the feelings, emotions and the mode of thinking, of the central character. The same angle of narration
is used in the story 'Manitayantiram' also, in which the author focuses his attention on the behaviour-pattern of the protagonist when placed in a crucial situation. Delving deep into the mind of the character and following his line of thinking are made possible by this point of view. On the other hand, had the author attempted to communicate the story in the first person, very likely the narrative would have degenerated into a sentimental essay with the main character cutting an unenviable figure in the act of explaining his peculiar conduct. The whole thing in fact would have turned into a melodrama.

Point of view can be divided into two sorts; participant (first person) and non-participant (third person). Each of these two divisions can be sub-divided.

1. Participant (first person)
   a) Narrator as a major character
   b) Narrator as a minor character

2. Non-participant third person)
   a) Omniscient
   b) Objective.

Participant points of view

In the short skit 'Tiranta Jennis' the narrator is the major character. The story is told by him and it is chiefly about him. How he learns a costly lesson for
life, by mistaking a millionaire for a poor writer like himself, forms the interesting subject of the story. When the first person narrator, who happens to be the principal character also, describes with unchallenged authority his own sensations and ideas, he invests the story with uncommon credibility. Moreover the author need not comment on the basic character which is expressed by the character himself. The character again is able to reveal his own feelings and secure the sympathy of the readers. We find such a situation in the story 'Kopalapuram' in which the narrator, who himself is the central character, speaks about a tragedy caused by a simple coincidence. The narrator is writing a novel the heroine of which is christened as Lekshmi and the hero is supposed to write a love letter to her. The manuscript of the love letter prepared by him for use in the story, accidentally falls into the hands of his neighbour who has a grownup daughter bearing the same name. The letter creates a lot of misunderstanding in the family as a consequence of which the village woman commits suicide. The whole experience is so nauseating to him, that the narrator by way of relieving his burdened heart recites the whole episode.

30. Other instances of narrator as a major character - Viparita Acaii, Kopalapuram, Payam etc.
But sometime a first person narrator will be telling a story that focusses on some other person than himself. For example in the story 'Nonti', the Revenue Inspector Harihara Iyer is a minor character, a peripheral witness, to a story about Ramakrishnan, a freedom-fighter and we get the story of this patriot filtered through the ears and eyes of the former who is the narrator of the tale. In 'Vali' the narrator, himself a minor character, recounts the poignant tale of a young Brahmin widow who commits suicide out of frustration in life.

The first person narrator choice has its limitations in that the narrator can know and understand only what his temperament and talent permit.

"Like that of a lyric, the heart of a story must be sincere, and the fictitious 'I' method is telling from the heart" says Kenneth Kempton. According to him there should be some compelling reason such as for instance that the motive of the episode is sharable or the protagonist has a reason for telling it from the

31. Instances of narrator as a minor character. "Anta Mutthal Venu", Vihayaka Caturti, Kapatapuram, Vata mallikai etc.

'I' point of view. The chief appeal might be for solace, for mere communication, or from a need to confess and redress a wrong or solve a problem or simply to pass on to others something learned.

In the story 'Viparita Acai' a character recounts an incident that occurred in his life years back. The charm and beauty of the young wife of his friend who is on his sick-bed arouses lust in him and he waits for an opportunity to prey upon her. The lady however is ignorant of his intention and moves with him rather closely when attending upon her ailing husband. The occasion, the narrator waited for, comes when his friend finally collapses and he utilizes the opportunity to commit rape on her. Years later, the sight of a funeral procession kindles in him his past memories and he goes on narrating the events out of an urge to make a clean breast of his crime.

'Tiranta Jennal' tells about an unpleasant experience of the narrator who, deceived by the shabby appearance of a millionaire, takes him for a poor writer like himself and treats him to a feast. The recounting obviously is motivated by a desire to get relief and solace. The same motive is at the root of the narration.
of the story 'Kopalapuram' also. 'Vēṭalām Gonna Katai' and 'Kapalapuram' two other stories written from the 'I' point of view evince a desire on the part of the narrator to communicate some uncommon experiences. Sometimes the narrator may like to point out certain injustices perpetrated in the name of religion and superstition, as in the story 'Tani Cruvanukku'.

Non-participant point of view

In a non-participant point of view the teller of the tale does not introduce himself as a character. He simply recedes from the story. If the point of view is omniscient, the narrator relates what he wishes about the thoughts and deeds of his characters, as we find in the following stories. Here the narrator knows everything and can be at any place at any time without having to explain his presence. Such a device gives the author extraordinary flexibility particularly because he can look into the minds of his characters and report their thoughts and sensations.

The stories 'Nīcāmūm Minaippum' and 'Cuppēyya pillayin kātakal' use the omniscient narration in a

33. Sitti, Cellammāl, Capa Vimocanam, 'Cuppēyya Pillayin Kātakal', Nīcāmūm Minaippum etc.
very special and effective manner. In the first one, the inner conflict of the central character is dramatized over the insult hurled at him by the book-seller Mr. V.P, the protagonist gets himself lost in wool-gathering by which the subconscious perhaps tries to find an outlet for his seething emotion. He conjures up in his mind a pleasant scene in which the proof-reader tenders his apologies profusely for his misbehaviour. The second story is a study in escapism wherein we find a poor employee indulging in all sorts of fantasies which provide him relief from the hard realities of life.

When omniscience attempts to record mental activity ranging from consciousness to unconsciousness it is sometimes labelled as "the stream of consciousness point of view". In an effort to reproduce the unending activity of the mind some authors using the stream of consciousness method dispense with conventional syntax, punctuation, and logical transitions. In James Joyee's "Ulysses" for example, the last few pages are an unpunctuated flow of one character's thoughts.

In the stream of consciousness method the protagonist experiences the story while it is happening and the channel of his perception may be narrowed to his
perception may be narrowed to his sense impressions or it may widen to his thoughts conveyed in any way possible so long as they are still his thoughts. Actually the writer has allowed a part of his creative imagination to enter his conception of the protagonist, and record the experience as felt by him, retaining the rest of his creative imagination to control the story. The normal effect of this method is like a bid for some degree of reader-sympathy for the character and this may amount to an invitation to the reader to identify himself with a character and live the story as he lives.

Among his stories, Putumapittan's 'Kayirraravu' alone seems to have been treated in its entirety in the stream of consciousness technique. It records the flow of thoughts of Paramacivan Pillai, the chief character of the story, while sitting leisurely in a meadow and also while laid up after the snake bite. The whole narrative is the experience filtered through the consciousness of the protagonist and expressed in broken and disjointed sentences.

We find a partial adoption of the stream of consciousness in certain passages in the stories
'Cayankalamayakkam', 'Anru Iravu', 'Valkai' etc. (refer the passage in 'Valkai' dealing with the muse of the tramp on the inequality and injustice prevalent in our society; the reminiscences of the narrator in the story 'Cayankalamayakkam', and part two of the story "Anru Iravu" wherein we see Manikkavacakar recollecting the incidents of the day, which are recorded through 'interior monologue' or 'stream of consciousness'.)

The objective point of view arises while the third person narrator instead of entering the mind records what crosses a dispassionate eye and ear. This point of view is sometimes called the camera. The absence of editorializing and of dissection of the mind often produce the effect of a play. Hemingway's "The Killers" is a good example of this type. Putumalippittan has not written any story in a purely objective type although we find it close approximation in the narratives 'Nikumpalai', 'Karucitaivu' and 'Mahamacanam'. The first two are sketched in conversational form one satirizing upon the hollowness of the present day University Examination and the other describing an abortive attempt of an officer in writing a short-story. Mahamacanam depicts the picture of a beggar dying in hunger unwept and unsung on the foot-path in the Mount Road. The author has refrained as possible from thrusting his presence unnecessarily and this aloofness contributes a lot to the grimness of the story. Moreover this story deserves
special mention for its unique technique which is not to be seen in any of his other narratives. **It is a story written on a two level plane. A two level story is one wherein the reader sees more than what is apparent to the focal character. A little girl observes a beggar in the throes of death without a bit realizing the horror of the situation while the readers are conscious throughout the tragic drama. This two level technique which is closely related to dramatic irony (c.f. 34) is observed in the stories "In Another Country" and "A Trip to Ozardis" written respectively by Hemingway and Edwin Granberry.**

Rarely is any one view point used exclusively in any single story. For instances, Putumaippittan uses author Omniscience and stream of consciousness in combination in some of his stories. The story 'Vinayakacaturti' though looks like a first person narration in fact told from the third person omniscient point of view. Here the mind is supposed to recount the story to the narrator which in effect tantamounts to a third person recounting the story. The occasional interpolations by the narrator gives a feigned appearance of

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34. Sophoclean irony - p.39.
35. 'Nisum Nimaippum', 'Anru Iravu', Cuppiya Pillayin Katalkal etc.
a story told in the first person.

The only sound generalization possible about the effect of point of view are that (1) since point of view is one of the things that give form to a story, a good author chooses the point of view that he feels best for his particular story (ii) the use of any other point of view will turn the story into a different story.

Barring a few written in the first person, almost all the stories of Putumaippittan are told by the third person omniscient narrator who knows everything and who can be at any place at any time. When inwardness of character is involved, one cannot use the focus of the dramatic or objective narration or the first person point of view as it tends to be melodramatic or sentimental. Take the story 'Kalyāṇi'. Had it been narrated by Kalyāṇi or Sarma could either of them dissect the mind of the other or avoid emotion and sentimentiality over the incidents described? When the author is keen on probing the depths of the minds of the chief characters just to see how the conflicts are resolved by them, he could not choose a better medium than the omnicient point of view.
It would be highly profitable if we analyze the appropriateness of the point of view in the story 'Nonti'. It is narrated in the first person non-participating minor character. This method as we have already seen has the limitation that it does not admit of any direct account of mental process, state of feeling or motive of persons under observation except in terms of surmise. In 'Nonti' the emotions of the protagonist are completely shut off from the observation of the narrator. The author's intention evidently is to show the freedom fighter Ramakrishnan, the chief character, as an ideal man.

In one of the freedom-struggles under the Gandhian banner, he is brutally manhandled by the police and loses his leg as a consequence. His Co-worker Manonmani Ammal, in love with this gentleman, offers to marry him but he gently declines the offer which he knows well is made in a spirit of self-sacrifice. The author wants to bring into focus this noble aspect of the character of the freedom-fighter. So the author evidently thought that an author-omniscient angle of vision would be quite out of place in this context as it might reveal more than what is necessary. Again had the story been told by Ramakrishnan himself, it
would take no time for the character to indulge in
sentimentality over his motive in refusing the overtures
of the lady. So it would not be appropriate for
either the author or the protagonist himself, to
narrate the story. Hence the choice of the narrator
falling on the subsidiary character to whom the central
character confides his heart, is the most natural and
convincing. Likewise if we examine the viewpoint of
each and every story we may be profited by knowing the
intention of the author in selecting a particular focus
of narration for each tale.

How important is plot in short stories

Plot is the structure of action presented
through incidents in a story. Today one hears of
plotless stories. The fashion for some years now among
many of the more intellectual writers has been to empha-
size character or theme and to show little interest in
plot. The new stories may be built around a single
episode and even that may be implied not delineated.
Physical action may be minimal or entirely absent but
if there is a genuine story or play there will be a
plot.
The contemporary short story, it must be remembered, is different from both the parable — a narrative existing for the sake of a moral point — and the anecdote — a story of odd or involved happening which survives notably in the works of Somerset Maugham and the boy-meet-girl stories of slick magazines. The invented anecdote with its unlikely coincidence, its unconvincing ironic situation, it's surprise ending in short with its heavy reliance on plot, is not very meaningful. The revelation in a short story is presented through incidents of course; but the interest commonly resides in the character revealed through the incidents rather than in the incidents themselves. Little happens in the sense that there is little rushing from place to place. What does happen is usually a mental reaction to an experience that is the heart of the story.

In the narrative before 19th century the plot usually involves a conflict that is resolved, bringing about a change in the protagonist's condition. In contemporary stories the plot is usually designed to reveal the protagonist's state of mind. This de-emphasis of overt actions results in an affinity with the
lyric and the drama. H.E. Bates probably had this trend of the modern short stories in mind when he wrote the following. "The artificially plotted story cannot survive and in support of it we could point out to the persistent survival of the kind of story in which the reflection or interpretation of life and not the manipulation of life was important. A writer of plot stories might succeed so long as he could keep the supply of goods but death meant pretty quick oblivion. Yet somehow the stories of authors like Gogol, Turgenev, Mauppasant, Elauber and Chekhov managed to survive long after their creators were dead. Likewise plot had no hand in the survival of Susannah, the book of Ruth or the Prodigal son."  

Putumaipttan himself has an interesting comment to make about the nature of the plot in his stories. He says, "My stories lack twists and surprises in the construction of their plots. In fact, the 'Story element in them is meagre. Neither do they have any precise beginning or ending. This feature is very common in

western stories and the credit or discredit whatever you may call it, for importing this new element in the Tamil Stories rests with me alone". 38

Although the division of Stories into various categories as plot-stories, character-stories, and theme-stories tends to be somewhat arbitrary as these three elements are invariably found in any narrative, still we have got a tendency to classify a story on the basis of its predominant element. Majority of the stories rely mainly on one of the three elements, while in some we find a balanced and judicious blend of all these ingredients. When the action of the story is centralized in the mind of the protagonist as in the narrative Cuppyya Pillayin Katalkal, Cellammal, 'Manita ymnriram', etc., we may safely assume them to be character-studies.

Plot-stories or action-stories as they are often called, are usually packed with fast-moving action, twist, surprises, suspense and other elements in a degree far in excess of what is necessary to maintain

38. Introduction by Putumapittan to his Collection 'Amma' - Star Publication, Madras, p.4.
a proportionate balance between the various fictional constituents. One way of ascertaining whether a story can be called a plot-story is to see whether its characters could be replaced by substitutes without any detriment to the intention or aim of the story. If it could be done it is essentially a story of plot. I would venture to say that out of his ninety and odd stories, Dr. Campat is perhaps the only one that could be affiliated to the plot-dominated category. In some other stories like 'Nācakārakkumpal', Putiya Kūntu and Tunpakkeni, we do find a more elaborate and complicated plot. But we should remember that characterization plays an equally prominent part in these stories, thus annulling the supremacy of the plot-element.

Similarly when theme gets the upper hand in the composition of a story the characters very often play the role of counters. Can any of these following stories boast of a well-developed character? In a story of theme, the author manipulates some stereotyped characters moving them hither and thither like the coins on a chess-board, in order to prove his theme.

39. Ponnakaram, Kavantanum Kamanum, Valkai, Nikumpalai etc.
The relationship between Plot and Character

In some stories we are chiefly interested in plot. (the arrangement of happening or doings) in others we are interested in character (the personalities of the doers), but on the whole the two are so intertwined that interest in one involves interest in the other. Happenings occur and personalities respond to them engendering further happenings. To put it in the words of Hudson: "Simple or complex the plot evolves as a natural consequence of the fact that a number of given people of such and such disposition and impelled by such and such motives and passions are brought together in circumstances which give rise to an interplay of influence or clash of interests. Personal reaction to circumstances will always remain a central consideration. Incident is thus rooted in character and is to be explained in terms of it. The two areas of character and plot impinge upon each other."

The same truth was expressed by Henry James, when he asked "what is incident but the determination

of character"? Commonly as a good story proceeds and we become increasingly familiar with the characters we get intimations of what they may do in the future. We may not know how precisely they will act but we have a fairly good idea and when in fact we see their subsequent actions we usually recognize the appropriateness.

The author presents his characters in two ways, either directly with a scrutiny of their traits and characteristics or indirectly through dialogue and action. The very nature of fiction suggests that the latter is its characteristic means and yet it is highly direct presentation in ordinary real life stories. In the author, each every presentation of character is indirect, involving that which character generally unfolds himself through natural talk and gesture