The Global Approach To Short Story Beginnings

短篇小說的起頭：由宏觀看局部

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Abstract

In the young, but growing, field of short story theory, it has been a standard practice for theorists to establish the short story as a distinctive and independent genre by pointing out the fundamental differences between the short story and the novel. Among other formal features of the underrated genre, story beginnings, i.e. how writers begin their stories, have received some theoretical attention. A survey of the writings on this particular formal device, however, proves that the issue has not been adequately addressed. The global (as opposed to local) approach advocated in this article proposes that we deal with a short story beginning from hindsight, to reflect upon it after one or several perusals of the story under investigation. Moreover, it posits the imperative to study a writer's strategy in opening his/her story by examining the formal as well as thematic relationship between the beginning and the whole that embodies it. The global approach to short story beginnings can often arrive at insights that other approaches have failed to bring forth. The approach points to the "framing" function which a story beginning serves. More surprisingly, it draws attention to the epitomizing characteristic of short story beginnings: a story beginning is not merely a starting point where a relevant atmosphere is set; it is also an "end" point where the summation of the whole is offered.

摘 要

近年來，英美文學界對短篇小說理論的研究方興未艾。於諸多研究重點中，短篇小說的起頭——意即一篇小說如何開始——亦不乏人問津。然而，過去針對此議題提出見解的論述，大都採以局部看局部的批評策略，將一篇小說的起頭部份當作獨立於全篇的個體。本文主張以宏觀的視野來分析起頭，不但著重起頭部份的精讀，還強調起頭與全篇的結構關係。本文提出短篇小說起頭的兩個文類特色。首先，和長篇小說的起頭不同，短篇的起頭有「加框」的作用。更重要的是，短篇小說的起頭常有「以小見大」、「以偏概全」的特徵。

The initial attempts to theorize about the short story can be found in Edgar Allen Poe's "Review of Twice-Told Tales" published in 1842. A book review of Hawthorne's collection of short stories, the seminal article was not intended by the author as a theory piece per se, but it has cast a tremendous amount of influence on writings on short story theory in the past three decades. In the young, but growing, field of short story theory, it has been a standard practice, informally initiated by none other than Poe himself, for theorists to establish the short story as a distinctive and independent genre by pointing out the fundamental differences between the short story and the novel. Among other formal features of the underrated genre, story beginnings, i.e. how writers begin their stories, have received some theoretical

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attention. A survey of the writings on this particular formal device, however, proves that the issue has not been adequately addressed and thus leaves much room for further investigations.

Sean O'Faolain is among the first to pay some critical attention to short story beginnings, though the section on the subject in his book-length study is rather brief and secondary to his discussion of the language of the short story. "There is something so unmistakably alert about the language of the short story, " writes O'Faolain, "that we could not, for instance, mistake the openings of short stories for the openings of novels" (219). To prove his point, O'Faolain conducts a little experiment in which he presents six openings of fiction and invites his reader to make an educated guess as to which one opens a short story and which a novel. Anticipating the reader's making mistakes, O'Faolain consoles him/her by either putting the blame on the author or categorizing a certain passage as an exception to the rules.

O'Faolain is on the right track when he observes the unique style of language in the short story and one must also give him credit for recognizing the special way in which a story begins. But asking the reader to guess whether an opening unfolds a story or a novel is as pointless as asking him to speculate whether a particular passage from a story appears in the beginning, middle, or end. Like other literary genres, the short story is an amorphous art form rich in variety and has its share of "exceptions." Often in the history of the short story a popular set of conventions is gradually superseded by a host of exceptions which in turn congeal a new set of conventions, only to be usurped by later, even more innovative, exceptions. It is inevitably a fruitless effort to deal with a complex subject such as short story beginnings by taking as O'Faolain did a somewhat intuitive approach. To discover the generic differences between openings of short stories and those of novels, other approaches need to be adopted.

In 1965, after examining the beginnings of one thousand and one American short stories, Joseph M. Backus produced a short article with a rather long title, "'He Came into Her Line of Vision Walking Backward': Nonsequential Sequence- Signals in Short Story." Almost two decades later in 1982, Helmut Bonheim devoted a whole chapter to short story beginnings in his *Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story.* Bonheim's study of story openings is based on a survey of "six hundred British, American, and Canadian short stories" (92). Backus' article and Bonheim's study will be discussed together here because both rely heavily on statistics and both are interested primarily in how a writer begins his or her story. In addition, both writers are not concerned with how a story's beginning is different from a novel's beginning, although Bonheim does make some passing comments on the matter. The main difference between the two studies is that, while Backus tries to apply C. C. Fries' linguistic theory to his examination, Bonheim resorts to narrative theory for his enterprise. Whereas the former concentrates primarily on the very first sentence of a story, the latter focuses mostly on the opening paragraph.

Despite their using different critical tools, the two came up with similar conclusions. Backus posits that, in the development of the short story, there is a steady increase in the use of nonsequential sequence-signals (such as "he" or "she") to open a story. As a result of conducting narrative "mode-chopping," Bonheim discovers that there is in short story history a gradual movement away from unraveling a story in a static mode (comment and description) toward opening in a dynamic mode (report and speech). Both conclusions attest to the generally- recognized trend in the modern short story, in which a writer prefers to open by plunging "the reader in medias res in order to give him a sense of immediacy and involvement" (69). It should be noted that the studies by Backus and Bonheim are limited by their preoccupation with the mechanical aspects of a story beginning and their lack of attention to the context in which a beginning appears. Moreover, in dealing with the beginning as a mechanism in isolation, Backus and Bonheim completely disregard more significant issues such as 1) the relationship between how a story is begun and what is revealed in the beginning; 2) the structural as well as thematic relationship between the beginning and the whole; and 3) the various functions which a beginning serves.

Also concentrating on the opening sentences of a story, Susan Lohafer's approach to story beginnings in her Coming to Terms with the Short Story, however, is quite dissimilar to Backus'. Not interested in comprehensive survey or statistics, Lohafer concerns herself with "the ontological gap between the reader's reality and the story's" (55). She draws our attention to the initial effect of the beginning on the reader who, in the act of reading, moves from one reality (the world in which he lives) to another reality (the fictional world created by language). "The beginning of a story," writes Lohafer, "is the point of greatest ontological shock" (60). On another occasion, she postulates that "when we descry, or even merely sense, that the sentence creator has invested a great deal of care and art in the formation of the sentence, we are on the alert" (37). As a result we tend to pay more attention to the beginning. Near the end of her discussion of the beginning, Lohafer admits that " I see that I've brought myself to the point of speaking as much of endings as of beginnings" (60). This confirms my conviction that one cannot adequately treat the beginning in total isolation without touching upon other elements of the whole. I will come back to Lohafer's work later, for some of her ideas are useful for my formulation of the "global" approach to short story beginnings.

To be sure, there are many ways to explore the nature of short story beginnings. Sean O'Faolain to some degree took an intuitive approach. Backus and Bonheim chose to tackle the subject by putting emphasis on the how instead of the what and the why. Susan Lohafer, on the other hand, adopted a reader-response approach to speculate about the initial effect the beginning has on the reader when he encounters a story for the first time. Here I would like to suggest a different approach. To begin with, I propose to deal with a short story beginning from hindsight, to reflect upon it after one or several perusals of the story under investigation. To some extent my approach to story beginnings is not unlike the way in which John Gerlach explores the nature of story endings in Toward the End: to see the

part in light of the whole. Just as it is impossible to talk effectively about the ending without considering what has preceded it, it is less rewarding to examine the beginning without taking into account what comes after it. It is essential to study a writer's strategy in opening his story by examining the formal as well as thematic relationship between the beginning and the whole that embodies it. For want of a better term, I shall call this method the "global" (as opposed to "local") approach, an approach which leans heavily toward Joseph Frank's notion of spatialization in literary interpretation and some conceptions of reader-response criticism expounded by scholars such as Stanley Fish.

When a writer revises the beginning of his story, he does not treat it locally in isolation from the rest of the piece. Rather, he sees it as an integral part of the whole. To have a better grasp of the total import of a beginning, the reader needs to do the same. It goes without saying that the middle and the ending of a story are determined by the beginning. "[T]he way an author helps us 'get into story,'" as suggested by Lohafer, "has a lot to do with the way he wants us to 'get out of' it" (60). Before sending a story off to press, the writer's finishing touch might not be on the ending, but could very well be on the beginning. Here the famous two versions of "The Real Thing" by Henry James come to mind. Comparing the original version in the London edition and the revised one in the Rinehart edition, one finds telling discrepancies in the very first sentence:

> When the porter's wife (she used to answer the house-bell) announced "A gentleman--with a lady, sir," I had, as I often had in those days, for the wish was father to the thought, an immediate vision of sitters. (229)

> When the porter's wife, who used to answer the house-bell, announced "A gentleman and a lady, sir," I had, as I often had in those days–the wish being father to the thought--an immediate vision of sitters. (307)

The changes are small but their effects on the sentence should not be taken slightly. The obvious difference is that the revised sentence is relatively more compressed and picks up a much smoother rhythm. A more subtle but significant change is found in the way the genteel couple are introduced. The original version, "A gentleman–with a lady, sir," foregrounds the husband and puts the wife in a secondary position. This may serve to reflect more faithfully the general sexual relationship in nineteenth- century England, but class consciousness, rather than the gender issue, is at the heart of the story. With the whole story in mind, "A gentleman and a lady" in the revised version seems more poignant. For one thing, the equation in the expression corresponds with the fact that the couple are treated for the most part as one social type. For another, the perfect symmetry makes the casual announcement sound more like the pronouncement of a class label. Consequently the revised version corresponds much more closely to what the whole story entails and it can be inferred that, when James made those changes, he must have had the entire story in mind.

In his "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Joseph Frank advocates the feasibility of viewing a certain type of literary texts as a spatial form, rather than a temporal or linear one. He draws the distinction between T. S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste Land": the former to be viewed linearly, while the latter to be perceived spatially. But my experience with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" has informed me otherwise. When I tried to concretize the poem, whether on first reading or after several perusals, I tended to view the piece spatially, by recognizing thematic echoes and structural connections otherwise obscured by the temporal sequence. The same holds true in our experience with the short story, be it a realistic story or a lyrical one.

When we "visualize" a story, any story, as a spatial form, we are even more convinced that its beginning determines and is in turn determined by the rest of the work. In examining the beginning of a story, it is of course important to acknowledge its prominent position in the temporal sequence. When the reader first enters into a story, he often experiences some degree of disorientation. This is always true no matter if the reader is experienced or not, no matter if the story is a conventional piece or otherwise. In an effort to leap over "the ontological gap," the reader tends to move rapidly forward to obtain more information, to get himself more quickly immersed in the fictional world. Story beginnings, therefore, seem to be the place where the linear dimension of the story is most prominent. This does not suggest, however, that the spatializing technique has no place in our experience with beginnings. In fact, the beginning of a story is where the spatial dimension is most telling, because very often the story's middle and end are already encoded in its beginning. To decode what the beginning portends, the reader needs to rely on the spatializing approach by constantly making comparisons between the opening and the other parts of the story.

Thus it is crucial not to treat the beginning as merely a starting point. Sometimes it may be feasible to lose sight for a moment of its "beginningness" and see how it fits spatially with the rest. Processing the beginning locally should not be an end in itself; we need to bring in global considerations. In other words, attention is paid more to configuration than succession, more to active structuration than static structure.

The notion of spatiality plays a pivotal role in the global approach. But there is an even more essential guiding principle that requires explanation. Here the distinction made by Susan Lohafer between immediate and deferred cognitive closure proves helpful. According to Lohafer, immediate cognitive closure is "achieved when we grasp the surface meaning of the words" (43). On the other hand, deferred cognitive closure is:

> achieved when we arrive at an understanding of the full significance of [certain] words in [a] story. It can never really be reached, especially in a story that provokes serious thought. Nevertheless, it can be used, in argument, to point to stages in the appreciation of residual meaning. (43)

It seems to me there are two different levels of deferred cognitive closure: one at a local level, the other at a global level. The local level is achieved when we understand, as fully as possible, the significance of a passage on first reading or in total isolation. The global level of deferred cognitive closure has to do with a broader and more profound apprehension of that particular passage, scrutinized with the whole text in mind. Simply put, the global approach to short story beginnings is aimed at achieving deferred cognitive closure at the second level. It should be emphasized that global processing does not operate in discrete stages. Exactly when global considerations come into play in one's reading experience varies from one reader to another, from one reading to another. To a careful, and more experienced, reader, the moment he wades through the beginning, he starts to make globalizing attempts. This is why, in reading a story for the first time, the reader may experience in his mind an ongoing struggle between the tendency to move on and the impulse to backtrack. However, globalization usually does not exercise its interpretive power to a fuller extent until the whole story has been read at least once. In the following pages I will apply the global approach to examining short story beginnings to see in what sense and to what degree it can inform us of the unique nature of a story beginning. I am not interested in doing a comprehensive survey; instead, I will confine my test to several well- known stories.

In mentioning the differences between the beginning of a short story and that of a novel, Bonheim observes the following truism:

> For several reasons, . . . the opening of a short story is more important than that of a novel. Insofar as we can measure it in sentences and paragraphs at all, the opening may be shorter in a short story; but of course it occupies a greater percentage of the text. Then too, the short story tends to require a more tightly knit structure, so that the initial sounding of the theme and tone is likely to reverberate through the middle and end in a way which is neither called for nor possible in a novel. (91)

To theme and tone I might add other elements such as characterization, character relationship, motivation, conflict, and symbol.

All narrative beginnings serve the dual function of a "springboard" technique and a "framing" device. Often in a short story, the "framing" dimension gains more prominence than the "springboard" dimension. With the novel it is usually the other way around. In other words, a story beginning is characterized more by the sense of closure than by that of openness, whereas the beginning of a novel is marked more by its openness than by closure. Viewed from hindsight, a story beginning is distinguished less by freedom than by delimitation. Often our sense of the framing effect of a novel's beginning is only an illusion. As does its counterpart in a short story, the opening of a novel serves first and foremost to usher the reader into a fictional world. However, the world presented in a novel's beginning

can be likened to an open space with various pathways leading to another open space also equipped with pathways leading to yet another open space and so on. With a short story beginning, we enter an enclosed space and the moment we exit from that space coincides with the moment we reach the end of the story. Instead of providing more avenues to other possibilities, a story beginning suggests only one possibility and sticks with it throughout. A story beginning is to a novel's beginning, perhaps, as a claustrophobic world is to an open vista.

A case in point is the opening of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown." The story unfolds with young Brown bidding farewell to his wife Faith who beseeches the former not to leave her alone at night. Accordingly, the whole story never deviates from the central issue concerning whether Brown's action will make him lose his Faith (or faith). Similarly "The Real Thing" opens with the narrator's first encounter with the Monarchs and the whole piece revolves correspondingly around the personal as well as professional relationship between the struggling artist and the down-and- out couple. This framing device is also apparent in the beginnings of modern, or even postmodern, short stories. Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," for instance, begins with the grandmother trying to persuade her son not to take the family to Florida by mentioning the news that The Misfit is at large heading toward the area. As expected, the story is about the fatal encounter between the family (especially the grandmother) and The Misfit. John Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse," for another, deals with stories and funhouses as two interrelated thematic concerns and its beginning paragraphs immediately direct our attention to those two topics. In the final example I will compare D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers and "The Blind Man." Both pieces of fiction involve the triangular relationship and tension between three central characters. In Sons and Lovers the triangle is formed by Paul, Miriam and Clara. The novel begins, however, with the unhappy marriage of a couple, from which the rest of the story could go anywhere. Paul is not introduced until Chapter II of Part I. Moreover, Miriam does not emerge as a central character until the opening of Part II and Clara appears full-fledgedly even later. In "The Blind Man," all the three characters concerned are economically introduced in the very first paragraph which also forewarns the reader of the triangular tension between the characters mentioned. This leads to my next point.

When the global level of deferred cognitive closure is achieved, one often finds seeds of foreshadowing meticulously planted in the beginning of a short Story. At the local level, the grandmother's using The Misfit as an excuse in the beginning of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" seems casual and accidental. But at the global level, one finds the grandmother's reference to the ruthless fugitive ominously fateful and tragically fatal. In the beginning of "The Real Thing" the narrator's mistaking the couple for sitters who pay seem a harmless error. But, viewed globally, the artist's quickness in jumping to conclusion about the couple foreshadows how his perception and treatment of the Monarchs will be predetermined by his class consciousness. Thus the word "vision" in the opening sentence reeks with thematic resonances, for the story bears on a test concerning the narrator's ability to see beyond the sur-

face as well as class distinctions.

More significantly, a short story beginning is often marked by its tendency to epitomize the whole. This is one characteristic that usually cannot be found in a novel's beginning, although Tolstoy's Anna Karenina is a famous exception. Take for instance the opening of a tightly constructed and highly compressed modern novel, The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald:

> In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.
>
> "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." (1)

Granted, the beginning immediately establishes the pervasive tone of the narration and, more important, the basic attitude of the narrator toward other characters, notably Gatsby. But these passages and, for that matter, the whole of Chapter I, cannot fully reflect the thematic scope of the whole. For one thing, the theme of the American dream does not start to emerge until we learn more about Gatsby, his riches and his obsession with Daisy. For another, the central images of the novel–the waste land and the ominous pair of the over-looking eyes--have to wait till Chapter II to be introduced.

The global approach shows us that, with the short story, it is possible, and maybe strategically feasible, for the beginning to serve the function of summation, embodying the central characters, conflict, theme, and symbol. This is to say that the opening part tends to sum up the whole in a succinct and symbolic manner. To a greater or lesser extent, this is true with the beginnings of "Young Goodman Brown," "The Real Thing," "The Blind Man," "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," and "Lost in the Funhouse." For a new example let us consider more closely the beginning of Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat":

> None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colors of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks. (68)

In this story the beginning carries much more poetic weight than does the ending, which is basically anti-climactic. Perceived at the literal level, the whole story is about the ordeal of four men at sea; but, as is generally recognized, it is more than an adventure story. Symbolically, it draws a picture of the permanent opposition between human beings and nature: man being left along, adrift in an indifferent universe. The fact that most of the survivors are rescued at the end does not put a stop to this constant struggle of human beings. The

only lesson to be learned from the experience is that the notion of an all-loving God is an illusion and that it is up to human beings to work together for the common good.

All of the aforementioned motifs (philosophical, existential, religious, social) are embodied to some extent in the opening paragraph. The opposition between human beings and nature is established by "they" on the one hand and "the waves" on the other, and the vulnerability of the former is first suggested by the word "open" in the title. That the hostile nature has the upper hand over the four men and that it seems to have a will of its own are suggested in the dynamic, or active, mode in which the waves are described. And that the men have given up hope for divine intervention from a benevolent God is implied in the deceptively transparent opening sentence: "None of them knew the color of the sky." The sentiment defies common-sense logic. If the men can see the colors of the waves, it must be in the daytime; they must also then be able to see the sky clearly. But why is none of them aware of the color of the sky? Because they don't have the time and energy to look up? Perhaps their not knowing the color of the sky has to do with the fact that they are forced by necessity to preoccupy themselves with the vicious waves. Thus the colors of the sea they know quite well. Or, perhaps, it is because they don't want to look at the sky. When desperate people subconsciously hope for divine deliverance, they habitually look up toward the sky. But the eyes of the four men, instead of looking upward, "glanced level." The opening sentence then is suggestive of the possibility that the men have gone through the stage of hopefulness ("Oh, God, please help!") or that of self-pity ("Why me?") to the stage of sad realization: they are alone in a precarious existence. Finally, to downplay the individuality of the four men and to emphasize their union, the narrator chose to refer to the characters collectively as "them" or "they": four as one. Structurally and thematically speaking, the opening paragraph presents itself as a miniature version of the whole.

For a less obvious example of this epitomizing tendency let's turn to another story by Crane: "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." The first paragraph of the story reads:

> The great Pullman was whirling onward with such dignity of motion that a glance from the window seemed simply to prove that the plains of Texas were pouring eastward. Vast flats of green grass, dull-hued spaces of mesquite and cactus, little groups of frame houses, woods of light and tender trees, all were sweeping into the east, sweeping over the horizon, a precipice. (109)

Without knowing what is to follow after this passage, the paragraph seems a mere description of a scene: a train moving westward and the motion makes the plains look as if they were pouring eastward. Yet, with the whole story in view, this beginning sums up the dramatic action of the whole: the interaction between east and west of America during early twentieth century, the encounter between eastern progressiveness (as symbolized by the train) and the western ruggedness (as suggested in the described objects of nature). Moreover, as is implied by the word "precipice" at the end, the two-way traffic connotes a dangerous, but exciting,

period of American history when two cultures and two sensibilities confronted each other.

The application of the global approach, however, is not as clear-cut as it appears. In the previous demonstrations, I have deliberately downplayed the role of local processing in order to illustrate how the global approach can enhance our understanding the nature of story beginnings. The fact of the matter is: in the act of reading, there is in the mind of the reader a constant interplay of and/or struggle between local processing and global considerations. The reader goes through an on-going process of negotiation between what can be locally retrieved and what can be globally understood. In meditating on a beginning, the question we should ask, to follow Stanley Fish's advice, is not "what does this beginning?" but "what does this beginning do?" (71). In reader-response criticism, it was Fish who made "the crucial move in the reader-oriented criticism by removing the literary text from the center of critical attention and replacing it with the reader's cognitive activity" (Tompkins xvii). Reading, for Fish, is primarily an experience:

> An observation about the sentences as an utterance has been transformed into an account of its experience. It is no longer an object, a thing- in-itself, but an event, something that happens to, and with the participation of, the reader. And it is this event, this happening--all of it and anything that could be said about it or any information one might take away from it--this is, I would argue, the meaning of the sentence. (72)

In the same article Fish disagrees with linguists who belittle the role of the surface structure in a text. In the actualization of meaning, he argues:

> The deep structure plays an important role, but it is not everything; for we comprehend not in terms of deep structure alone, but in terms of a relationship between the unfolding, in time, of the surface structure and a continual checking of it against our projection of what the deep structure will reveal itself to be; and when the final discovery has been made and the deep structure is perceived, all the "mistakes," the positing, on the basis of incomplete evidence, of deep structures that failed to materialize, will not be canceled out. They have been experienced. . . . (86)

Here Fish's distinction between the surface structure and the deep structure is useful to further expound what I mean by the global approach to short story beginnings. (For my own purpose, though, I have reversed Fish's perspective by deemphasizing the surface structure and accentuating the deep structure.) To a certain extent, the local processing of a beginning is to discover the "surface" structure, i.e. what is conveyed in the beginning proper. On the other hand, the aim of the global approach I have been advocating is to unveil the "deep" structure, to discover how the beginning paves the way for and resonants with the rest of

the story. Both activities are equally indispensable and the relationship between the two is reciprocal. Our total experience with a beginning involves "a sequence of decisions, revisions, anticipations, reversals, and recoveries," (Tompkins xvi) a complex operation of negotiating between local processing and global insights.

In some cases, our expectations derived from processing a beginning locally are fulfilled later as we read on. For an example, let us consider more closely the beginning of "The Blind Man":

> Isabel Pervin was listening for two sounds–for the sound of wheels on the drive outside and for the noise of her husband's footsteps in the hall. Her dearest and oldest friend, a man who seemed almost indispensable to her living, would drive up in the rainy dusk of closing November day. The trap had gone to fetch him from the station. And her husband, who had been blinded in Flanders, and who had a disfiguring mark on his brow, would be coming in from the outhouses. (329)

Perceived even at a local level, the opening deserves some critical scrutiny. At the outset we learn that Isabel is expecting to hear two sounds. Is she, one might ask, anticipating with pleasure or apprehension? If we read carefully, we notice that the impending arrival of her friend is associated with a neutral word "sound," while the expected entrance of her husband is associated with a negative word "noise." Is the difference in the choice of diction simply a rhetorical strategy to avoid repetition on the part of the author? Or is it to imply two different attitudes in Isabel toward the two men? It may be that Isabel awaits her "dearest and oldest" friend with pleasure, while she anticipates with annoyance the returning of her husband. When we reach the second paragraph, we find that perhaps we have been misled, since we are specifically told that the couple "had been very happy" (329). Yet, can Isabel really feel fulfilled when "a man who seemed almost indispensable to her living" lives so far away from her? As we read along, our initial speculations are confirmed in the fourth paragraph:

> But as time went on, sometimes the rich glamour would leave them. Sometimes, after months of this intensity, a sense of burden overcame Isabel, a weariness, a terrible ennui. . . . (329)

Thinking back to the opening paragraph, it is safe to assume that Isabel hopes the coming of her old friend will lift the burden off her, break her away from this suffocating intimacy.

Further analysis of the opening paragraph suggests subtle, but significant, differences between the two men. The friend is referred to in a somewhat impersonal manner-- "the sound of wheels"--the husband, on the other hand, is referred to with a personal touch--"the noise of her husband's footstep." Although both men have not appeared at this point, the presence of the husband is more vividly felt. For one thing, he is nearby the house. For

another, there are descriptions of his being blind and his having "a disfiguring mark on his brow." This distinction may not stand out when we first process the opening paragraph. As we learn more and more about the two characters, however, we realize that the distinction is crucial. Bertie Reid is one who throughout his life shuns contact on a personal, intimate basis, while Maurice, in contrast, thrives on it. After we finish the story and reread the first paragraph, we find something even more interesting: "The trap had gone to fetch him [Bertie] from the station." At the local level, this information seems obligatory and insignificant but, perceived globally, the word "trap" might be intended as a double entendre. It is true that, to some extent, the couple have subconsciously set up a trap to capture Bertie who at the end of the story is crushed by Maurice's intense display of naked emotions and is described as "a mollusc whose shell is broken" (344).

In the example above most of our speculations based on a local processing of the story beginning are confirmed step by step all the way to the end. The next logical question to ask then is: what if our expectations are not fulfilled, or what if when clues given in the beginning turn out to be misleading? Are we to consider our efforts in local processing pointless and a waste of time? "Clues, after all," observes Stanley Fish, "are sometimes misleading and give rise to 'mistakes'" (86). Ronald Wardhaugh, a linguist who assigns little significance to the surface structure, maintains that mistakes are made "because the students have adopted inappropriate strategies in their process" (138). But Fish argues convincingly that:

> In my account of reading, however, the temporary adoption of these inappropriate strategies is itself a response to the strategy of an author, and the resulting mistakes are part of the experience provided by that author's language, and there part of its meaning. (86)

Take for instance the beginning of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." The beginning part of the story tends to give the impression that whatever the grandmother does--such as pointing at the picture of The Misfit or smuggling her cat into the car--seems accidental. We might correct this impression when we reach the part when the grandmother shrieks and says: "You are the Misfit!" (696) Another reader might not modify the initial impression until the end of the story when The Misfit says: "She would of been a good woman . . . if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (701). Either way, both readers eventually realize that each and every action taken by the grandmother proves to be tragically fateful. But that does not mean the initial impression of "accidentalness" is wrong and thus is to be dismissed altogether. As a matter of fact, both the "mistaken" impression and the modified one are the combined effects of the narrative strategy: between the sense of accidentalness in the surface structure and the sense of fatefulness in the deep structure lies the poignant irony in the peculiar way God operates.

As is briefly demonstrated above, the essence as well as enjoyment of our experience with a story opening derives for the most part from the procedure in which we go back and

forth between the opening proper and what comes after it, between local processing and globalizing attempts. It is, to be sure, a complex process and can never be faithfully recorded. But the more its complexity is made clear, the more we may come to appreciate the validity of the global approach to story beginnings. To illustrate the intricate interplay of localization (temporality) and globalization (spatiality), I will examine in detail James Joyce's "Araby," a story frequently taught worldwide and a story whose complexity has escaped some critics. The story thus begins:

> North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two stories stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours from a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces. The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp: The Abbot, by Walter Scott, The Devout Communicant, and The Memoirs of Vidcog. I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple tree and a few straggling bushes under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister. (21)

In his discussion of story beginnings, Bonheim also makes references to this story. He observes that "the atmosphere at the climax of the story, in the bazaar, is not that which is deftly sketched in by the opening paragraph" (96). "In other words," he adds:

> the setting offers a way into the story insofar as it creates the relevant atmosphere, but it is no longer a setting within which the story proper will take place. (96)

Thus, to Bonheim, the thematic relevance of the beginning is as questionable as the opening of Joyce's "Two Gallants" (96). One wonders what Bonheim means by "the story proper." If the story proper is what happens in the fair, which occupies only about one-fifth of the total length, can we then conclude that the previous four-fifths of the story are merely to pave the way for the story proper? I would argue that what happens before the boys goes to the fair is also the story proper. And, as will be made clear later, the function which the beginning of "Araby" serves is not simply to offer a way into the story or to create the relevant atmosphere.

Is the beginning of "Araby" a "modal facade?" If we follow Bonheim's simple guideline of mode differentiating, it is. For the opening two paragraphs of the story are primarily in the mode of description, while the rest of the story is dominated by report and speech. But Bonheim offers another guideline. "The modal facade," he explains, "is a device of narrative which has no apparent organic relationship to the structure behind . . ." (10). According to this principle, then, "Araby" definitely does not open with a modal facade; neither do most of the well-written short stories for that matter. Why this contradiction? It has to do with the careless manner in which Bonheim uses the critical term. From the first criterion to the second, he has made a big critical jump and thus has created a gap in logic. The fact is that the two criteria do not necessarily or automatically correspond with one another. If the first criterion (mode differentiating) is the correct one to use, then, the term "modal facade," limited by its strictly mechanical nature, has little critical voltage. If the second principle (organic relationship) is to be observed, however, the global approach, not just local "mode-chopping," should be applied to determine whether a beginning is a modal facade. In the following I will closely examine the beginning of "Araby" as a way to map out the complex interpretive process with any story beginning.

The opening two paragraphs, with their density of language, invite us to slow down our reading pace and pay some analytical attention. At the local level of deferred cognitive closure, our apprehension of the beginning can be summarized as follows. The first paragraph describes the exterior surrounding, while the second refers mostly to the interior environment in which the narrator lives. An unmistakable sense of confinement reverberates throughout the first paragraph. This is suggested by the dead-end street blocked by a dilapidated building and is emphasized in the repetition of the word "blind." The lifelessness of the surrounding is in sharp contrast with the liveliness of the boys playing on the street. If the boys find their playground confining, they may also feel the school equally restricting: one can image their eagerness to be "set free" by their teachers. That the place seems ghostly quiet and suffers from a state of paralysis can be inferred from the imposing presence of the "uninhabited house" and also from the inhabited ones with "brown imperturbable faces." The personification of the houses serves to make an indirect comment on their occupants. Like their inanimate houses, the adults, perhaps guilty of vanity and social snobbishness, are implied to be aloof and apathetic.

The interior described in the second paragraph is equally depressing and suffocating. The musty air of the rooms strongly conveys a sense of suffocation. The word "enclosed" echoes with the word "blind" in the first paragraph. In addition, the gloomy color of the books, yellow, corresponds with the unpleasant brown color of the houses. The back drawing-room is filled with memories and things of the past: "former," "died," "old," "useless." If the religious atmosphere has so far eluded us, we cannot help but notice it when we reach the part in which a garden with an apple tree is introduced. The wild garden strikes us as an abandoned Garden of Eden. Once this biblical image is registered in our minds, all other references to religion become apparent: Christian Brothers' School, the dead priest, and the three-religiously related books.

At the local level, some observations about the narrator can also be ventured. As we ponder on the peculiar environment within and without, we notice something very curious and, to some extent, contradictory about the narrator. If the narrator seems weary of the lifeless surrounding without, he is somewhat fascinated with the space within. The detailed descriptions of the rooms clearly indicate that he lingers there fairly often. He seems to have a fond memory of the dead priest who is described by him as a generous person. Moreover, he apparently has special feelings for those old, damp books, especially the one with yellow leaves.

Already we have learned a lot from just the two opening paragraphs. But we have only touched upon the surface structure. It is time to read on and, at the same time, bring in global considerations to get at the deep structure. It is only by trying to decode what is encoded in the beginning that we can appreciate more fully Joyce's strategy in opening the way he did.

In the third paragraph of the story, we find out that the narrator is relating a childhood experience of his. We now can safely assume that the boy/narrator must be one of the students at the Christian Brothers' School. But what kind of a boy is he, we wonder? Why is he attracted to a room of a dead person? What is there that intrigues him? After reading a few more paragraphs, we learn about the boy's infatuation with a girl identified as Mangon's sister. Though no physical features of the girl are provided, she seems ideal to the boy: she is more of a symbol than real person. In his fantasy the boy subconsciously sees her as pure and perfect as Virgin Mary–model of an "ideal" lady in the world of romance--and himself as romantic and spiritually-inspired as a crusading knight protecting a chalice. At this point, a few things about the opening paragraphs gradually start to dawn on us. To begin with, the dreary North Richmond Street provides for the boy a motivation to escape. But, strangely enough, the boy chooses to escape into the equally depressing back drawing-room that used to house the now dead priest. Maybe the boy is spellbound by the mysteriousness of the place and it is his refuge from the outside world. It's sense of damp antiquity, together with the pervasive religious aura, serves to foster the boy's rampant imagination. In his imagination he freely soars in the romance world not unlike the world created in Walter Scott's book. This explains the religious overtone of the boy's fantasies. With this in mind, the seeming contradiction we have observed earlier about the narrator begins to make sense. If North Richmond Street is the place to escape from, the oddly enchanting room is the world to escape into.

Implied in the opening paragraph is the boy's natural aversion to anything vulgar or secular--the imposing uninhabited building and the unpleasant brown houses. At the same time, the second paragraph serves as a sharp contrast to show that the boy is attracted to almost anything with a religious aura: the priest and his books. This tendency of his foreshadows his disgust with the marketplace and his great expectations from a fair called "Araby," for its exotic name seems to promise a religiously inspiring experience. More important, the bazaar could be the place in which a real romance world is materialized.

The story, viewed as a whole, presents a movement from North Richmond Street to the fair, from the world of the secular/material to that of religious/spiritual (although the fair turns out to be another marketplace). This movement, we suddenly realize, is ingeniously and subtly embodied in the deep structure of the first two paragraphs: a movement from the exterior/physical/present/secular to the interior/spiritual/past(timeless)/ religious. Perhaps the boy has obtained from this ability to escape a false sense of superiority and thus at the end renders himself a victim of his own vanity. His vanity is most evident in the way he perceives his pride and joy, Mangon's sister. Ostensibly, he seems to see her exclusively in a spiritual light but, as most critics have noted, most of his descriptions of the girl border on sensuous eroticism. After all, the boy is not as spiritual as he think he is and he is not at all above the world of materialism. Viewed from this perspective, the boy's Epiphany at the end does not merely involve, as is often interpreted, his vanity in not realizing that he is nothing but a boy thinking of himself as a adult. It also concerns at one level the contradiction between how he feels about the girl (ostensibly spiritual) and the way he tries to express it (mostly material: i.e. to buy something with money), and at a deeper level the contradiction between the professed spiritual love and the unacknowledged physical attraction. Thus along with the sudden illumination at the end comes a profound sense of disillusionment about the fact that escape is impossible. In this light the references to the dead priest in the second paragraph resonate with thematic echoes:

> He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

What seems like a praise is in fact a reprobation: the legacy of the priest turns out to be something of a materialistic nature, involving money and furniture. As the ending proves, the boy's sense of superiority is unfounded. Like the dead priest, he cannot rise above the world of materialism or materiality, and he too suffers from a defunct vision. He is "blind" as North Richmond Street is blind. At this point we gain much appreciation from the way the repeated word "blind" in the first paragraph echoes with the phrase "into the darkness" in the last. At this point, too, I find that I have brought myself to talk as much about the ending as about the beginning.

The global approach to short story beginnings as demonstrated above can often arrive at insights which other approaches have failed to bring forth. The approach points to the "framing" function which a story beginning serves. More surprisingly, it draws attention to the epitomizing characteristic of short story beginnings. A story beginning is not merely a starting point where a relevant atmosphere is set; it is also an "end" point where the summation of the whole is offered. This is not to suggest, however, that story beginnings that do not possess those qualities are necessarily inadequate openings. It is simply to indicate that, in many of the stories that are considered as "classics," the opening is often encoded with clues pertaining to theme, tone, characterization, character relationship, motivation, conflict, and symbol.

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