



INTRODUCTION

Introduction to Literature
July 28, 2022
IIIT Hyderabad

Agenda



Go over the syllabus in
some detail



Start thinking and talking
about literature

What is this course about?

- What do we mean by literature in this course?
- This course
 - is for those who have little or no introduction to reading literature in the classroom.
 - **Literature acquires meaning and, indeed, finds realization in how it is read and interpreted by readers**, who have the opportunity to appreciate different worldviews, experiences, and subject positions through such reading.
 - will introduce students to the study of literature and equip them with a foundational understanding of **major concepts, methods, and theories** used to analyze and interpret literary expression.

What is this course about?

- Three questions: what is literature, and why and how do we study it?
 - Defining Literature and Its Place in the World;
 - The “Literariness” of Literature; Representation and Reality;
 - Major Genres of Literature;
 - Major Concepts, Methods, and Theories of Literature; and
 - Literature in the Digital Age

- On successful completion of the course, students will have
 - an appreciation of the perspective of a literary scholar;
 - foundational skills in literary concepts and methods that are necessary to critically interpret, analyze, and appreciate literature;
 - a basic foundation to conduct computational research on creative writing;
 - the ability to differentiate between literature and other forms of cultural production;
 - improved their ability to think and communicate carefully about the literary merit of creative texts beyond casual impressions or value judgements;
 - acquiring – in the process – fundamental skills in oral and written communication
 - learnt new things that will challenge them.

Expected Outcomes

Type of Evaluation	Weightage (in %)
Quizzes	30% (2 x 15%)
Mid-Semester Exam	30%
Project	40%
Other Evaluation _____	

Grading Plan

- The project in this course will consist of writing a 2500-word research essay on a literary text.
- Any project-related submission with plagiarism equal to or greater than 25% will receive an F grade; 2 Fs for plagiarism will result in an F in the course.

Remarks

- This is a literature course and will involve a significant amount of reading (about 600-800 pages). Students should read and prepare continuously throughout the course *in advance* of the class in which texts will be discussed.
- Please bring assigned texts to the class in which they will be discussed.
- The course will entail active participation of students in class discussions.
- Texts will be made available to students in English translation (original language texts can also be shared with students wherever available).

Reference Books

(arranged according to the order of use in class lectures)

- Woolf, Virginia. "How Should One Read a Book" (1925)
- Eagleton, Terry. *How to Read Literature* (2013)
- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1957)
- Barnet, Sylvan, William Burto, and William E. Cain, eds. *An Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* (1961)
- Moretti, Franco. *Distant Reading* (2013)

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities* (1983)
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory* (1995)
- Barth, John. "It's a Short Story" (1993)
- Bhabha, Homi. "Introduction: Narrating the Nation." *Nation and Narration* (1990)
- Farner, Geir. *Literary Fiction: The Ways We Read Narrative Literature* (2014)
- Habib, M.A.R. *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory* (2005)
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Historiographical Metafiction* (1989)
- Klages, Mary. *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2006)
- Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (2004)
- Lockers, Matthew J. *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History* (2013)
- Mufti, Aamir R. "A Greater Story Writer than God: Genre, Gender and Minority in Late Colonial India" (2002)
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "Indian Novels in Translation" (1972)
- Natarajan, Nalini. *Handbook of Twentieth Century Literatures of India* (1996)
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010)
- Paniker, K. Ayyappa. *Indian Narratology* (2003)

Further Reading

(arranged alphabetically)

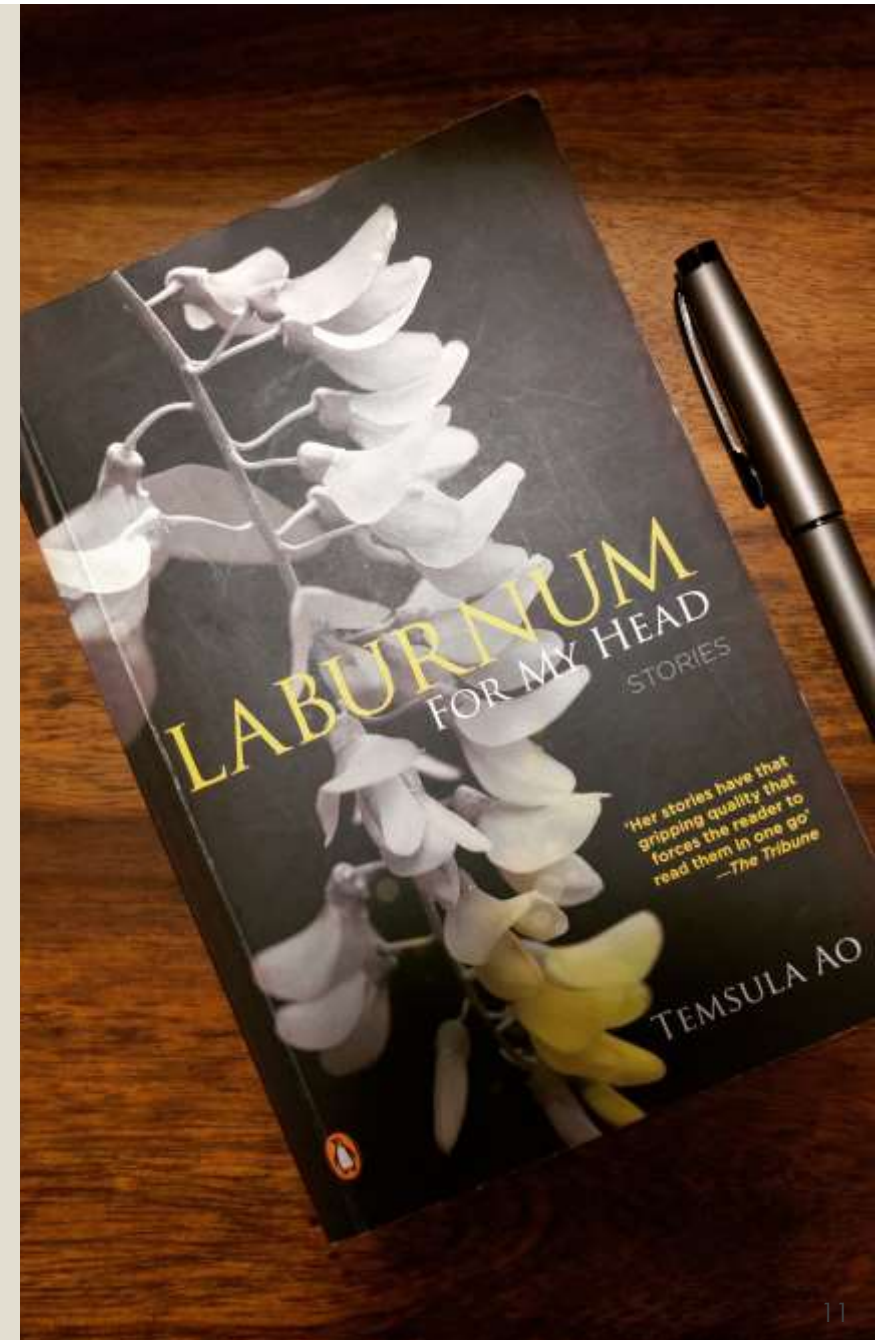


UNIT I:

(A) INTRODUCTION
(B) SHORT STORIES

Agenda for Aug 1 & 4

- What is literature? Why do we read?
- “Literariness,” and what constitutes a literary genre
- Fiction and Non-Fiction
- Temsula Ao, “Laburnum for my Head”
 - Reader-Response Criticism (Abrams 256-260) and Close-Reading;
 - Character; Setting



First things first

What is literature?
Why do we read?



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- What is literature? Why do we read?
 - Creative writing
 - Novels, short stories, novellas
 - Poetry
 - Plays



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- But there are also other things, which can have literary qualities, such as letters or autobiographies. They belong to the liminal space between genres.



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- Novels, short stories, novellas
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- But there are also other things, which can have literary qualities, such as letters or autobiographies. They belong to the liminal space between genres.

- “Literariness,” and what constitutes a literary genre

- Genres are classes or types of literature
 - Aristotelian definition: “works are classified in accordance with the similarity in the principles by which they are organized in order to achieve a particular kind of emotional effect” (Abrams 109).
 - Wittgenstein: “family resemblances” (110).



First things first

“There has also been interest in the role that **generic assumptions have played in shaping the work that an author composes, and also in establishing expectations that alter the way that a reader will interpret and respond to a particular work.** Whatever the present skepticism, however, about the old belief that genres constitute inherent species in the realm of literature, the fact that **generic distinctions remain indispensable** in literary discourse is attested by the unceasing publication of books whose titles announce that they deal with tragedy, the lyric, pastoral, the novel, or another of the many types and subtypes into which literature has over the centuries been classified” (110).



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- That quality that distinguishes and separates literary texts from non-literary texts

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- What are non-literary texts?
 - newspaper articles, advertisements, posters, reports etc.
- In what way are literary texts different from non-literary texts?
 - craft of language, work of the imagination, story-telling



LITERARY ANALYSIS

Introduction to Literature
August 1, 2022
IIIT Hyderabad

Agenda

- Using Temsüla Ao's "Laburnum for my Head" (2009) as an example:
 - What is literary analysis or literary criticism?
 - How do we study literary texts?



Temsüla Ao (b.1945)

- Born in Jorhat (Assam), lived a lot of her life in Shillong
- Five books of poetry; two collections of short stories; ethnography of Ao-Naga oral tradition; memoir
- Director, Northeast Zone Cultural Centre; Dean (Humanities and Education), North Eastern Hill University, Shillong
- Sahitya Akademi award for the collection *Laburnum for my Head* (2009)
- Padmashri (2007); Nagaland Governor's Award for Distinction in Literature (2009)
- Depicts both the uniqueness and universality of life in north-eastern locations; women's lives in particular; lives of ordinary people who are caught in the cross-fire



- Analysis or interpretation of literary texts, which form the primary ground of study.
 - interpreting literary texts,
 - arriving at a certain understanding and position on the text through this process, and
 - contributing to making meaning and adding to scholarship about the text.

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- Literature reveals its meanings and truths through readers (and all literary scholars are, first and foremost, readers).
- When we interpret and analyze a literary text, we participate in its creation:
 - Reader-Response Criticism/ Reception Theory: “process of reading a literary text” (Abrams 256)
 - “These [gaps] the reader must fill in by a creative participation with what is given in the text before him [*sic*]. The experience of reading is an evolving process of anticipation, frustration, retrospection, reconstruction, and satisfaction” (257).

What is literary analysis or literary criticism?

Mechanics of Literary Analysis

- Interpreting and analyzing literary texts involves
 - making an argument/claim about a literary text and then justifying it using supporting evidence (the text)
 - using reasoning, logic, argumentation, analysis, juxtaposition (comparison and contrast) to explain your evidence

Mechanics of Literary Analysis

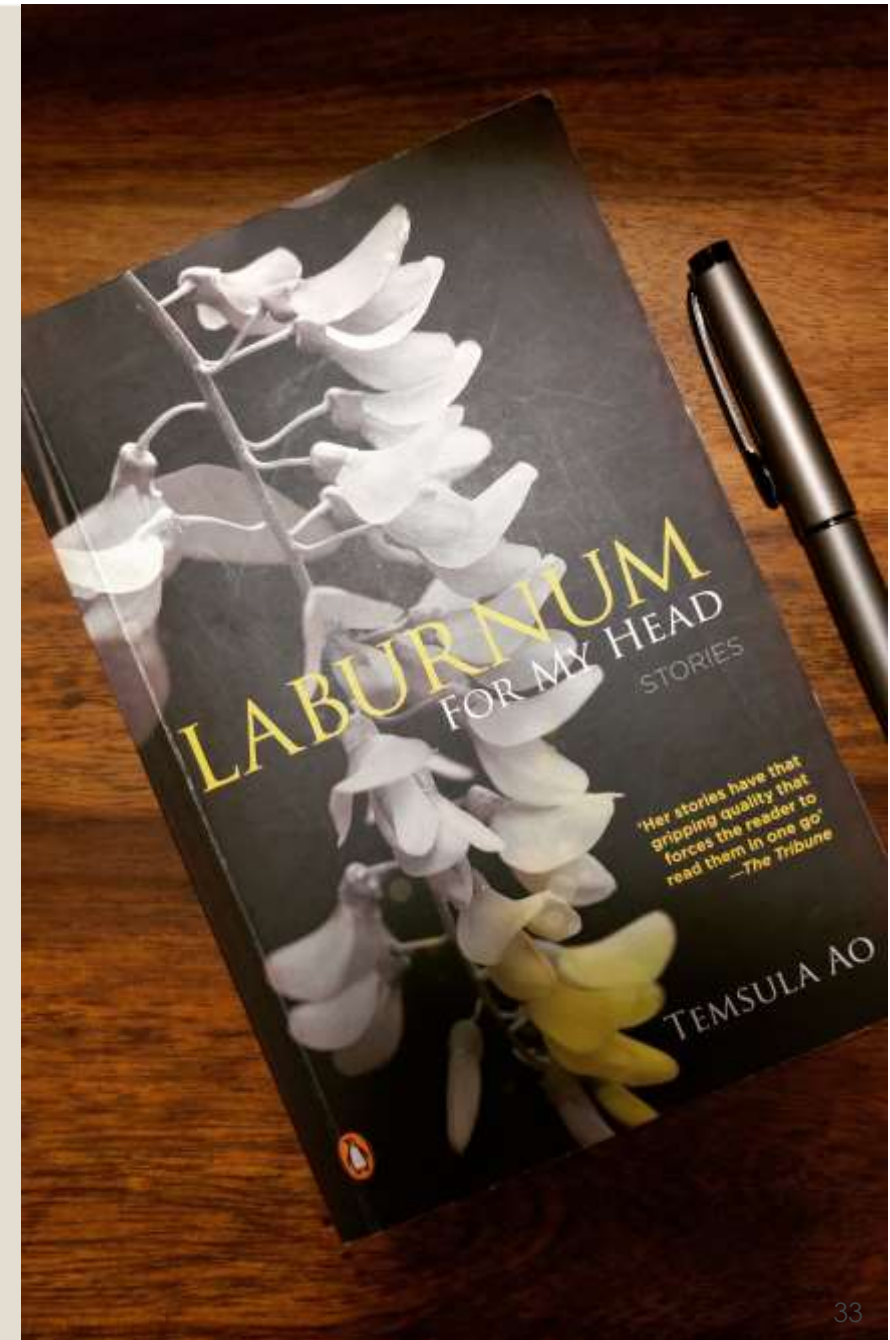
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- Mechanics of Analysis:
 - What is being said?
 - How is it being said?
 - Why is it being said?
(Search for patterns)

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 - Why is it being said?
(Search for patterns)
 - Be thorough:
 - It is our job to fully investigate all the possibilities of texts, all the meanings and readings that can come out of them.
 - To say that we are reading too much into a text is often a lazy person's response, one who is not alive to the ways in which words, texts, images are actively used – on purpose – as a medium to communicate ideas, thoughts, feelings, ideologies.
- Technique: close-reading – reading attentively and purposefully

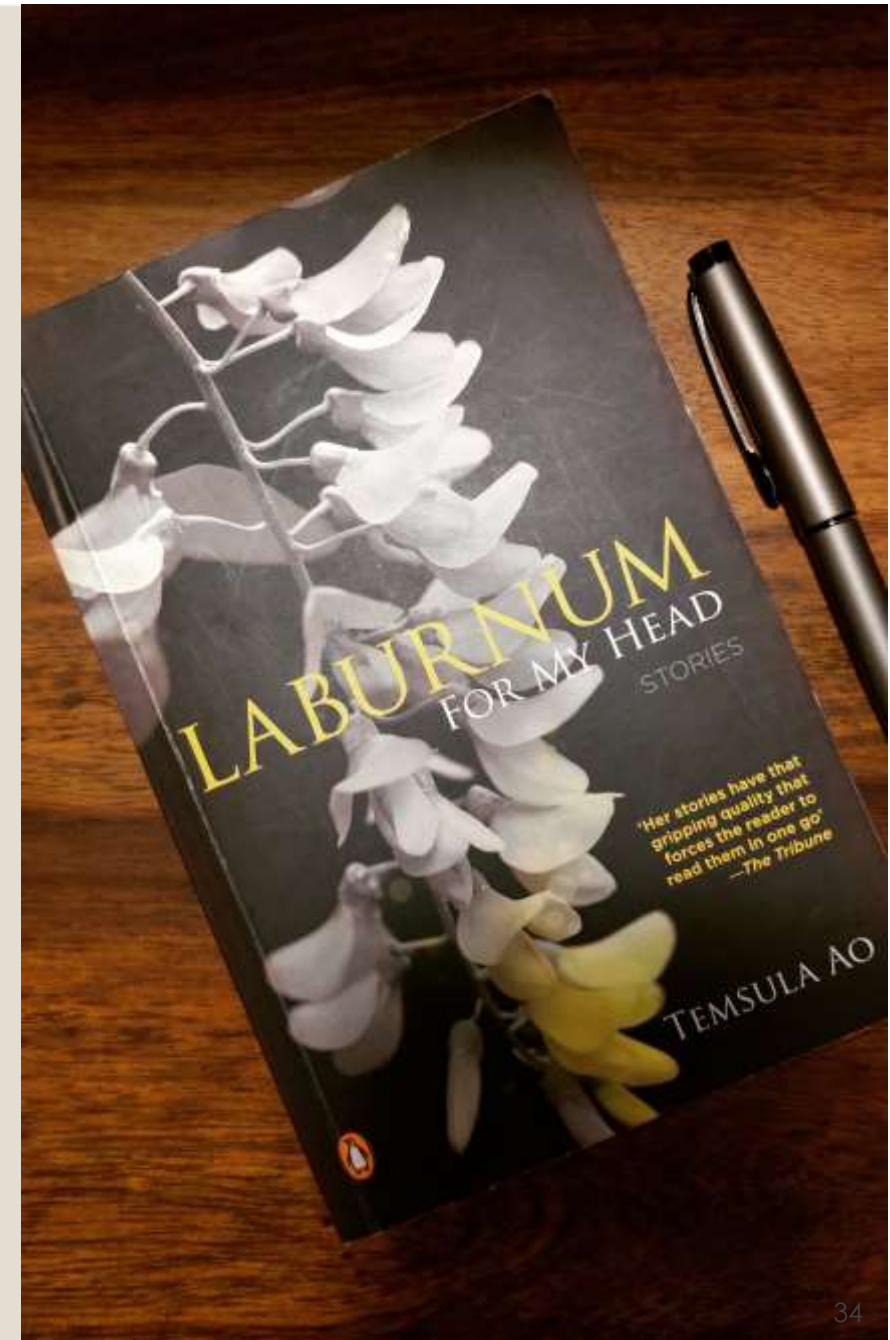
Mechanics of Literary Analysis

- Language
- Setting
- Structure
- Characters, narratorial persona
- Plot
- Social and political analysis



Language

Beauty and meaning are created through language and content.

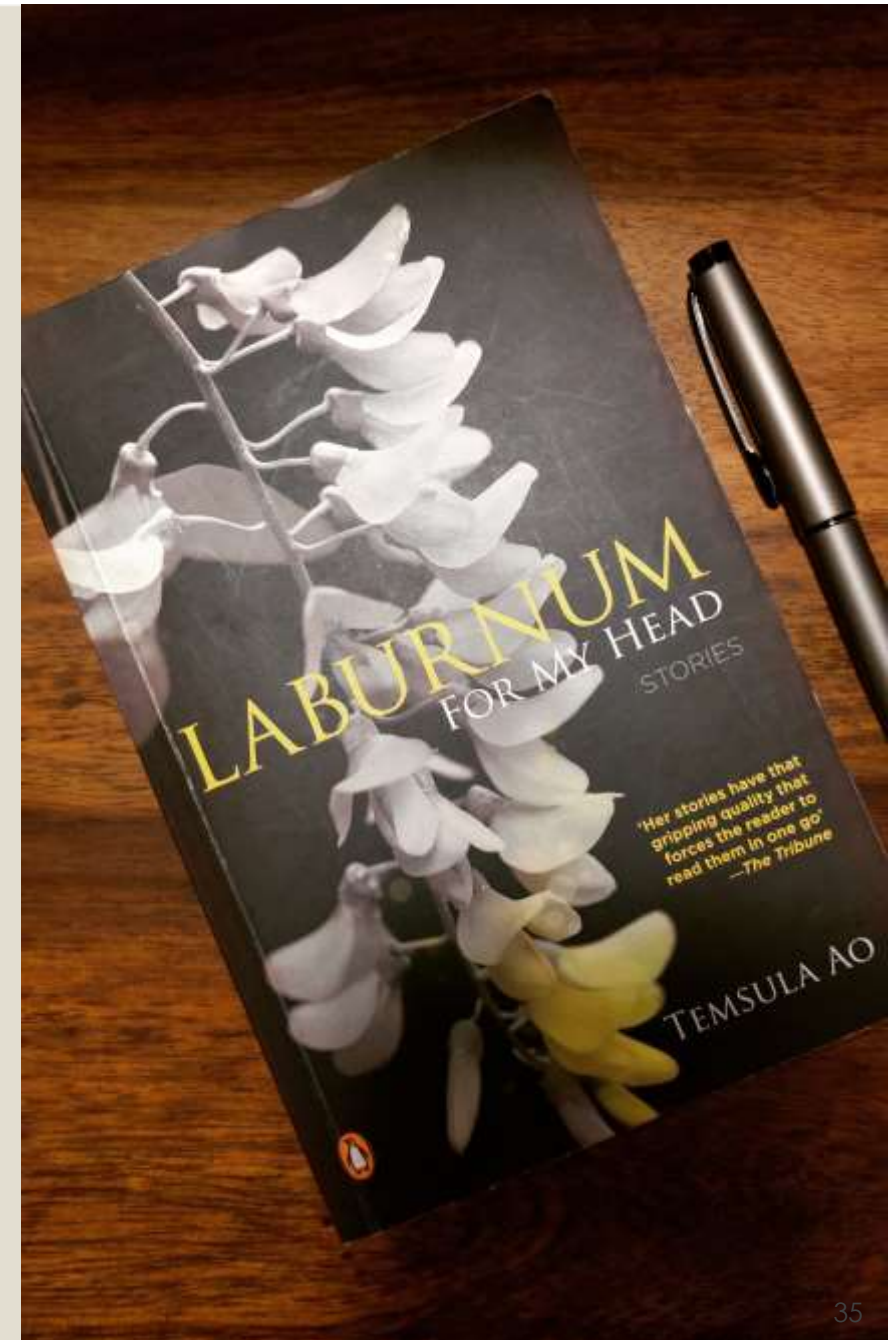


Language

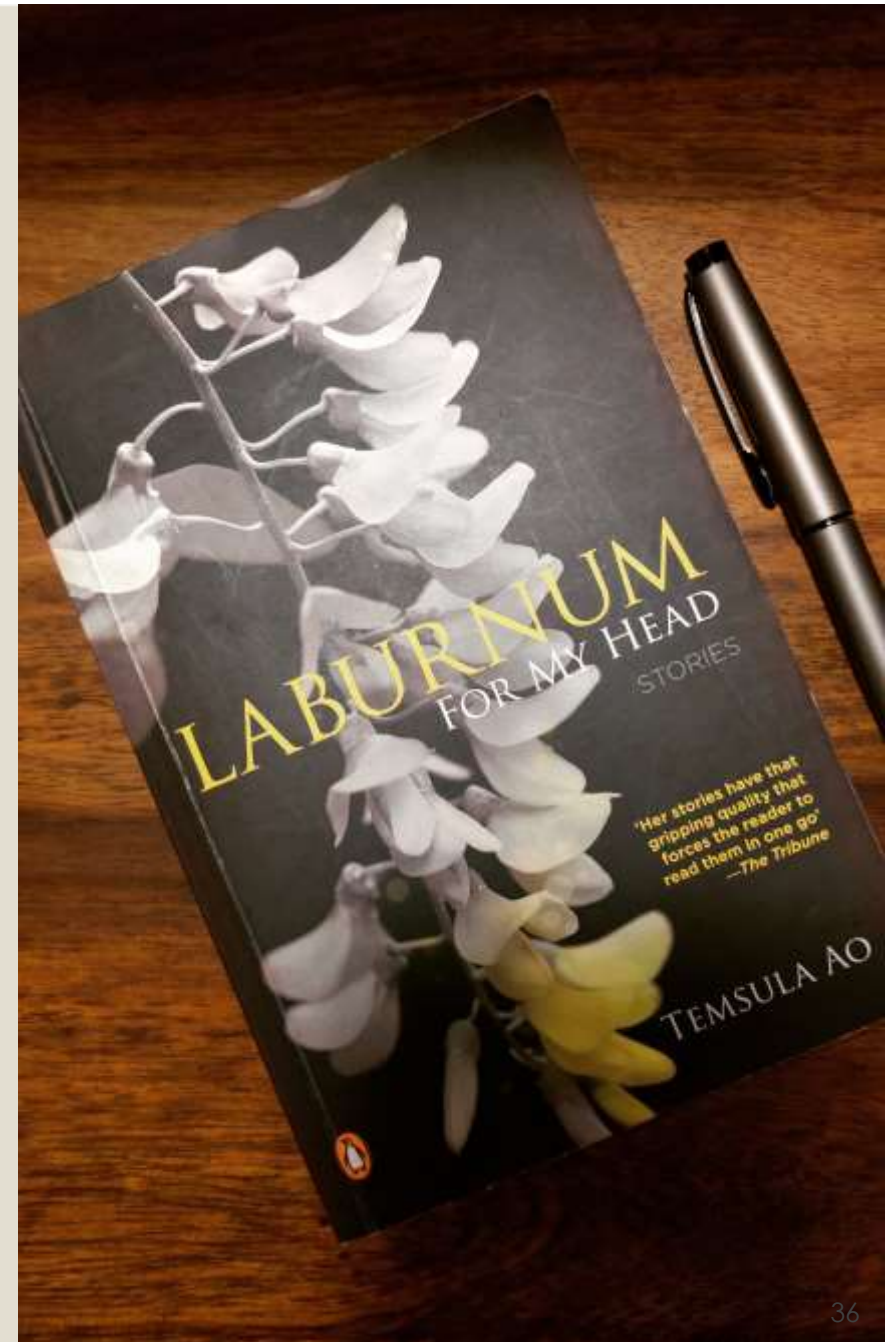
How does the author use language to convey meaning, what kind of narrative, linguistic, stylistic strategies do they use?

- “magnificent incongruity” (1);
- “annual show of yellow splendour” (2);
- “shy showing” (16)

Is there something different about the way the writer does these things that we do not use in ordinary speech or everyday language, what does this achieve?



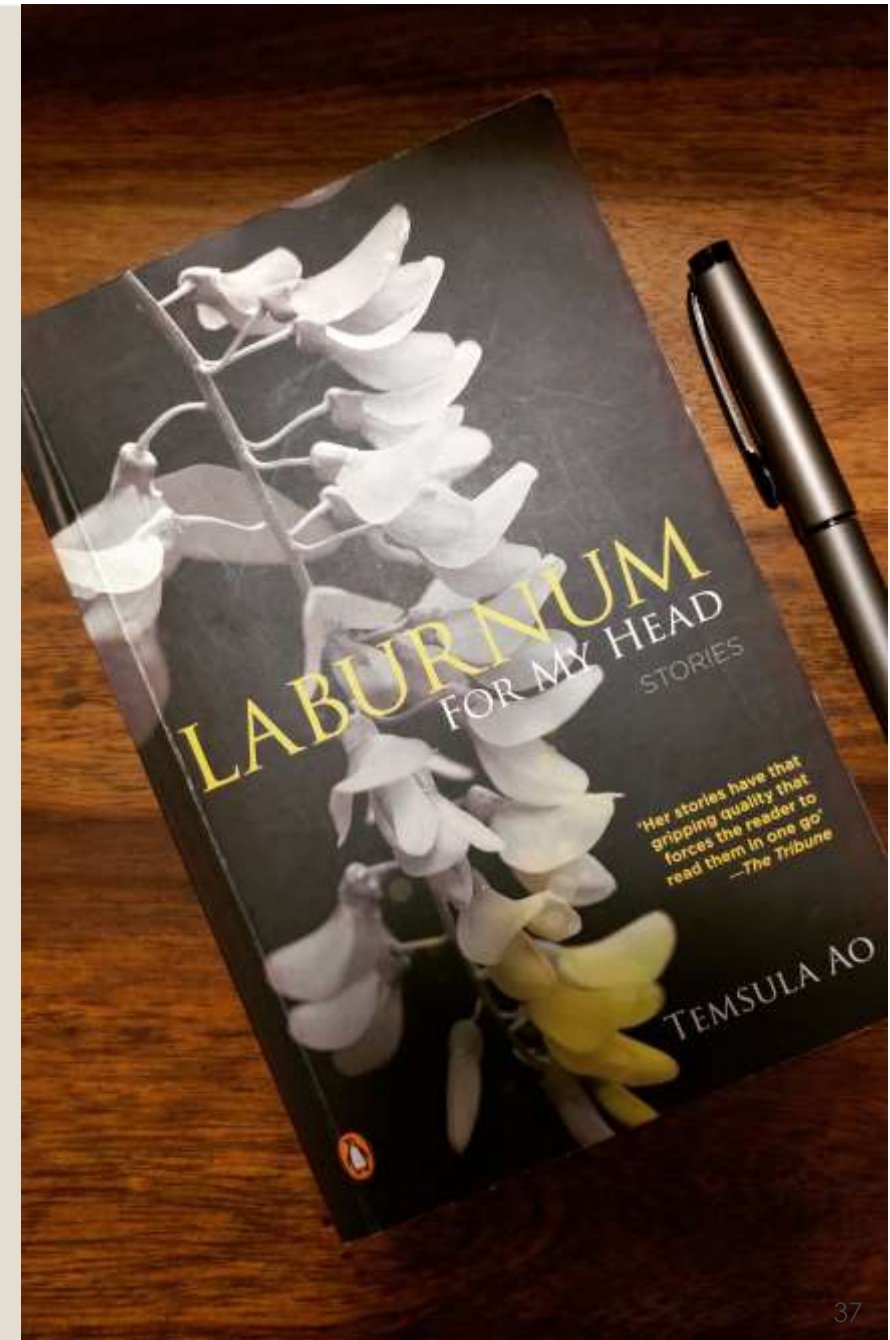
Setting



Setting

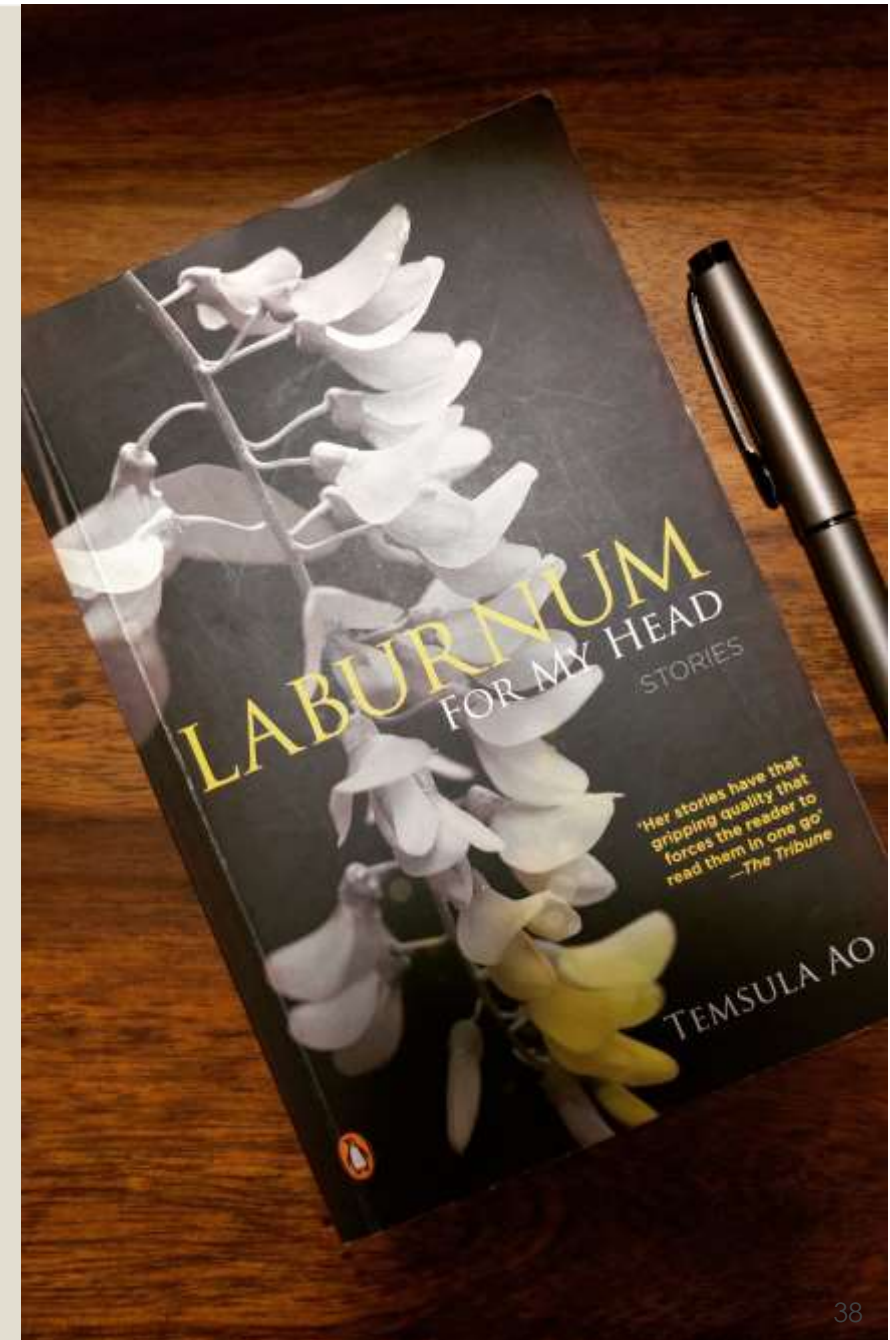
Setting can be just necessary background in some texts, whereas in some texts, they play an important role in generating atmosphere, e.g. science fiction, fantasy, realist fiction.

- Spatial Setting
 - Space and place
 - Town? House? Room? (We know only what is necessary because the entire story is about Lentina's singular fixation with the laburnum)
- Time frame / Temporal Frame
 - How much time elapses during the story?
 - Narrative time (the operation of time): flash-back, flash-forward
- Historical time period
 - internet, DDT, TV?
- Social circumstances (can vary or remain the same)

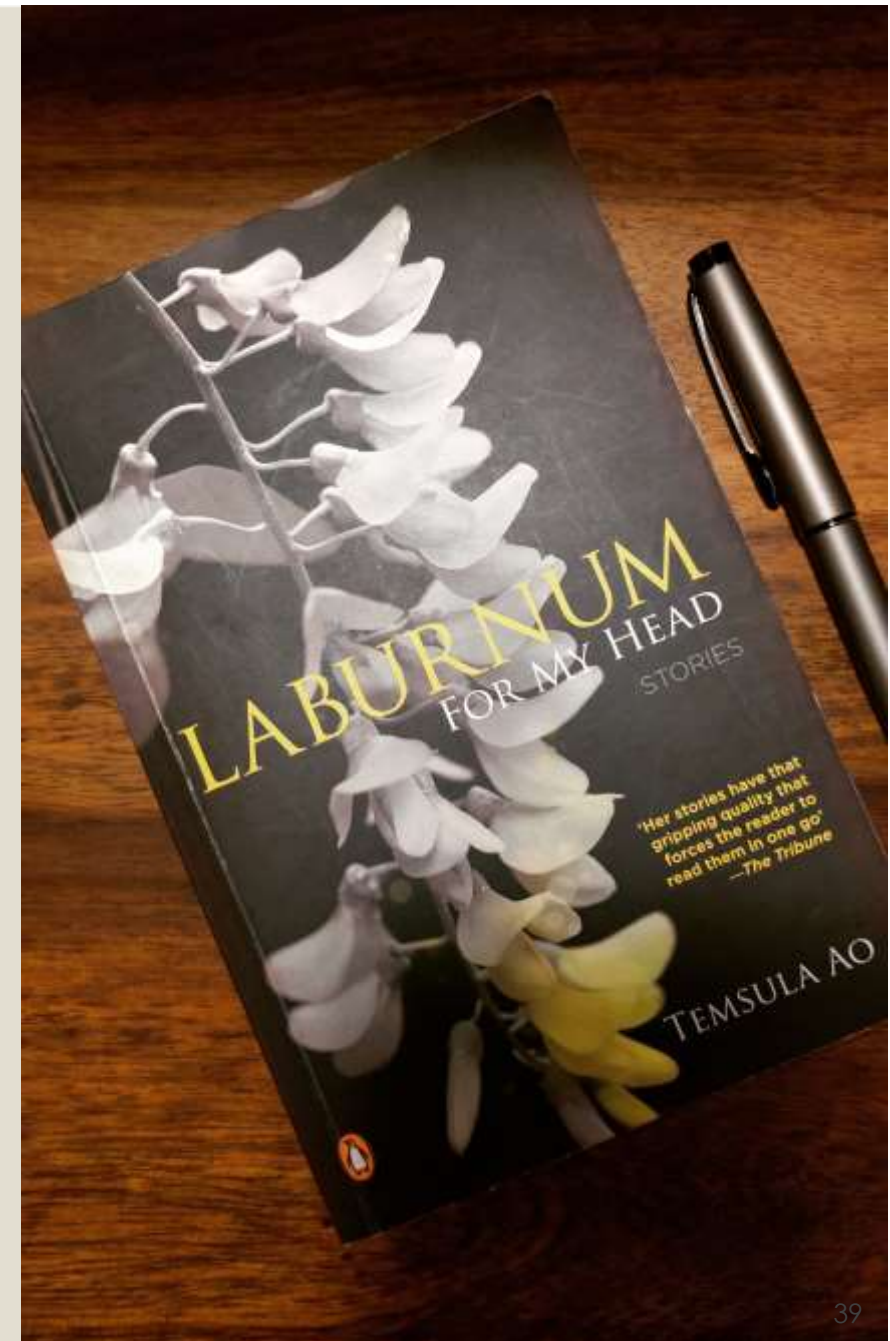


Structure

- How is the text constructed?
 - Which paragraphs involve narrator commenting or addressing the reader directly?
 - Narratorial sign-posting:
 - “But the story is running ahead of itself and must be told from the beginning” (12)
 - “So ends the story of the un-dramatic life of an ordinary woman who cherished one single passionate wish that a humble laburnum tree should bloom once a year on her crown” (20).
 - How much of the text consists of direct speech, i.e. dialogue, and how much of it is reported and descriptive?
 - How does that shape the text and contribute to the meaning we make of it?
 - e.g. Huma R. Kidwai, *The Hussaini Alam House* (2012)

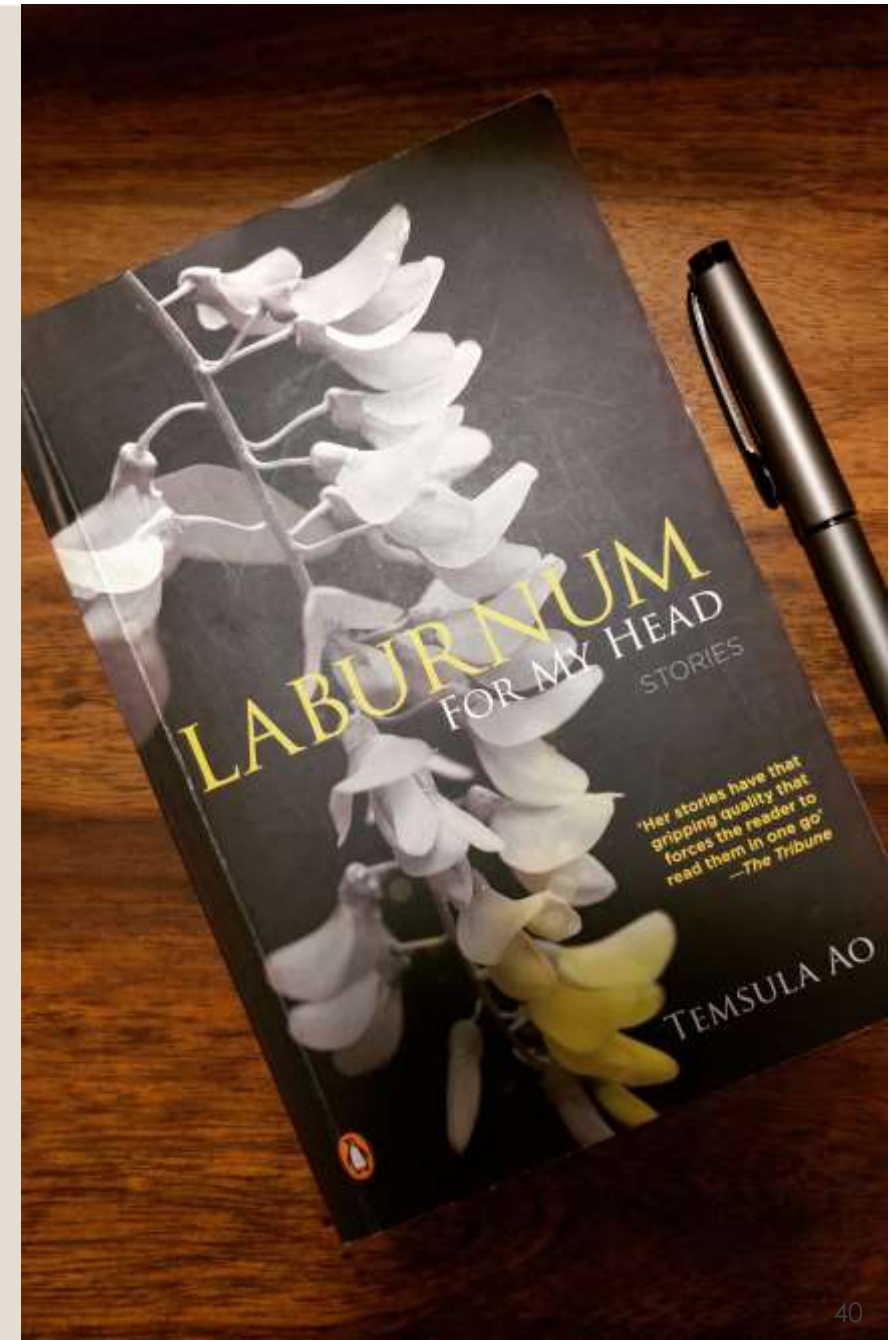


Characters



Characters

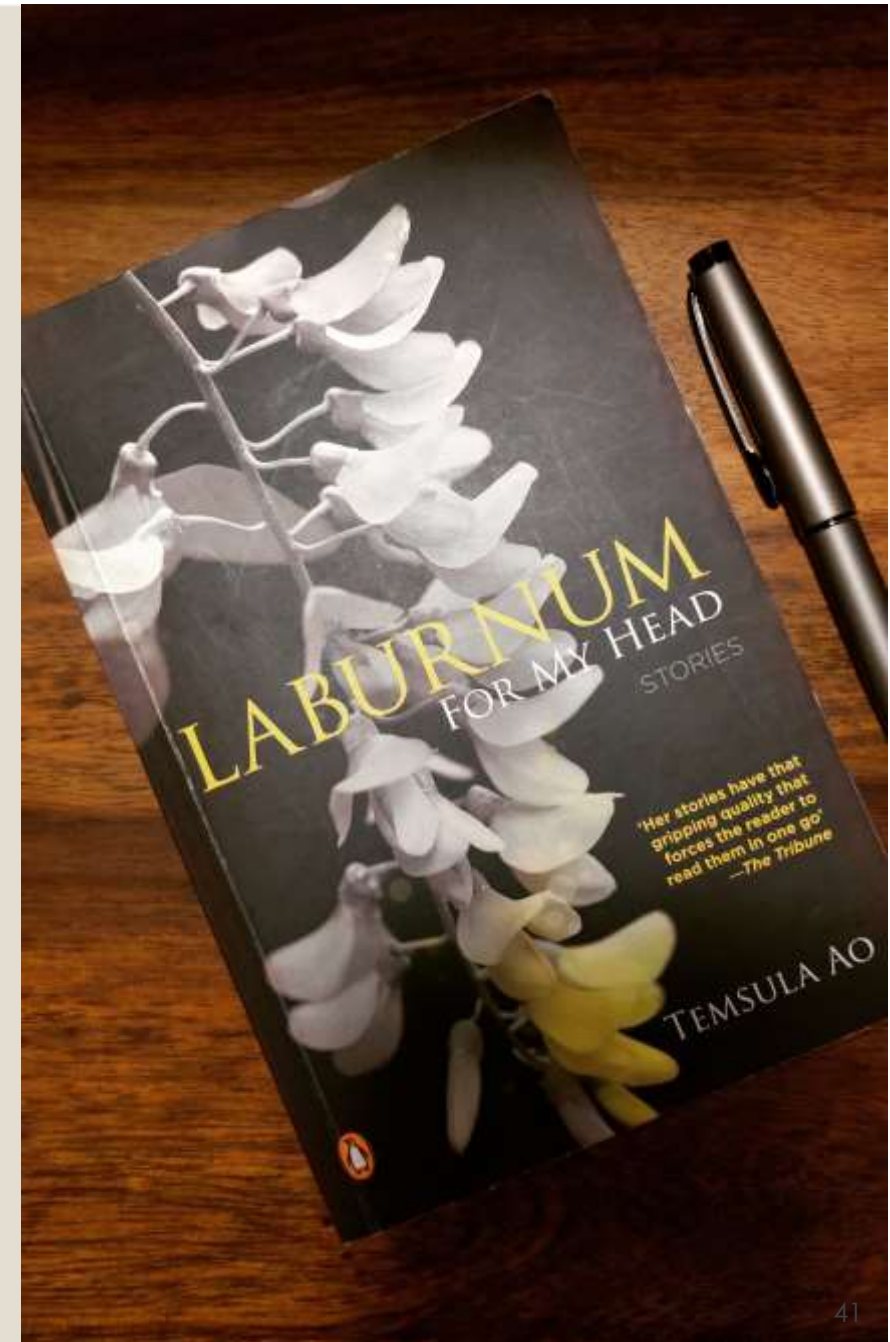
- Characters
 - Figure in a literary work.
 - Flat characters (one-dimensional, simple and simplistic personalities – “kind mother”)
 - Round characters (complex personalities, more believable and plausible);
 - round characters are considered more artistically successful, but there are many successful books and genres where characters are not round, e.g. epic heroes, Sherlock Holmes, while Jane Austen's Emma or Elizabeth Bennet is a round character.



Characters

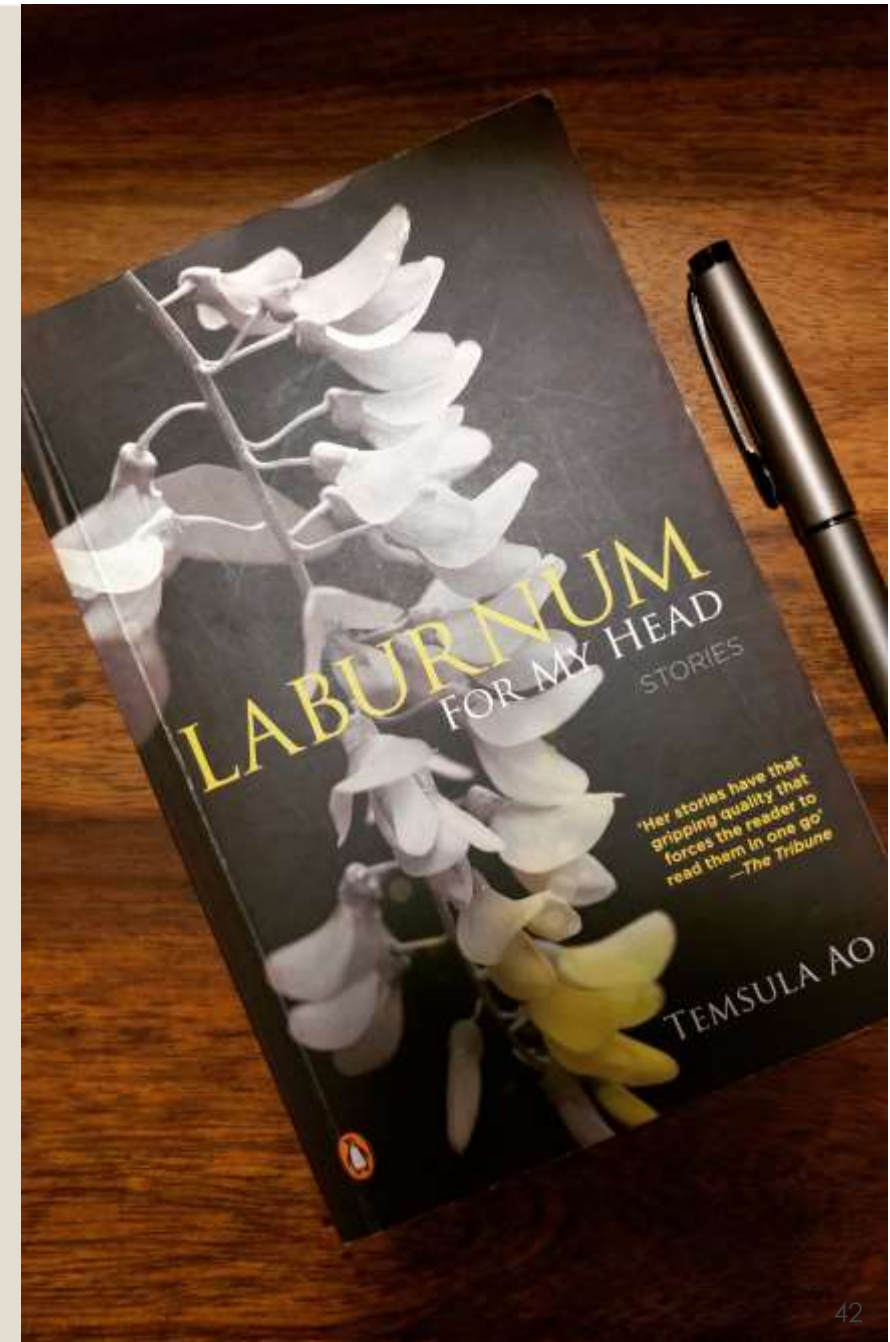
- Showing and telling are two strategies that writers use to reveal character:

“In showing (also called ‘the dramatic method’), the author simply presents the characters talking and acting and leaves the reader to infer the motives and dispositions that lie behind what they say and do. The author may show not only external speech and actions, but also a character's inner thoughts, feelings, and responsiveness to events ... In telling, the author intervenes authoritatively in order to describe, and often to evaluate, the motives and dispositional qualities of the characters” (33-4).



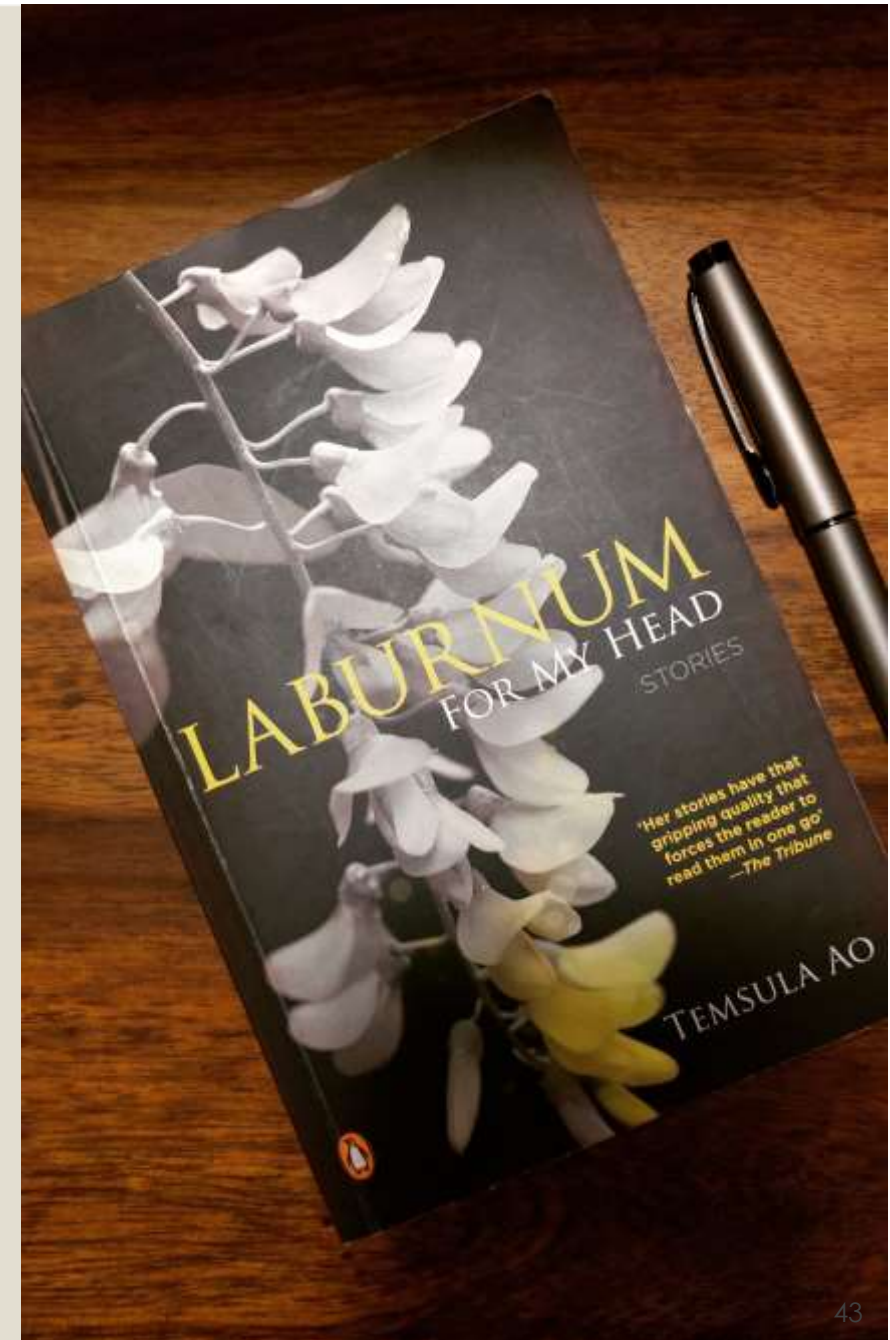
Characters

- So what kind of character is Lentina (bear in mind that a short story does not give a writer enough space to fully develop a character):
 - Flat or round? Showing or telling?



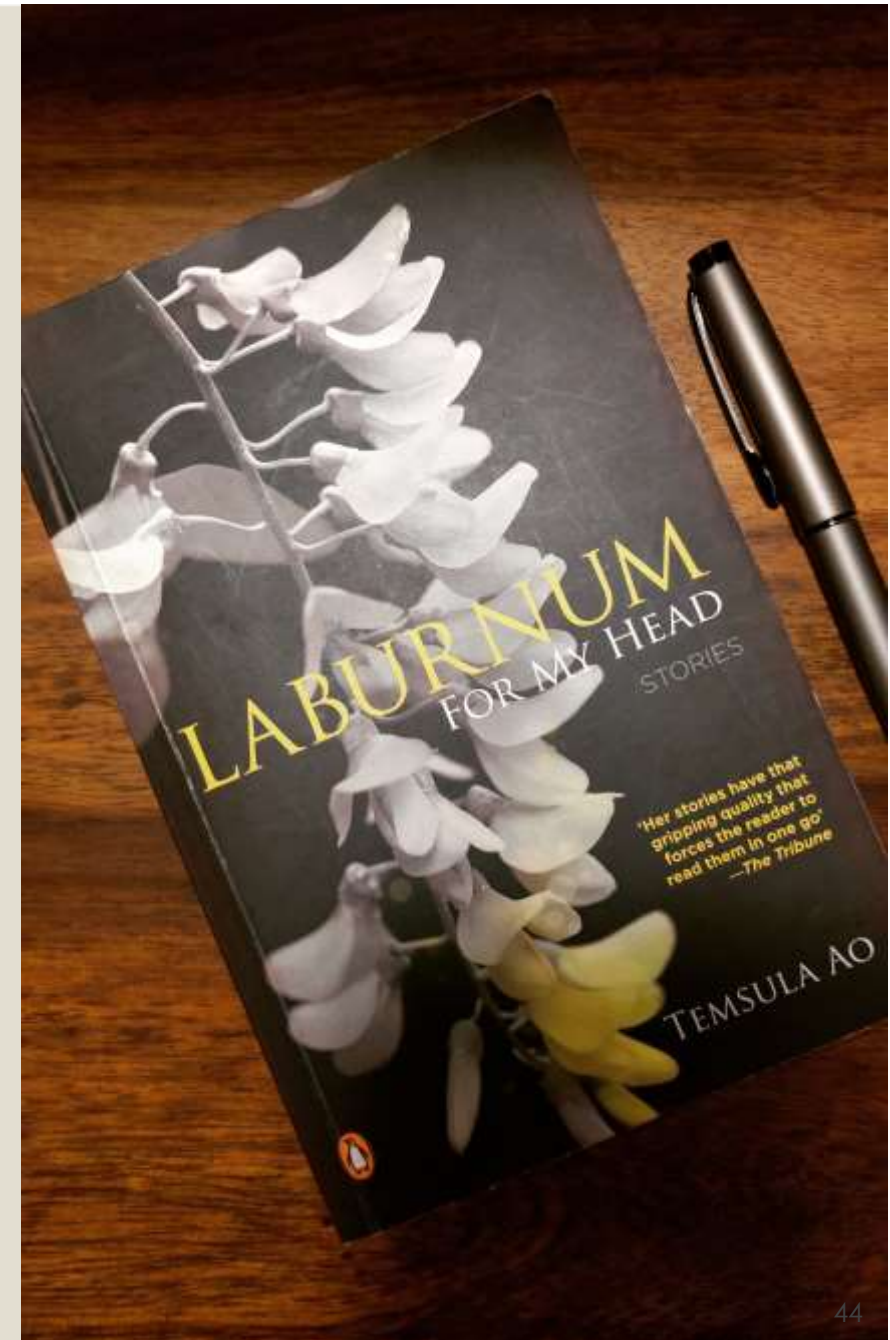
Characters

- What are characters driven by?
- How do they develop?
- How do they interact with each other?



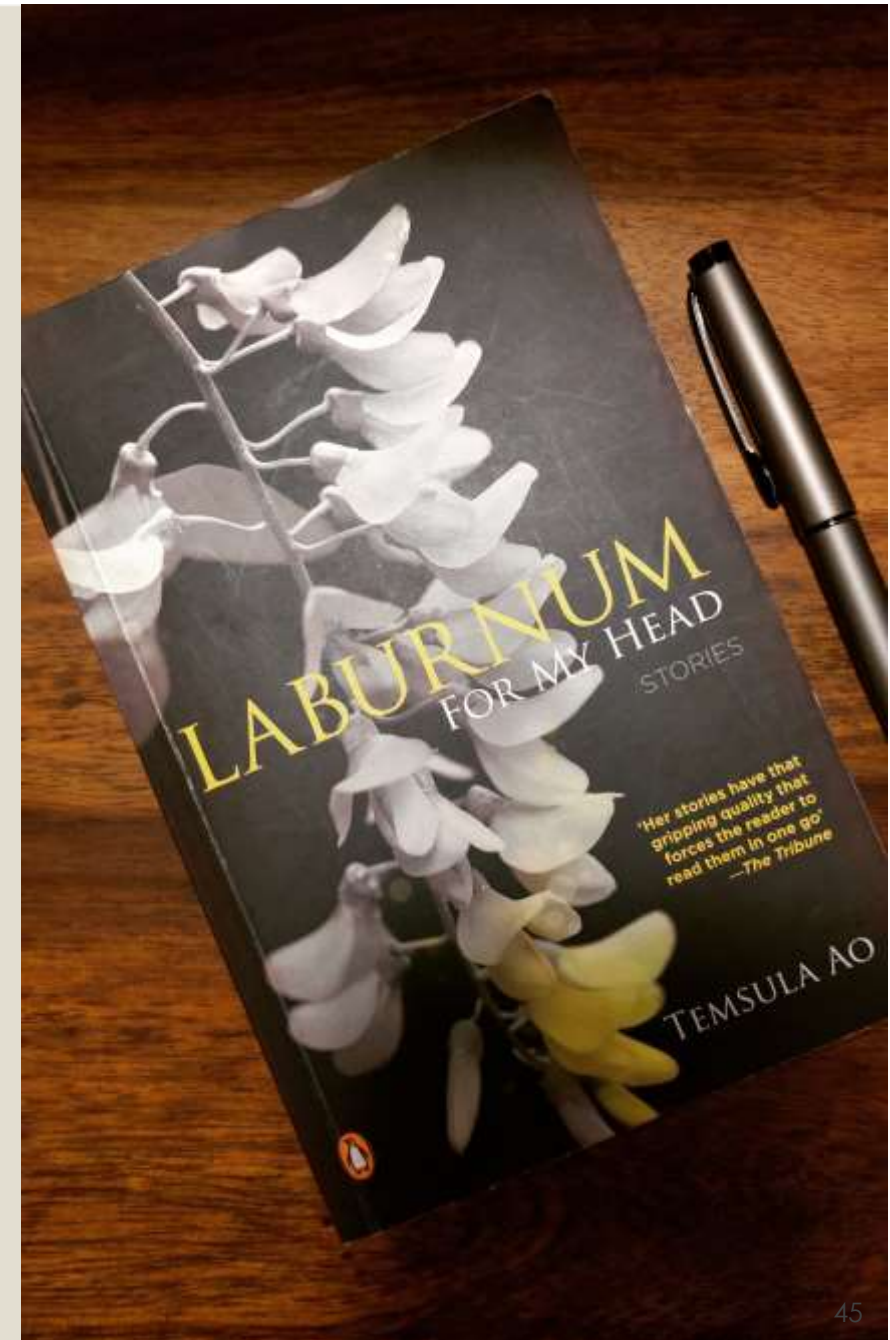
Characters

- Who is Lentina? (class, age, social background, family, education)
- Who are we expected to sympathise with?
 - Her family, who think she is obsessed, or her?
 - How do we know?
 - Who are we rooting for?
 - What do we learn about characters, their motivations, thoughts?



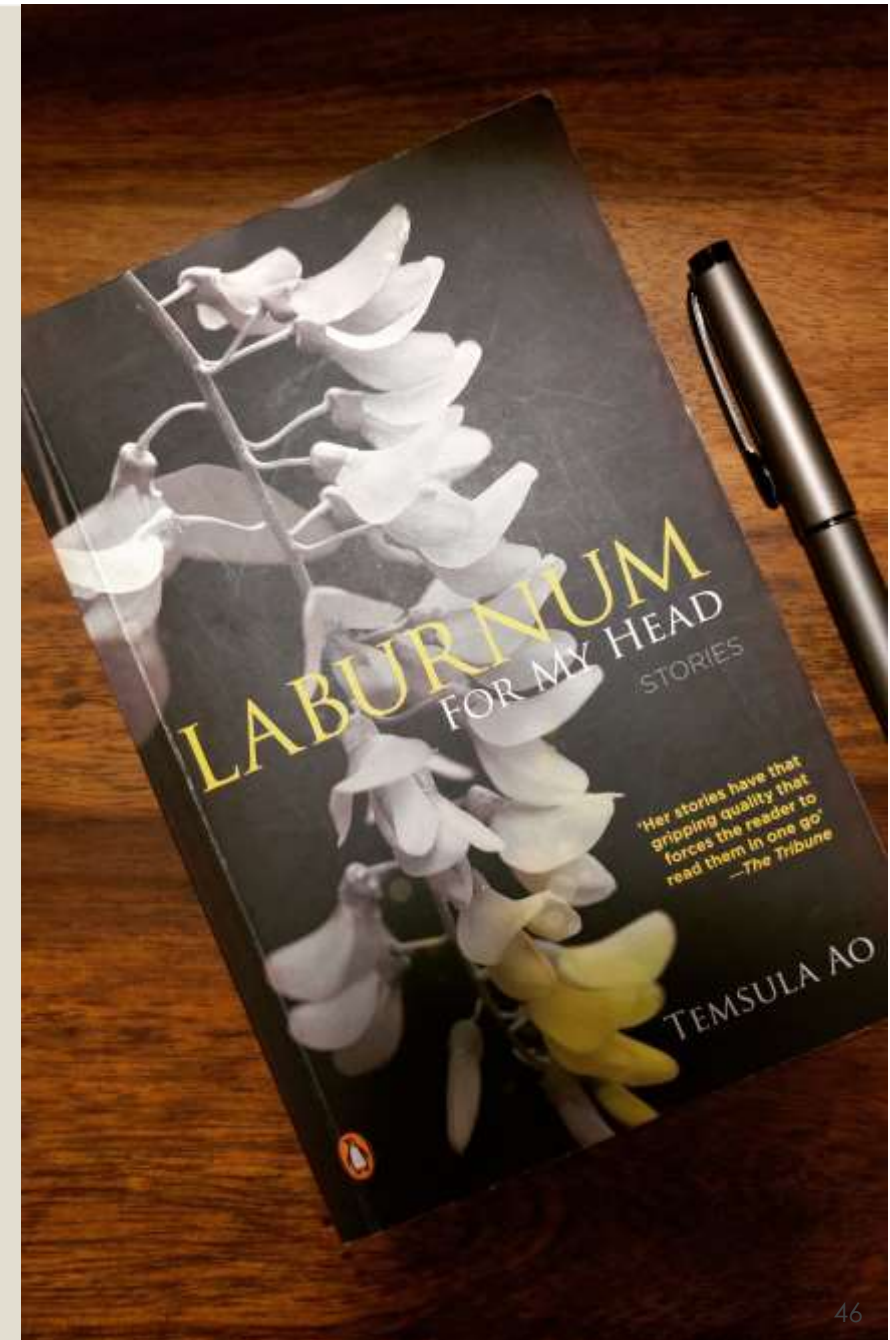
Characters

- Other characters:
 - Babu's son-in-law, Khalong's thoughts
 - furthers our understanding and builds textures around the story
 - Relationship between Lentina and Babu; relationship between Lentina and her family; relationship between Babu and the family
 - evolving and changing
 - Psychological insights into human nature: Khalong concerned about ethics, but quotes more to her anyway! And Lentina knows that
 - self-interest trumps ethics; priorities trump financial prudence



Characters

- Narratorial persona
 - How much access do we have to other people's thoughts?
 - How involved is the narrator in telling the story? (personality of the narrator, extent of intrusion)





Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

A Few Questions

A Few Questions

Meditation on Death (**theme: abstract idea of concept**) through Lentina's obsession with Laburnum (**leitmotif/motif: recurring elements that refer to the theme**)

- A woman singularly driven and preoccupied with one idea, and what that tells us about the human condition: human beings; human heart; exploration of personality, family, and society through this theme.



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

A Few Questions

- Death as a theme in the story:
 - “This consecrated ground has thus become choked with the specimens of human conceit” (1).
 - Culture of death: “mourned and unmourned” – duty by “willing and unwilling offspring and relatives” (2).
 - Death as a theme – cemetery, death of plants, Lentina widowed, Babu widower.
 - Contrast between living tree and its animation, demonstration and display of life – while the elaborate headstones arranged by people as marks of status or piety simply fail to compare.



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

A Few Questions

“Strangeness” as an undertone/overtone threading through the text (trope)

- state of mind of Lentina – the way her character develops is told through her love for laburnum”:
 - “She began to wonder about these accidents in her garden ever since she had planted the laburnum saplings” (3) → unsaid, something that cannot be rationally explained?
 - Human – smiles when she thinks of laburnum at her husband’s funeral.

A Few Questions

“Strangeness” as an undertone/overtone threading through the text (trope)

- How does the writer set up Lentina’s state of mind?
- What do you think of her state of mind?



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

A Few Questions

“After what seemed to be an arduous trek, she settled on a spot in the southernmost tip of the cemetery and began to nod her head, as if she had found what she was looking for. Babu was puzzled and was almost beginning to see what his young masters had said about madam losing her mind. When she gestured to him to approach, he went hesitantly. Motioning to him to walk faster, she pointed to the spot where she was standing ...” (6).



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

A Few Questions

- “fire and intensity in her eyes” (6)
 - Passion unsaid to people, even to Babu.
 - The resources that make themselves available to Lentina are set up in such a way that they suggest supernatural agents at work.



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

A Few Questions

“Strangeness” as an undertone/overtone threading through the text (trope)

- Her luck and the role of chance adds to the charm and the “strangeness” of the story: land just next to the cemetery
- “It was as if she were asking for candy, and not for a place where she would eventually be buried.” (13)
- Khalong’s land → narrative drive – narrative slowly and almost deterministically moves towards the fulfillment of her deep-seated longing.
- Walking barefoot without a shawl – 14. Detachment from family – seeks lone figures.
- Part of the strangeness of the story – “So every May, something extraordinary” (20).



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

XXII

from *Spring and All* (1923)^[1]

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.



Broken Love

Is like an intercepted message

It is a feather swirling emptily
in a dusty trough

It is the sun's broken yolk
at evening

It is this empty room
where I write this poem.

References

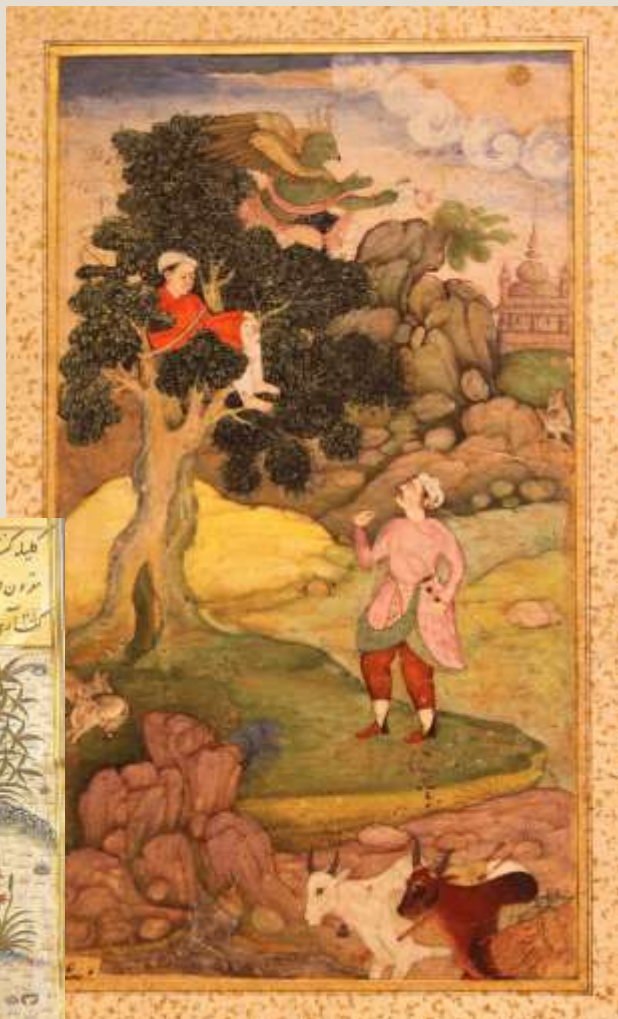
- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Heinle and Heinle, 1999. Seventh Edition. **[pgs. 32-4: “Character”; pgs. 284-5: “Setting”; pgs. 256-60: “Reader-Response Criticism”]**
- Ao, Temsula. “Laburnum for my Head.” *Laburnum for My Head*. Penguin, 2009. 1-20.
- Barnett, Sylvan, et al. *An Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. Pearson Longman, 2008. Second Printing. **[pgs. 101-2 for setting and character]**

- Start reading Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* (2018)



CHARACTERISTICS OF A SHORT STORY

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- Like the novel **genre**, short stories too have **protagonists**. They have **plots** and are narrated from at least one **point of view**.
- Some Attempts at Classification:
 - “Story of Incident” – “course and outcome of events” (Abrams 286)
 - LFMH: premise, quest, and how that turns out
 - LTS: fabular quality, folktale quality – repetition, central motif repeats
 - “Story of Character” – “state of mind and motivation,” “psychological and moral qualities” of the protagonist (ibid.).
- Some stories have a “balance of interest between external action and character.”
- These are easy and convenient divisions – literature is not an exact science because it is based on human expression and humans are complicated and contradictory in their own respective ways.

Basics

- Magnitude or scale of the short story determines its shape and author's choices.
- Different narrative strategies of the short story:
 - Limited number of characters; "cannot afford the space for the leisurely analysis and sustained development of character" (Abrams 286);
 - Social milieu is not as dense and detailed;
 - Setting is minimal;
 - Conflict itself may be longer, but the writer of short stories keeps complications down, resolution of conflict is swift.
 - "The central incident is often selected to manifest as much as possible of the protagonist's life and character, and the details are devised to carry maximum import for the development of the plot. This spareness in the narrative often gives the artistry in a good short story higher visibility than the artistry in the more capacious and loosely structured novel" (286-7).

Key Differences

A yacht race!
A yacht race!

- John Barth on Leo Tolstoy's nightmare about the yacht race – *War and Peace* (1872)

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A yacht race!

- John Barth on Leo Tolstoy's nightmare about the yacht race – *War and Peace* (1872)

“Whatever the truth of the yacht-race story, it certainly sounds to me like the bad dream of a novelist, not a short story writer. That the genre of the novel tends toward inclusion, that of the short story toward exclusion, goes without saying” (Barth 26).

A yacht race!
A yacht race!

- John Barth on Leo Tolstoy's nightmare about the yacht race – *War and Peace* (1872)
 - “Whatever the truth of the yacht-race story, it certainly sounds to me like the bad dream of a novelist, not a short story writer. That the genre of the novel tends toward inclusion, that of the short story toward exclusion, goes without saying” (Barth 26).
- Novelists try to see how much they can leave in, and short story writers try to see how much they can leave out →
Central Tenet of the Short Story.

A yacht race!
A yacht race!



R.K. Narayan (1906-2001)

- Creator of the fictional south Indian town of Malgudi
- Major writer of early Indian English literature
- *Swami and Friends* (1935); *Malgudi Days* (1942); *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955); *The Guide* (1958)
- Humour, rendering human psychology and human nature into words, compression (and other characteristics of the traditional short story genre – offers a good study of the traditional short story)



R.K. Narayan (1906-2001)

- Middle-class life and characters (wrote what he knew about)
- Usually has a detached narrator, above the events, who does not offer an opinion or analysis, just reports and describes. Makes this more authentic and stimulating and reflective for the reader, who arrives at their own conclusion.

Important Characteristics of a Short Story

Compression

Implicativeness

Rendition

Precise observation

- Compression – condensing a long duration of time or experience.

Important Characteristics of a Short Story

- Compression – condensing a long duration of time or experience.

“In about a week he had become the favourite of the place.

The glamour, however, lasted only for a week. Before the end of another week he had lost his appetite” (Narayan 81).

Important Characteristics of a Short Story

Implicativeness – the avoidance of repetition by implied context, previously provided.

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Implicativeness – the avoidance of repetition by implied context, previously provided.

- “Sekhar replied, ‘Please don’t, sir, I think this will do ...’ The headmaster looked stunned. His face was beaded with perspiration. Sekhar felt the greatest pity for him. But he felt he could not help it. No judge delivering a sentence felt more pained and helpless” (75).

Important Characteristics of a Short Story

Implicativeness – the avoidance of repetition by implied context, previously provided.

- “‘Absolutely none, sir ...’ Sekhar said with his voice trembling. He felt very unhappy that he could not speak more soothingly. Truth, he reflected, required as much strength to give as to receive” (75).

Important Characteristics of a Short Story

- Rendition, as opposed to mere assertion (showing, instead of telling)

Important Characteristics of a Short Story

- Rendition, as opposed to mere assertion (showing, instead of telling)
 - “‘Oh, I’ve reconsidered it. I must positively have them here tomorrow ...’ A hundred papers in a day! That meant all night’s sitting up! ‘Give me a couple of days, sir ...’
‘No. I must have them tomorrow morning. And remember, every paper must be thoroughly scrutinized’” (76).
- “The incense sticks burnt low” (75).

Important Characteristics of a Short Story

- Precise Observation

Important Characteristics of a Short Story

- Precise observation
 - “At home the headmaster proved very ingratiating. He sat Sekhar on a red silk carpet, set before him several dishes of delicacies, and fussed over him as if he were a son-in-law of the house” (74).

Important Characteristics of a Short Story

- **Compression**
- **Implicativeness**
- **Rendition**
- **Precise observation**
- However, these are not the only literary qualities of the short story. Qualities change over a period of time as different influences and events condition and shape literature.
- So the aesthetic values of a given genre do not remain the same for all time. Artists always push boundaries and see how far they can stretch without breaking.

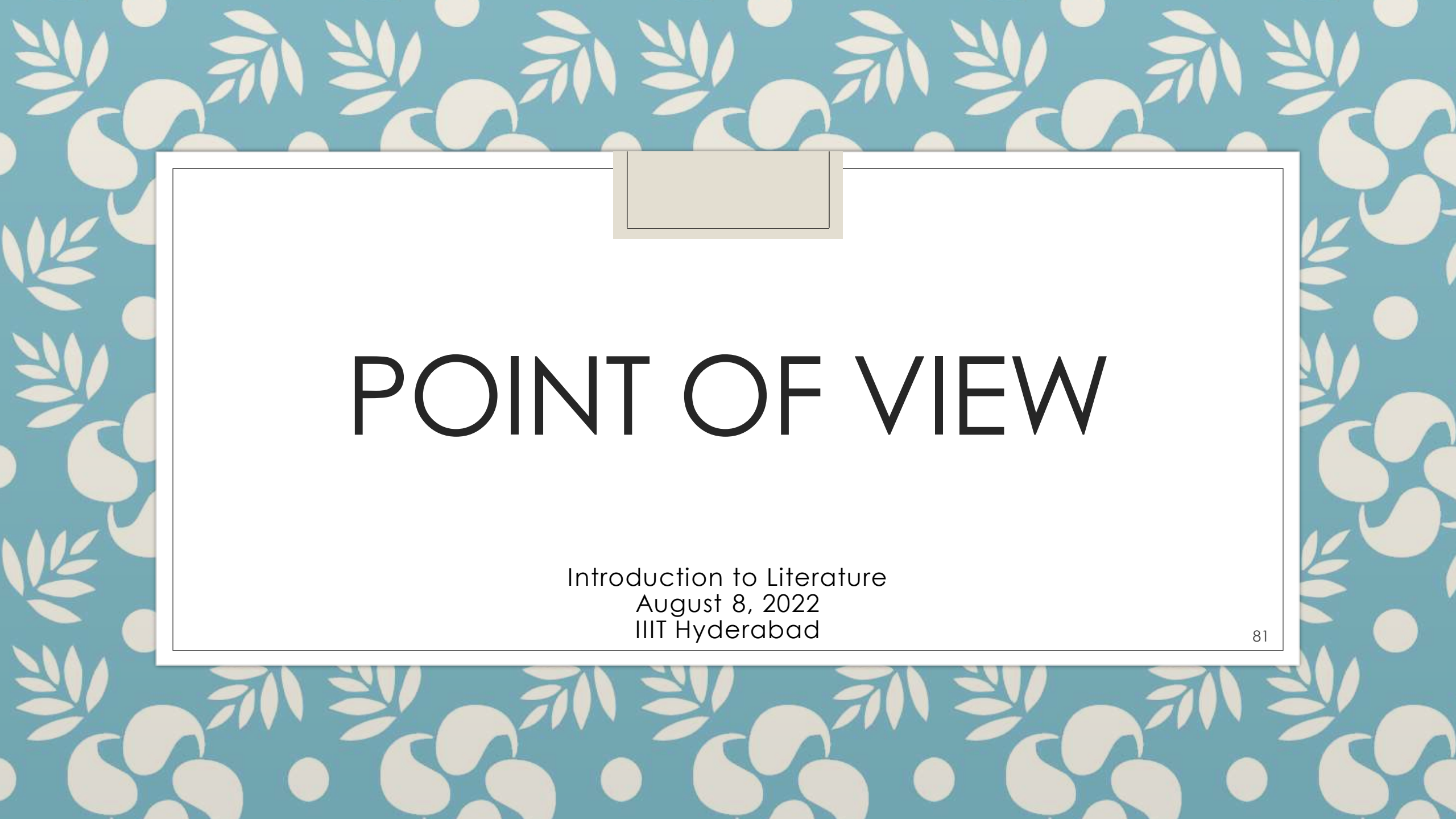
Important Characteristics of a Short Story

- One-sentence short story:
 - “Frame Tale”: Once upon a time, there was a story that began.
- Frame narrative from the frame tale (nested tales):
 - Seven degrees of narrative embeddedness: tale within a tale within a tale within a tale within a tale within a tale within a tale!
 - “their concentric plots were rigged for sequential climax-triggering from the inmost out” (Barth 38).

Barth's Postmodern Experiments with Short Story

References

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Heinle and Heinle, 1999. Seventh Edition.
[pgs. 286-8: “Short Story”]
- Barth, John. “It’s a Short Story.” *Mississippi Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1/2, About the Short Story (Spring, 1993), pp. 25-40.
- Narayan, R.K. “Like the Sun.” *Under the Banyan Tree*. Penguin, 1985. 73-6.

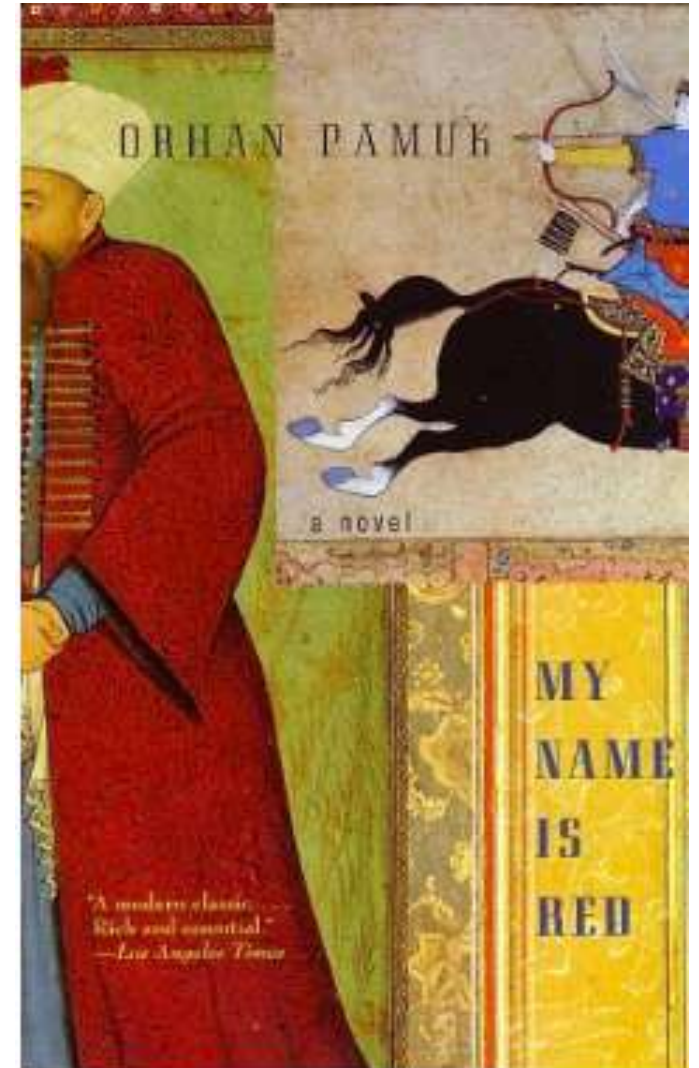


POINT OF VIEW

Introduction to Literature
August 8, 2022
IIIT Hyderabad

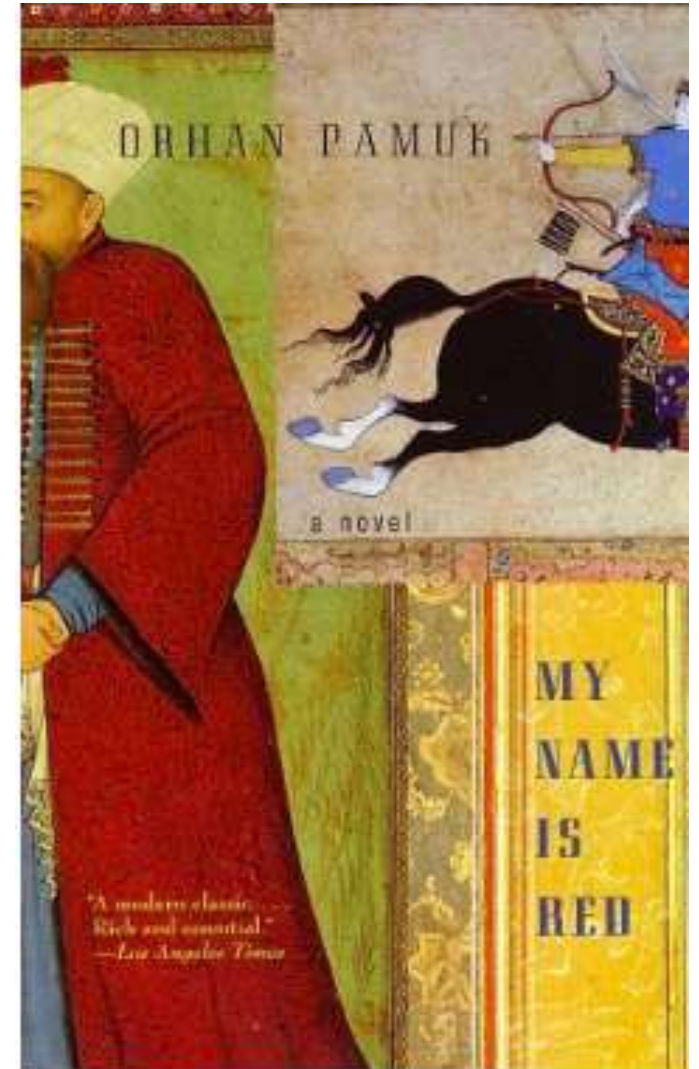
Point of View

- “the way a story gets told” (Abrams 231) – the voice that narrates the story to us in a piece of prose.



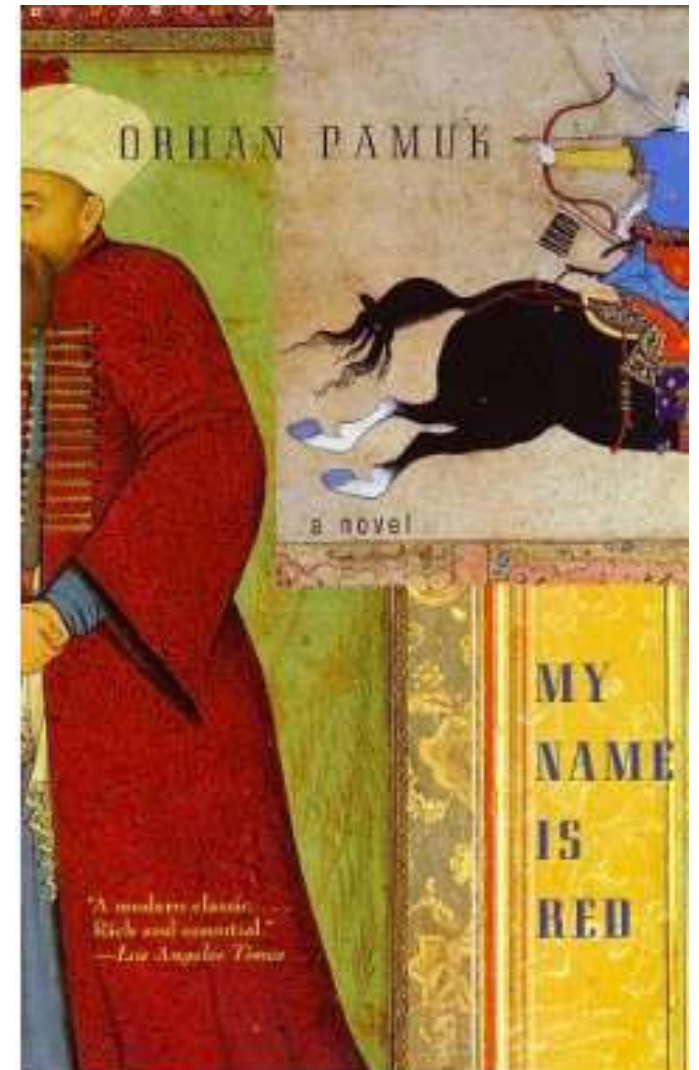
Point of View

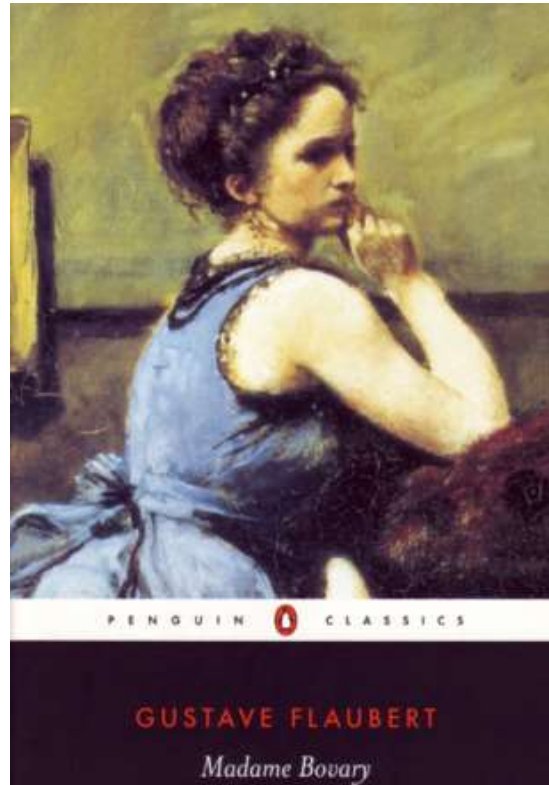
- Narrative voice
 - “the mode (or modes) established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, dialogue, actions, setting, and events which constitute the *narrative* in a work of fiction” (ibid.).



Point of View

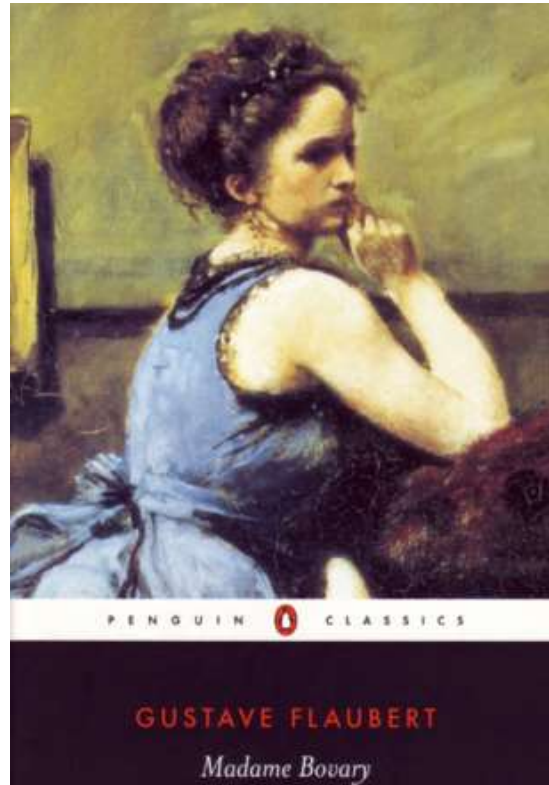
- Increasing importance of the narrator over the past two centuries.
- Writers today can use many points of view in one text, different combinations of first-, third-, and even second-person voice.





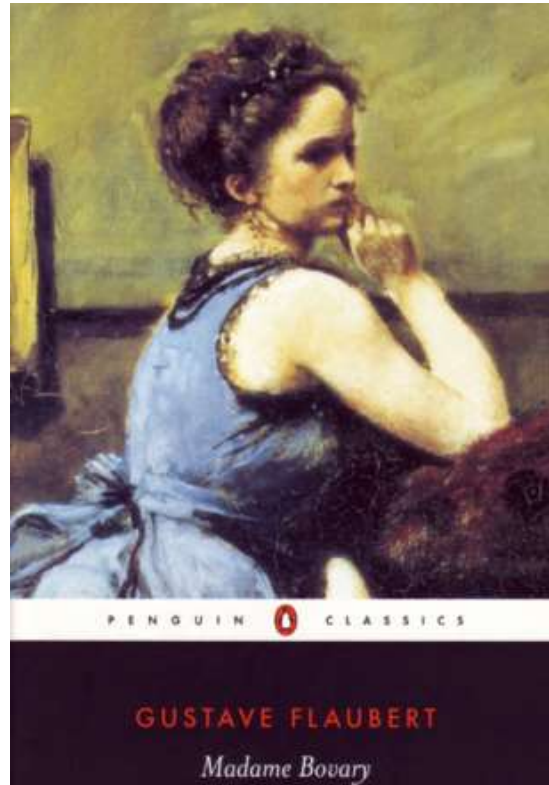
Third-Person Narration

- The third-person narrator is “someone outside the story proper who refers to all the characters in the story by name” (Abrams 231) or pronoun, e.g. “she said,” “the nurses went,” “he ate.”



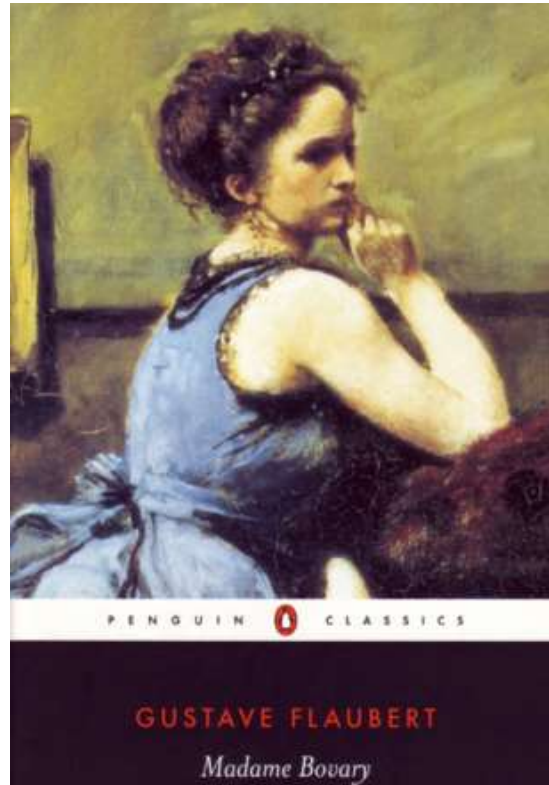
Third-Person Narration

- Different kinds of third-person narrator:
 - **Omniscient Narrator** – knows everything necessary about characters and stories and has total access to their thoughts, feelings, and actions; free to shift from one consciousness/character/time and space to another.
 - **Intrusive Narrator** – not only reports, but comments and evaluates the actions and thoughts of the characters, sometimes expressing personal opinions about them or the story in general.
 - **Unintrusive Narrator** – reports without commentary and opinion; sometimes refuses to access inner feelings or motives of characters.



Third-Person Narration

- **“Focus of narration”**: who tells the story and from the perspective of which character
- **“Focus of character”**: who perceives what is told us in any part of the story

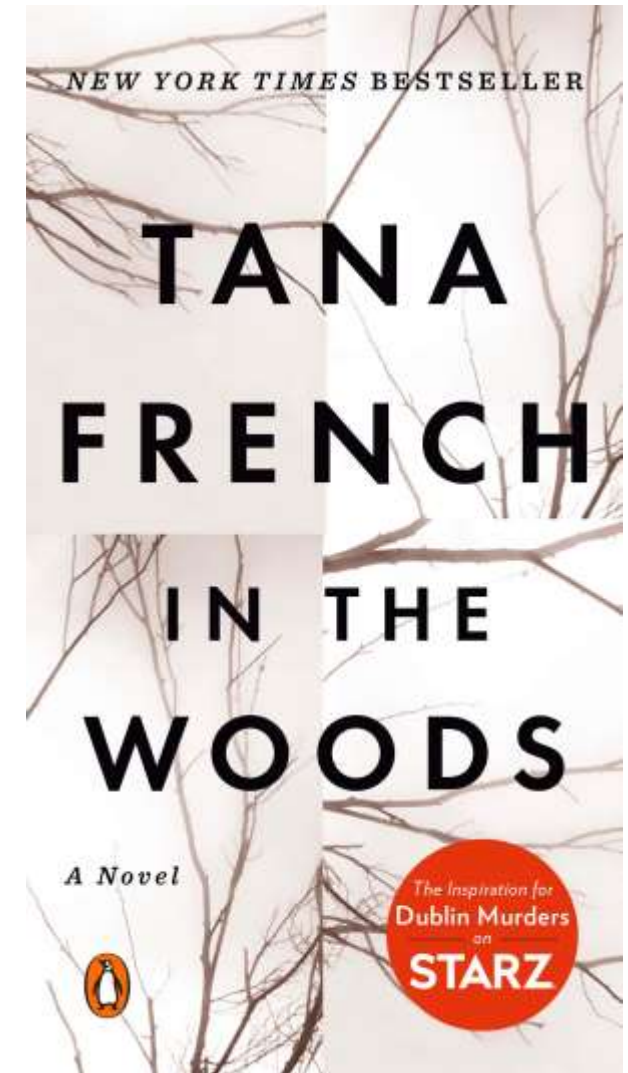


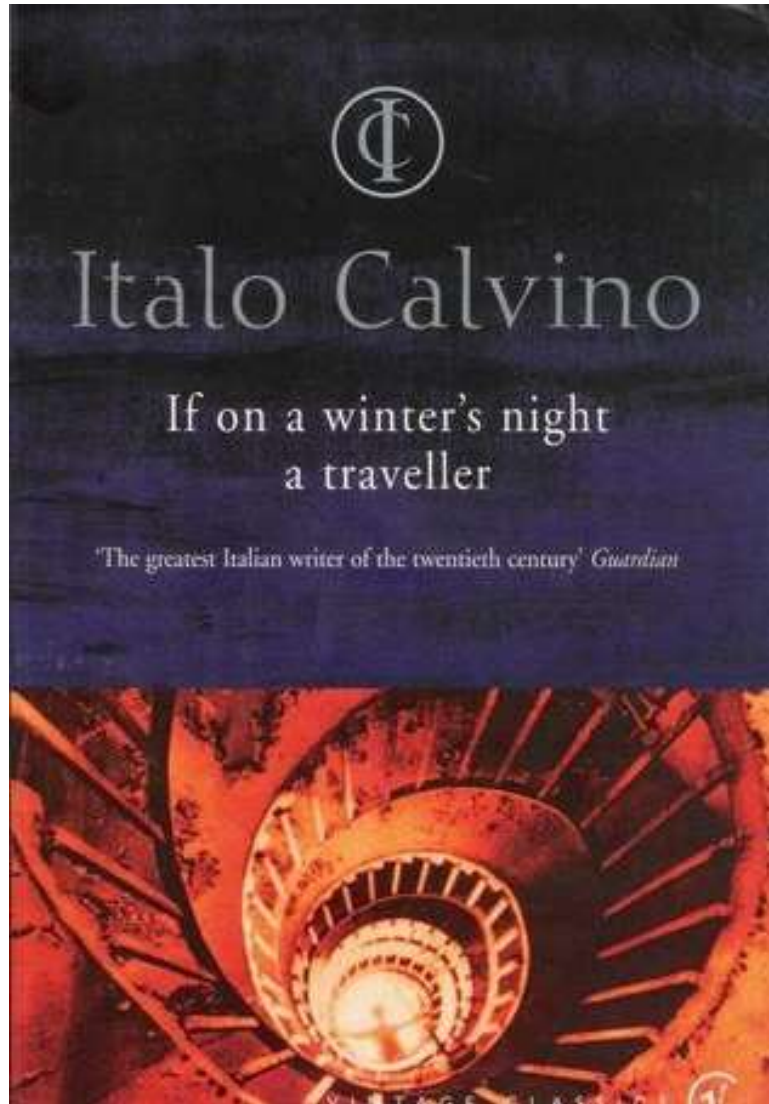
Third-Person Narration

- Limited Omniscience: “stays inside the confines of what is perceived, thought, remembered and felt by a single character (or at most by very few characters) within the story” (Abrams 232).
- Henry James called this selected character the “focus,” “mirror,” “centre of consciousness” (qtd in *ibid.*)

First-Person Narration

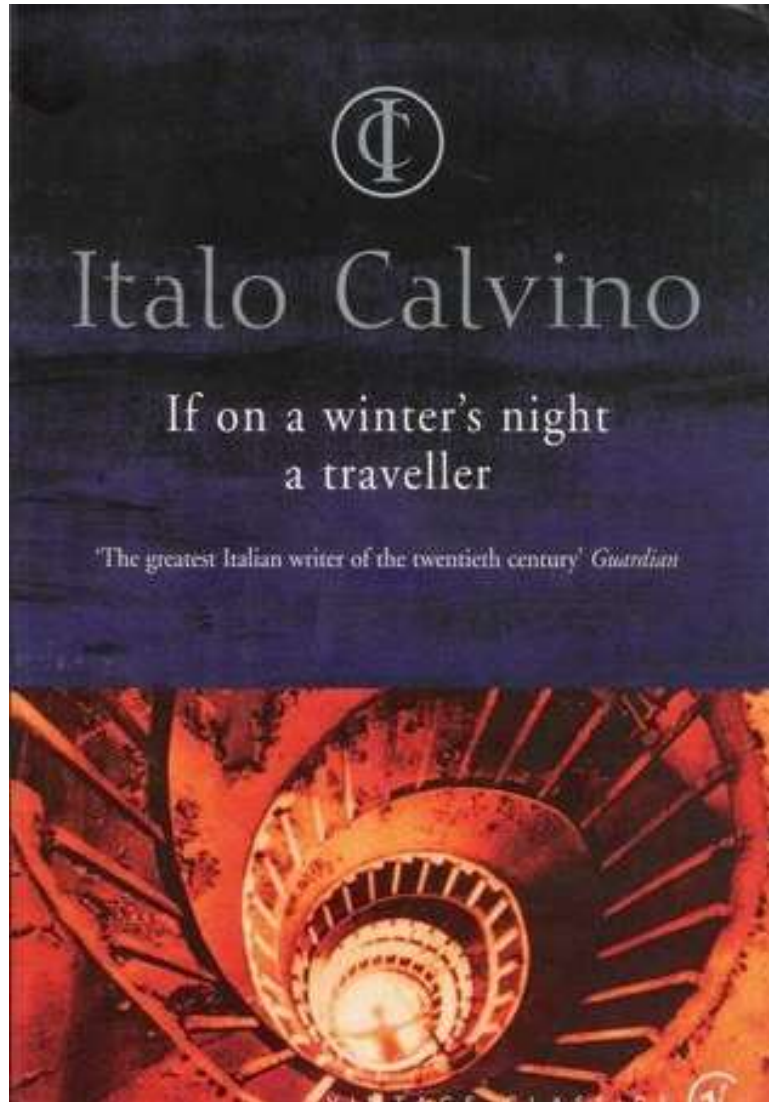
- The first-person narrator is “to a greater or lesser degree a participant in the story” (Abrams 231) and narrates using the first-person pronoun “I.”
- Narrative is limited by what the first-person narrator knows, has experienced, can infer, and/or can learn from other characters.
- Can be a central figure in the plot, a minor figure, or a peripheral one who just happens to be there to witness what happened and report it.





Second-Person Narration

- The story is narrated by a narrator who is addressing another person as “you,” in the second-person voice.
- The addressee could be a character in the story or even the reader.



Second-Person Narration

- **"You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Relax. Concentrate . . . Best to close the door, the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, "No, I don't want to watch TV!" . . . Or if you prefer, don't say anything; just hope they'll leave you alone"** (qtd in Abrams 234).
 - (Calvino involves the reader in the imagination and creation of his novel by addressing and including them in the story)

*(self-reflexive or involuted novel, which incorporates into its narration reference to the process of composing the fictional story itself)