

Prompt: Starkey suggests that “the essence of a short story” might be “a notable transformation in one or more main characters, although that alteration doesn’t have to be life-changing or even noticeable to a casual observer.” Pick a main character from one of the three stories from the reading assignment. How would you describe that character? What is the character like and how do you know? And how does that character change over the course of the story? Are there perhaps other ways in which a change occurs by the end of the story? Finally, how can a character be used as a vehicle for telling a story?

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The father figure character from *The Baby* begins in a place that we can easily view as quite normal for a parent. He wants to help teach his child a lesson, and so devises a simple rule for punishing the wrongdoings on the part of the child. He seems to be logical, set in his ways, and dedicated to the duties he has established for himself. This sense of duty especially comes out as the story develops further and further. The somewhat reasonable punishments for the baby become more and more unreasonable and absurd, but the father addresses them with a focus and determination that shifts from being an admirable trait to a character flaw. Eventually though, the man realizes what the reader has known for a while: he is being unreasonable. Clearly since he is being unreasonable, his actions should change, and so he changes them. But unlike what we initially see alluded to: him playing with his daughter and letting her enjoy the world in her own way, we get the 180 degree, head snapping turn around of smashing windshields. This works to cement the absurdist and postmodernist themes that the

preamble mentions are such key parts of the writing of Donald Barthelme in only a few sentences and one or two overarching ideas.