CHAPTER IV

The Modern Short-Story: Principles and Technique
The short-story has its roots in the distant past, in the tales and fables of the world's childhood. The tales and the fables set out to tell imaginary stories of imaginary folks. That is why the short-story is one of the oldest forms of literature—perhaps the oldest of all. It probably originated around primitive camp fires, when hunters described, with unconscious art and imaginative emphasis, their deeds of the day. It found more formal expression in the classical fables and in some of the tales of the Old Testament and Apocrypha. In the Middle Ages it flowered in many different pastures. Later, the Renaissance gave birth to the 'novella'. From this model came the French 'conte', and such collections of stories in English as William Painter's 'The Palace of Pleasure'.

Whatever may have been its particular mode of development, the short-story began simply enough in the primitive desire on the part of one person to spin a yarn, and on the part of others to listen. But times have changed. Tales that were the delight of ancient or medieval ears often seem to us interminably rambling and wearisome. Our ancestors, like children, loved hearing the same tale over and over, and heard with joy the repetition of characteristic phrases. Now we look for quite other qualities. We require novelty in the matter, and, in the manner, concentration, snap, and
emphasis. The beginning must inevitably arrest the attention, and the end securely put the top-stone on all that has gone before. There must be no superfluous touches. There is no time for fumbling or hesitation. Every detail should help to produce a single impression so as to leave it perfectly clear in the reader's mind. The modern short story writer has to find the least common multiple of the minds of all his unseen and unknown readers, and, as far as possible, to ensure that his impression shall be conveyed unfailingly.

The short-story is the most modern of literary forms and the most popular. Its popularity rivals or rather exceeds that of the novel; like the latter it is essentially an art of the people. In its present form it appeared even later than the novel. It concerns itself with the life, thoughts and feelings of ordinary men and women. This is what differentiates it from the tales and fables which are its precursors. The short-story of today deals only with stark reality. There is not much difference between the novel and the short-story as to their purpose or in the material they use. The objects of both are a criticism of life and a depicting of its panorama, a probing into the mind and motives of man.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the short story is not merely a novel cut down. They both sprang originally from the elementary desire to tell a
tale, but, in the course of time, they have developed along entirely different lines. There is now a dissimilarity in technique. Therefore the short-story is not a condensed novel. It is a separate art form. The novel deals with a lifetime or even generations as in the 'Forsyte Saga', while the short story can only deal with a few hours or at most a few days of a person's life.

The task of the short-story is to express a single mood. The short-story writer must interpret the history of a life time by a mere incident, he must draw an entire character within the compass of a few hundred words.

In a novel life is rendered in all its fulness, and details are exhaustively portrayed, in a short-story they are scrupulously avoided. Unlike the novel, the short-story can never give the whole of life. In it only a simplification and idealisation of a particular phase of life can be presented in a vigorous, compressed and suggestive way. Thus its aim is more limited and specific than that of the novel. Its plot is necessarily simpler and more clear. Its action is uninterrupted, harmonious and directly helpful of characterisation. In it the characters are fewer and more striking, and they are presented under more unusual circumstances. The short-story thus has a distinct type of unity. It often deals with a single situation. Whereas the novel is concerned with life
histories, the short-story presents determining crisis in the lives of characters. In order to render the impression of a situation it uses its series of events in accordance with a dominating motive. In fact, it is this unity of impression or the "effect of totality", as Poe calls it, which is the chief mark of distinction between the short-story and the novel.

Part of the difference between the short story and the novel is the difference between a love affair and marriage. The first is piquant, exciting, less risky, but may cause beautiful troubles, such as wedlock. The second is long, complicated, noisy, unpredictable, very often unhappy, and absolutely prime to living on earth. The total commitment of marriage is very different from the lyrical joys of love. The novel is different from the short-story, and not merely because it is longer and heavier. The responsibility is total. "In dreams begin responsibilities"—in short-stories. "In the day responsibilities end, they end in responsibilities"—so the blessed total envelopment of a novel tells us. The short-story tends to control and formalize experience (though the expressionistic short-story does not); the novel tends to set forward experience in documentary details (though the Jamesian novel does not).

The short-story is characterized, as Professor Brander Matthews reminds us, by "Unity, totality, and
concentration on a single event or sequence of events. In it are shown "the essential comprehension, the swift and straightforward movement, the unwillingness to linger by the way". It is this "unwillingness to linger by the way" which more than anything else marks the development of the modern short-story. The short-story, like any other form of art, is a matter of adaptation. On the one hand there are the rigorous limits of space, on the other there is the raw material— the 'stuff' of the story. It is for the writer to see what is practicable and to do it. He will not attempt to tell the story of "Paradise Lost" within the fourteen lines of a sonnet, nor will he seek to compress the immortal journeyings of Sancho Panza within the narrow confines of a short-story.

The short-story, understood as such, came into being in the wake of the magazine. Magazines helped in creating a greater demand for the short-story and encouraged more and more people to try their hand at it. Thus they are indirectly responsible for the success it has now achieved. It would not be far from incorrect if we state that all modern short-stories are magazine stories or newspaper stories.

(2) What The Modern Short-Story is.

If we are asked what is meant by a Short-story we need only say, rather tautologically, it is a story which is short. In other words, a Short-Story must be
short, and that it must be a story. The shortest of
short stories may be no more than a page or two in length:
the longest, may run to over a hundred pages.

Some of the most successful short-story writers
of our own time have expressed their views regarding the
modern short-story. Their views are sufficient to explain
as to what the modern short-story is. We, therefore,
quote their views as follows:

(1) "A short-story is, or should be, a simple
ting; it aims at producing one single vivid effect; it
has to seize the attention at the outset, and never
relaxing, gather it together more and more until the
climax is reached. The limits of the human capacity to
attend closely therefore set a limit to it: it must
explode and finish before interruption occurs or fatigue
sets in".

—H.G.Wells.

(2) "A short-story is a narrative short enough
to be read in a single sitting, written to make an
impression on the reader excluding all that does not
forward that impression complete and final in itself".

—Poe,E.A.

(3) "The short-story is not a transcript of life
but a simplification of some side of life. ——It
presents a single episode treated dramatically and
producing on the reader an effect of totality, a unified
impression of one situation or experience or event".

—R.L.Stevenson.
(4) "A short story should be a story, a record of things full of incident and accident, swift movement, unexpected development leading through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouement".

- Sir Hugh Walpole.

(5) "A short story is just like a horse race. It is the start and finish which count most".

- Ellery Sedgwick.

(6) H.E. Bates has no ready-made formula for the short story, but it can be seen that he favours a situation that involves persons drawn from the world of common folk, brought to a moment of heightened experience. Economy of expression and sensitivity to atmosphere are his prime virtues. To these are allied a descriptive skill and the ability to create moments of intense emotion. He establishes the fact that there is no categorical imperative for the short story. He writes -

"The basis of almost every argument or conclusion I can make is the axiom that the short story can be anything that the author decides it shall be,"

and sums up the Protean nature of short stories thus:

"There is no definition, no measure, which will aptly contain the structure, effect, and beauty of them all."

(7) For D.H. Lawrence it is nonsense to say "A short
story must have —— "A story by him is always what it has to be by that inner compulsion, by that integrity of vision and expression. A story by him has organic form. It begins, it grows from within and it ends absolutely naturally. Yet there is a controlling purpose in this unforced sequence. Like his matter, his manner of writing is marked by freshness and directness.

(8) Frank O'Connor's conception of the short-story is:

"Story telling is the nearest thing one can get to the quality of a pure lyric poem. It doesn't deal with problems; it doesn't have any solution to offer; it just states the human condition."

(9) "Suggestiveness and echo are the life-breathings of short story."

— Pahadi.

(10) A well-known critic like Hudson states:

"A short story must contain one and only one informative idea and that the idea must be worked out to its logical conclusions with absolute singleness of aim and directness of method."

(3) The Characteristics of Modern Short Story.

The short-story is a dramatic narrative with a single effect. The short story writer aims at interpreting some aspect or slice of life from his own personal point of view. On account of this every short story has a theme round which it moves. The interpretation of the
writer's conception of life which serves as the theme of the short story may be given by direct statement or by implication. A short story must produce a single effect upon the mind of the reader. All extraneous material which does not contribute to this single effect even though relevant and interesting, must be eliminated. The short story writer strives to take the reader along with him and make him live with the character he is depicting, and share their experiences. The short story, in another words, must have a feeling of immediacy, and it appeals primarily to the emotions and only secondarily to the intellect.

The short story is often clouded in meaning. It leaves many gaps which have to be filled up by the imagination of the reader. The expert short story writer does not strive to explain every thing, he does not waste his energy in giving an exposition of what occurred before the story opened, or relating events that happen after the denouement is reached. A good short story contains deliberately selected details and incidents, which may leave gaps and questions in the reader's mind.

The short story deals with a fragment of life. The fundamental unity of design is an important characteristic of a short story. It is the result of its limitation of range of material to a single situation. A typical short story embodies a theme which is so simple that it cannot be sub-divided. It contains no
groups of major or minor characters, and it has no underplot or secondary line of interest. Thus there is a strict limitation of the aim and subject-matter of the short-story, and it is on account of these limitations that a great writer can attain perfection of form in a short story as a poet can do only in a lyric.

The modern short story is more akin to drama than novel, because in it a greater emphasis is laid on the situation rather than on the mere sequence of interesting events, as we find in the drama. Moreover, as in drama, the modern short story writer prefers to present crisis in the lives of characters and makes a deliberate use of the impressionistic method. The artistic heightening of dialogue, the concentration on a single issue, the vivid picture of a scene that is significant, which are the major characteristics of drama, have also been adopted by the modern short story writer. Thus the vivid, impressionistic story today is much nearer to the drama than to the novel. From the point of view of concentration, the short story ranks between the novel and the drama.

All the features, which one looks for in a good short story of the traditional kind, are simple but fascinating plot, lively characterisation, and strict economy of narrative. It demands the simplicity and directness. The short story, according to Esenwein, "is marked by seven characteristics:"
1. A single predominating character;
2. A single pre-eminent incident;
3. Imagination (i.e. fantasy or fancy);
4. Plot;
5. Compression;
6. Organization; and
7. Unity of Impression."

The first three of these designate the content of the story. Most good short stories have only one central character, one crucial incident, and at least a light touch of fancy. It is not strange, that these are usually thought to be intrinsic structures. The theme must yield a plot. The theme, in order to produce a single effect, must be one which can be adequately handled within the span of a single person. It was Poe who pointed out this peculiar limitation.

One of the defining elements of the short story is singleness of impression. Continuity and development in depth rather than in sequence of events, are essential to the short story. A short story should contain a revelation of hidden fact, a rapidly developed action or complication, an arresting climax, followed quite often by a twist in the ending. The essence of a high quality in the short story is to be found in the quality of its vision and the quality of its expression.

It is the displacement of plot as the main element which, more than anything else, distinguishes the modern
short story from the type of story generally written before about 1910. In other words, plot ceases to be the most important element in the short story. It never disappears altogether, but it is generally subordinated to situation and atmosphere. Thus it is of secondary importance. What counts is subtlety of situation, or suggestiveness of atmosphere, or vividly sensuous evocations of nature, or mood. The powerful effect can be created by a skilful evocation of simple situation and atmosphere.

Regarding plot, divergent views are found. 'I have never from the first had the slightest interest in plots', writes H.E. Bates. To O. Henry, on the other hand, plots were almost everything. Tchekhov said that a story should have neither beginning nor end. 'The first essential in a short-story writer is the power of interesting sentence by sentence', wrote John Galsworthy. In any case, the writing of the short story writer, must be more taut, highly charged, and rigorously controlled.

Brander Matthews remarked, "A true short story is something other and something more than a mere story which is short. A true story differs from the novel chiefly in its essential unity of impression. In a far more exact and precise use of the word, a short story has a unity as a novel cannot have it. Often it may be noted by the way the short story fulfils the three unities..."
of the French classic drama; it shows one action, in one place, in one day. A short story deals with the single character, a single event, one single emotion, or the series of emotions called fourth by a single situation."

From Poe the modern short story derives a striving for single effect; from Maupassant it borrows dramatic compression and the ironic twist at the end; from journalism, it imbibes an air of topicality and rush;

Fantasy has been a favourite element in modern short stories. Modern short stories can pierce a tragic situation with shaft of irony. The more sombre undertones of life are echoed in some of the finest modern stories. Three notable examples are James Joyce's 'Clay', 'Second Best' by D.H.Lawrence, and Katherine Mansfield's deeply moving story, 'The Garden Party'. Amongst the true artists the predominant characteristic is individuality.

In our era, the short story has been so developed and perfected that it can provide the medium for poetry no less than narrative. Humour and poetry, narrative excitement and character, fun, fantasy, satire and philosophy— all these can be expressed in that compact and versatile medium, the modern short story.

Short stories are now published almost in all periodicals. The vast majority of them are rapid of pace, readable in style, with a dramatic climax, and a
surprise ending. A small minority of the stories deal with solid matter and present an integration of substance and form. The stories dealing with social and economic themes are gaining great popularity.


As is already known, the short story is a dramatic narrative with a single effect. Every narrative contains three basic factors which enter into the structure and qualify the total impression. They are:

(1) Character,

(2) Complication,

(3) Setting.

(1) Character: There cannot be a dramatic situation without human beings.

(2) Complication: This includes the entanglement of persons and circumstances which make the plot.

(3) Setting: Broadly speaking the place where the plot unfolds is the story's setting.

These three directions of emphasis result in three fundamental types of story. The single effect is produced sometimes in character drawing, sometimes in the dramatic intensity of the plot, and sometimes in the sensuous quality of the setting. And the resulting types are commonly called, respectively,

1. The Character Story.
2. The Complication Story.
3. The Atmosphere Story.
These are the fundamental types. In addition, there are four more types, all compound.

4. The Character-Complication story.
5. The Character- Atmosphere Story.
7. The Three-phase story.

(1) The Character Story:- The single effect of the character story is produced through the dominant character. This character figures conspicuously in the action. The intensest effect will be produced if the character in one and the same deed, both exhibits his own nature relevantly and advances the plot action. The combination is the dramatic one par excellence; and it is powerful, not because it is drama, but because it is intense. And it is intense in that it produces a strong effect per unit impression.

The psychological character story of the analytical type often calls for indirect action, especially when the forces at work in the character are highly complicated. In all other cases, however, direct action is better, particularly in the ordinary character story. Such a story depicts conduct in a crisis, and this is never clearer and stronger than when told in its own simple terms, undecorated by attendant circumstances and not refracted through some other character's experience.

(2) The Complication Story:- In many a complica-
tion story, there is no development of character, and in many a character story the complication is trifling. The exposition is knit up according to logical principles, and the narrative to psychological principles.

(3) The Atmosphere Story—The atmosphere is the impression which environment makes upon the beholder. Every story whose setting must be staged at all may have atmosphere. The objective treatment is ill suited to the atmosphere story, though not incompatible with it. Unlike other types, the atmosphere story demands a certain wealth and delicacy of descriptive detail, inasmuch as it secures its strongest effect in a unified sensuous impression. The ideal of the atmospheric writer is to transmit the peculiar and full reality of scenes. In short, the atmosphere story is one in which character and complication are integrated with and intensify the setting, which latter produces the single effect.

For the purposes of the short story, the complication, the crisis, and the denouement must be of either equal or ascending effectiveness. Usually the following stages are found in the pattern of the story:

(a) The situation.
(b) The generating circumstances.
(c) The rising action.
(d) The climax.
(e) The denouement.

The element of suspense is an essential factor in
a short story. Throughout the story the reader must wonder what is going to happen, and how things are going to be explained or worked out. For example, such questions as - Will or will not the hero win the heroine? Will the murderer be found out? - are always haunting him, and in this manner his interest in the story is kept up. Suspense can also be created by making the reader wonder till the end of the story regarding the implied meaning or theme of the story. This element of suspense can be introduced by the short story writer in two ways—
(a) by knowing himself exactly how his story will culminate; and (b) by not telling everything he knows at once in an orderly fashion, but by deliberate withholding of information that would satisfy the reader's curiosity.

The single effect in the short story is generally produced, not by depicting a mere problem; but by depicting a conflict. And this conflict ends in one of two ways: (a) it brings out an act which is uniquely characteristic of the actor, or else, (b) it finishes with a merely consistent act of violation. These are the only two clearly marked types of conduct which hold the reader's interest to the last without altering its quality.

There are three levels or types of conflict. The only situation suited to the short story is that which, in real life, would stimulate the characters to thought and action. The conflict may lie between:
(a) Man and the physical world.

(b) Man and man.

(c) One force and another, in the same man. This type of conflict furnishes the stuff of which the so-called psychological story is made.

The three types of conflict appeal respectively to the three types of mind; the primitive, the socialized, and the intellectual. Mental conflict is considered to be superior to physical conflict. The dramatic conflict may occur within the mind of a single individual, the forces for good opposing the forces of evil within a man's or woman's own temperament. Frequently the physical and mental conflicts are continued together.

Every short story must represent a conflict between the forces of good and those of evil. The short story writer selects and records the various clashes and carries them along by suspense (curiosity and tension regarding the outcome), and ultimately leads them inevitably and with unity towards some sort of conclusion.


The actual materials at the command of the short story writer are People, Incidents and Settings. Someone of these elements is usually more predominant than the other two, although in most cases all three are present. A story could hardly be written in which character, incident and background i.e. setting were kept equally prominent. A great story is one which
shows development in a character which is significant and worth knowing, making this apparent by means of a series of incidents, interesting and attention-compelling in themselves with all exhibited upon a stage of action, a background, a setting, worthy of the people and the incidents. It is a piece of fiction producing a unified effect. Its single effect is usually an "impression". The Short-story is a cross-section of life, but of a single life or at the most of a thread of life where it crosses and becomes entangled with one or two other subordinate threads—a section through the knot.

Every element of a story may, of course, serve to heighten the total effect. But there are five kinds which do so in a superlative degree. They are:

1. The dominant character.
2. The plot action.
3. The order of events.
4. The point of view.
   (a) toward the story (artist's attitude).
   (b) within the story (angle of narration).
5. The atmosphere.

The short story has no words to spare for non-essentials, and the only essentials in its character drawing are intelligibility and sympathetic portrayal of the one trait which figures dramatically in it.

There are three stages of rational behaviour of
the character respectively the immediate response to the difficulty, the reflective delay and the active solution. The pattern, or static structure, of a character can be adequately depicted by the interplay of forces within the reflective delay. But the proof of the pattern, the full dramatic evidence of its existence and power in the particular person, appears in the active solution that follows the reflective delay.

Characterisation is of supreme importance in a short story, because the main interest of the reader lies in people. In order to make the characters in the story interesting it is essential that the writer establishes them as individuals. This is a very subtle art, and only an experienced writer knows its subtleties. Sometimes a single word may create a character in the reader's mind. On the other hand, a writer may compose many pages dealing with a character, and yet it may remain blurred and unconvincing. And it all depends on characterisation to make a story great and effective. For it is the impression which a character creates on the reader which lasts, whereas the theme and plot are forgotten in course of time.

The story writer can adopt a number of methods in characterisation. He can focus strongly upon a single characteristic to the exclusion of others. He may give greater importance to the environment in which a character is placed, and trace his development in accordance with
them. He may make the character grow out of action, or, on the other hand, show the character influencing the plot, and at the same time be influenced by it. He may write pages about his physical features, or remain contented with throwing a few hints on his physical aspect. He may deal at length with the character's thoughts, behaviour and reactions which are far more revealing than a catalogue of physical attributes.

How true must characters in a short story be to life? - is a question which is difficult to answer. Serious story-writers draw their characters from life, and fictionalise living people. Sometimes they present a character who possesses the qualities of an actual person or a combination of the characteristics of several living people, of course, altered by the sifting process of the author's imagination. Such characters generally ring true in every word and act. In fact in some of the best short stories the writer presents thinly disguised real life people and happenings after having taken them through the process of winnowing and interpretation. Such stories are far truer to life than even the so-called true stories.

The plot action is generally known as the theme, which means the total meaning of the story. Assuming that a short story is an impression from life, the first topic that presents itself for elucidation is the technical means which may be employed to make that impression.
Let us call the impressions which the author wishes to make the theme of the story. The theme is the central idea that the author wishes to set forth in his story. It is that phenomenon of nature or of human life which he wishes to make clear to his readers. The theme has been called the "meaning" of the piece of literature. When Edgar Allen Poe spoke of the "single narrative effect" towards which every part of the story leads, he probably had in mind the same thing that we would have when we speak of "the theme", "the essential meaning", "the underlying idea", "the central thought" etc.

Sometimes the writer states the theme clearly, sometimes it is implied. It is the theme which gives point or purpose to the story, and determines which angles or aspects of his characters are to be emphasized. It guides the writer in deciding what material he is to use in the story, what point of view he has to present, what action or event he has to unfold, and on what particular aspect he has to focus the interest of his story. In fact, theme is the purpose of the story. It is the lesson or revelation about life that the author is conveying to the reader by the events recorded. The quality writer may take up any theme which is a deliberate refutation of the traditional theme, and thus demonstrate his rebellion against the falsehood of traditional ideas.
The order of events is the arrangement of episodes in the story. At least four things are accomplished by the arrangement of episodes:

(i) Transitions are smoothed.
(ii) Characters and situations are clarified.
(iii) The natural climactic sequence of the plot events is made evident and sometimes intensified.
(iv) The single effect of the story is sharpened. ('the theme is rounded off').

With respect to the material of the story, there arise three special problems of order:

(a) The opening event.
(b) The closing event.
(c) The distribution of events throughout the plot action.

In solving each of these problems, all four of the above named improvements are accomplished in varying degrees.

(a) The opening event: The opening event has two functions; it must awaken the reader's interest in the story and it must also carry him quickly into the latter. Many a story which finishes strong begins with dull episodes.

When the intrinsic dramatic quality of a character and the plot in which the character figures is mediocre, the philosophical overture is usually better than a direct action opening.
(b) The closing event—There are three types of endings:

(i) The direct denouement.

(ii) The significant aftermath.

(iii) Interpretative comment.

(i) The direct denouement is the ideal finish of the pure dramatic story.

(ii) The significant aftermath is the commonest ending and usually the most appropriate. It consists of some little event which shows precisely how the characters are taking the denouement. Sometimes it intensifies the latter, but more often only clears away the last uncertainty about it.

(iii) Interpretative comment is the 'counterpart of the philosophical overture. Like it, it contains no action; unlike it, it need not consist of generalizations.

(c) The distribution of events throughout the plot action:

1. The events are to be telescoped within each movement as much as possible. That is, each episode is made to develop all the story factors in its movements.

2. If the events cannot be telescoped, first those events be depicted which demand the greater amount of pure description, except insofar as the single effect or dramatic sequence forbids this.

3. Transitions are best effected by telescoping the
last event of one movement with the first event of
the next.

4. The natural order of events may be altered in only
two cases:
(a) when the denouement can be concealed up to the
proper instant in no other way and
(b) when the plot action is shaped by some character's
learning the episodes in their false order.

The writer's point of view is essential both for
giving unity to the story, and producing a feeling of
immediacy. There are two meanings of 'point of view'.
The first is the artist's attitude and secondly the angle
of narration or the style. According to the first meaning
the point of view expresses the artist's sensitivity,
wish or belief toward a subject. This can be called as
"the artist's attitude". Secondly, the point of view
expresses the arrangement of some particular material
which makes conspicuous some quality of the latter which
the artist wishes to report. This quality may or may not
happen to be of those chosen by the artist for expression.
It may merely serve to express something else. This
second can be called as "the angle of narration", or
"the style". The single point of view is one of the
commonest features of the short story.

There are three typical angles of narration—
(a) The pure objective.
(b) The angle of the inactive witness or hearer.
(c) The angle of a participant.
   (i) A Subordinate character.
   (ii) A dominant character.

The pure objective might be called the photographer's point of view. A story told objectively throughout develops a speed and a directness rarely attained in any other way. It has no philosophical overture, no interpolations by the narrator, and very few elaborate descriptive passages. It portrays no more of an emotion or a thought than straightway manifests itself unequivocally in outward action.

In ordinary discourse 'style' is a blanket term covering at least three things: (1) the qualities of a narrative which are determined by the theme and the plot action; (2) the qualities of grammar and language, as such; and (3) the qualities which express the author's attitude toward the theme or plot action.

Style, in the first sense, is the result of mastering story technique, in the second sense, it is the result of mastering grammar and rhetoric; and, in the third sense, it is the result of the artist's attitude toward his material and all that pertains to it.

There are various methods which the writer can adopt for giving his point of view. He can write in the third person as one who knows everything. He can write
in the first person. He can be one of the main characters, or a subordinate character. Lastly he can take up the role of an observer and write in an objective manner.

In the painter's art atmosphere means 'the feeling or effect, as of air, light, space, or warmth, given as an environment of any subject'.

-(Standard Dictionary)

In literature the word describes a quality of the story setting and staging. It is the emotional flavour of the place and time in which the dramatic events unfold. The atmosphere is the impression which environment makes upon the beholder and which the beholder, in writing, seeks to convey to his readers. The ideal of the atmospheric writer is to transmit the peculiar and full reality of scenes.

The atmosphere story is one in which character and complication are integrated with and intensify the setting, which latter produces the single effect. The atmosphere story is easiest in which the setting is not setting at all but the dominant character in a drama without setting. Every story whose setting must be staged at all may have atmosphere. One way of securing effective atmosphere is to characterize its effect. But the range of atmospheric effects is narrow.

Immediacy is a very important quality in a short story. It is this quality that makes the reader feel that he is living in a story, not reading about it.
It can be attained by personalising events, or, in other words, making them happen to a person introduced already. The writer gives details in such a manner that he gives an impression that they are happening at the moment. Immediacy helps in creating the required atmosphere for the story.

Atmosphere of the story is different from its setting. In fact some great masters of short story have written without giving any specific setting. Atmosphere which is an integral part of plot, characters, theme and so on, is much more complex than mere setting which is only a part of the atmosphere. The very style, choice of words, length and rhythmical pattern of sentences, all contribute to atmosphere. The way that the characters talk and what they talk about are a part of atmosphere.

(6) A Note on the Psychological Story.

There are three stages of rational behaviour of the character respectively, the immediate response to the difficulty, the reflective delay and the active solution. We may now state a little more formally the fundamental fact about them which gives form and body to the whole technique of character drawing:

Character, being the particular proportion and relation of these three activities, is not determined by any one or two of them. Hence, to depict it unambiguously, all three must be shown in their particular relation under the given circumstances.
The immediate response is commonly rich in emotional flavour; the reflective delay itself is essentially rational, even though reason does not always win out, and the active solution is inevitably impulsive in some degree, just because it is an act of will. For us, the literary aspect of the fact is more significant. Briefly, it is thus:

The pattern, or static structure, of a character can be adequately depicted by the interplay of forces within the reflective delay. But the proof of the pattern, the full dramatic evidence of its existence and power in the particular person, appears in the active solution that follows the reflective delay. It has a bearing upon the most modern, most highly praised mode of fiction, the so-called 'psychological story'.

The psychological story is one which analyzes the feelings, thoughts, and impulses of its leading characters more minutely than does the ordinary dramatic story, which is content to describe only as much as might normally appear to the eye and ear of a possible spectator. It is in conflicts that the character story—the psychological story—has its being. The danger of substituting analysis for drama may be noted here. It is the danger of letting the thought do duty for the deed; that is, substituting for the real course of events the hero's stream of consciousness. To explain this substitution, we must make a brief excursion into psychology.
Nature is now here more prodigal than in mental life. She produces millions more little fish than can ever survive in the sea; and she gives birth to hundreds of millions of sensations, feelings, and imageries which can never develop and become dominant in the directing of men's lives. We become aware of this, the instant we observe accurately what is going on in our mind. Now, this fact in itself, is enough to prove that, when we think about a certain matter, we do not think in terms of these elusive and microscopical 'mental states'. They are responses to the conditions of the pressing problem; they are neither the conditions nor the character which responds.

The literary artist is interested in the dramatic aspect of human conduct, not in the mechanism of its activity. The latter falls to the professional scientist; to the psychologist and the physiologist. Its truthful portraiture affords no greater opportunity for fine narrative writing than does an account of the slack-wire walker's muscle play. As Aristotle saw, the objects of the artist are always 'men in action'. But a gush of 'mental states' is no more a man in action than a series of writhings is. Action may be the result of many sensations and writhings; but, even then, it has a singleness, a direction, and a purpose which these, its mechanical factors, altogether lack. It is not the artist's business to furnish the understanding of conduct, a knowledge
of causes. He is asked to sketch only the broad movement and trend in their decisive and illuminating manifestations. The single effect, the impressive unity of somebody's behaviour, is his ideal.

The genuine psychological story uses 'mental states' in a different way. They are not its language; they are its subject matter. The working of some human trait is depicted, as any simple adventure or love affair might be. Maupassant's 'A Piece of String', Henry James' 'The Liar', and Mrs. Wharton's 'The Daunt Diana' typify this undertaking. Also, mystery stories are for the most part psychological.

The psychological character story of the analytical type often calls for indirect action, especially when the forces at work in the character are either highly complicated or are interesting because of their surprising solution. In the former case the pattern of action resembles that of the story with sub-plots, the minor movements being those of the various interplaying instincts, prejudices and appetites.

(7) Premchand's views on the art of short story.

The writing of a short story, according to Premchand, was a pretty exacting affair. A mere event could never constitute a story; nor, for that matter, could a character or a group of characters. To be successful, the story must be based on some psychological, emotional or philosophical truth. If it were there, the nature of the event around which a story was to be built was
immaterial. Without this psychological basis, however, Premchand could never get down to writing a short story.

Another important ingredient of the short story was the element of drama. Premchand himself laboured hard to inject this element of drama and to create a climax which he considered an "absolute necessity". This, however, was the second stage, the first being the psychological truth underlying the themes. Once the former was decided upon, he got down to a delineation of the characters which would fit in with the theme and, in fact, worked out the whole story in his mind— even the sections that it must be divided into— so that it could gradually move on to a climax. A gripping narration or a racy language which by itself could not make a story successful, constituted its "soul". An attempt had, therefore, to be made by exerting one's mind to introduce the poetic element or literary flavour into it. This required a bent of mind which, without any conscious effort, could create plots, inject the dramatic element, and make the composition a literary piece.

After a short story was completed, Premchand would read it over to see if it had some originality, some touch of realism and some power to move— the tests of the success of a short story.