

Literary Texts II 9

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السنة الثالثة

HELLO EVERYONE!

Today, we are going to talk about the story *First Confession*.

Have you read the story?

It is about the confession of the main character in the story who is Jackie. He plays a double role. He is a narrator: he is the one who narrates the story. He is a child of seven years old in the story. He is preparing himself to go to church to make his first confession.

Jackie is telling a story about himself. He begins the story by talking about his **grandmother**. The grandmother never appears in person. She remains invisible, but we know about her through Jackie and what he tells us about her. The grandmother came to live with his family.

The second character in the story is **Nora**; Jackie's sister. He talks about his sister and describes her as being selfish.

The third character is **Mrs Ryan**; who is the teacher of religion. She is teaching Jackie along with other children to how to prepare themselves to the confession. She teaches him how to train himself how to make confession.

The last main character is **the priest**, he is nameless; doesn't have a name. He is open-minded, tolerant.

The grandmother is not a main character, we know quite a lot about her. She plays a very important role in the story, but she is not a main character, she is a secondary character.

Other secondary characters are *Jackie's friend, Jackie's father and mother*, who we never meet. They don't appear as characters.

What I want you to remember is the main characters and the plot. The plot is the organisation of different episodes into one whole

through the rules of causality. The plot begins with conflict between Jackie who is a child and his grandmother who is an old lady. So, it's **the conflict between old and young**. The story begins with generational conflict, conflict between **two generations**.

We have a conflict also between Jackie and his teacher. He tells us that he never liked her.

We also have a **conflict between two opposites**, between conservative and romantic, between **extremism and moderation**.

The plot moves forward. It moves **from external to eternal conflict**. The conflict becomes Jackie's own conflict.

Jackie also has a conflict between himself and his sister Nora. She wanted him to make a bad confession so he will be punished. But he didn't make a bad confession; instead it was a good one. When he makes a good confession at the church, he is rewarded by the priest.

Notice that the journey he makes, he moves from one phase into another. It is Jackie's journey *from innocence* which is childhood *to experience*. He is a child; he is supposed to go to church to make a confession. He goes to church and then he gains knowledge.

In the story we told that he moves from darkness to light. Darkness in his case is ignorance. He admits or confesses all the things he has done in his life, he told the truth, he didn't lie, and he didn't cheat. That's why we said the theme is a journey from innocence to experience and through which Jackie gains knowledge.

The story relies on what we call symbolism. In the story he uses a son as a symbol. When he talks about the time before and after he entered the church. Before he entered the church is darkness and after he entered the church it was sun light. He was relieved that he was not been punished. And he is not a sinner because also there is a question of sin. So, he grows that he is not a sinner.

As we say, everything in the story is narrated through Jackie's voice. In this case we have a subjective narrator because he used the "I" point of view.

Let's read from the story:

All the trouble began when my grandfather died and my

grandmother- my father's mother - came to live with us. Relations in the one house are a strain at the best of times, but, to make matters worse, my grandmother was a real old countrywoman and quite unsuited to the life in town. She had a fat, wrinkled old face, and, to Mother's great indignation, went round the house in bare feet"- the boots had her crippled, she said. For dinner she had a jug of porter and a pot of potatoes with - sometimes - a bit of salt fish, and she poured out the potatoes on the table and ate them slowly, with great relish, using her fingers by way of a fork.

He cannot tolerate her because she is from the countryside; he is growing up in a city, so he didn't like her behavior.

So, we have also a **conflict between city and countryside** life.

When you introduce a character, we call this **characterization**. The first character who was characterized in the story is Jackie's grandmother. He begins by describing her physical appearance, her face, then she is barefooted حافية القدمين, if she wears shoes, she couldn't feel comfortable. This is a description of a lady from the village. Then he said that she uses her fingers instead of a fork while eating. He is telling why he didn't like his grandmother.

The second character that is going to be characterized is his sister Nora in the second paragraph:

Now, girls are supposed to be fastidious, but I was the one who suffered most from this. Nora, my sister, just sucked up to the old woman for the penny she got every Friday out of the old-age pension, a thing I could not do. I was too honest, that was my trouble; and when I was playing with Bill Connell, the sergeant-major's son, and saw my grandmother steering up the path with the jug of porter sticking out from beneath her shawl, I was mortified. I made excuses not to let him come into the house, because I could never be sure what she would be up to when we went in.

He is talking about his sister as a selfish girl and old fashioned like her grandmother.

Bill Connell is his friend who was mentioned one time in the whole story. He is ashamed to invite his friend to the house because of his

grandmother and he made excuses not to let him come in into the house.

The following paragraph is about his parents. His mother was always standing behind him, supporting him, whereas his father was against him because he hates his mother. You know in English the grandmother is called a step mother. So, it is quite normal for Jackie's mother to support him against the step mother.

When Mother was at work and my grandmother made the dinner I wouldn't touch it. Nora once tried to make me, but I hid under the table from her and took the bread-knife with me for protection. Nora let on to be very indignant (she wasn't, of course, but she knew Mother saw through her, so she sided with Gran) and came after me. I lashed out at her with the bread-knife, and after that she left me alone. I stayed there till Mother came in from work and made my dinner, but when Father came in later Nora said in a shocked voice: 'Oh, Dadda, do you know what Jackie did at dinner-time?' Then, of course, it all came out; Father gave me a flaking; Mother interfered, and for days after that he didn't speak to me and Mother barely spoke to Nora. And all because of that old woman! God knows, I was heart-scalded.

This paragraph gives us an idea about the split inside the family.

First Jackie introduces the characters, then he is going to introduce the theme in the following paragraph:

Then, to crown my misfortunes, I had to make my first confession and communion. It was an old woman called Ryan who prepared us for these. She was about the one age with Gran; she was well-to-do, lived in a big house on Montenotte, wore a black cloak and bonnet, and came every day to school at three o'clock when we should have been going home, and talked to us of hell. She may have mentioned the other place as well, but that could only have been by accident, for hell had the first place in her heart.

He talked about this old lady Ryan who is very similar to his grandmother. She is "well-to-do" which means she is rich.

She told us about this teacher that she came in the middle of the day when it is hot and the children were hungry and tired and they want to

go home, she make an appearance and ask the students to stay and listen to her talking about hell. She is so fond of scaring the children by talking about hell.

The following paragraph he is telling us an example of these scaring methods.

She lit a candle, took out a new half-crown, and offered it to the first boy who would hold one finger - only one finger! - in the flame for five minutes by the school clock. Being always very ambitious I was tempted to volunteer, but I thought it might look greedy. Then she asked were we afraid of holding one finger - only one finger! - in a little candle flame for five minutes and not afraid of burning all over in roasting hot furnaces for all eternity. 'All eternity! Just think of that! A whole lifetime goes by and it's nothing, not even a drop in the ocean of your sufferings.' The woman was really interesting about hell, but my attention was all fixed on the half-crown. At the end of the lesson she put it back in her purse. It was a great disappointment; a religious woman like that, you wouldn't think she'd bother about a thing like a half-crown.

She told the child to put his finger in the flame, it hurts. Imagine yourself being thrown into a furnace. She used a wrong way of teaching little kids how to behave. She is scaring them; she is a bad teacher of religion. Instead of talking about rewards and how your life will become better if you worship God, instead of that, she reminds children of punishment. That's why they hate her.

On the other in the end in the church, the priest do the opposite, he rewarded Jackie for telling the truth.

The following paragraph p. 82: we can call it a story within a story. All the examples paragraph of the teacher are sub-stories within the main story.

Another day she said she knew a priest who woke one night to find a fellow he didn't recognize leaning over the end of his bed. The priest was a bit frightened - naturally enough but he asked the fellow what he wanted, and the fellow said in a deep, husky voice that he wanted to go to confession. The priest said it was an awkward time and wouldn't it do in the morning, but the fellow said that last time he went to confession,

there was one sin he kept back, being ashamed to mention it, and now it was always on his mind. Then the priest knew it was a bad case, because the fellow was after making a bad confession and committing a mortal sin. He got up to dress, and just then the cock crew in the yard outside, and - lo and behold! - when the priest looked round there was no sign of the fellow, only a smell of burning timber, and when the priest looked at his bed didn't he see the print of two hands burned in it? That was because the fellow had made a bad confession. This story made a shocking impression on me.

The last sentence is Jackie's comment. He felt that he might do the same and he will burn to death.

Continue reading the whole story. Now move to page 90.

The next time, the priest steered me into the confession box himself and left the shutter back the way I could see him get in and sit down at the further side of the grille from me.

This is the priest of the main story.

We have two priests: one is in the story within a story, and the other is the nameless priest in the main story.

Here Jackie arrives to the church, he enters into the confession box, he sits and he is ready to make a confession.

The next time, the priest steered me into the confession box himself and left the shutter back the way I could see him get in and sit down at the further side of the grille from me.

'Well, now,' he said, 'what do they call you?'

'Jackie, father,' said I.

'And what's a-trouble to you, Jackie?'

'Father,' I said, feeling I might as well get it over while I had him in good humor, 'I had it all arranged to kill my grandmother,'

He seemed a bit shaken by that, all right, because he said nothing for quite a while.

This is the first secret Jackie told the priest. The priest is not judgmental, so he didn't say a word and judge him immediately. He listened to him. He thinks that the kid must have a reason why he

wants to kill his own grandmother. He didn't tell him that you are sinner and you are going to go to hell, he wanted to understand why.

'My goodness,' he said at last, 'that'd be a shocking thing to What put that into your head?'

'Father,' I said, feeling very sorry for myself, 'she's an awful woman.'

'Is asked. 'What way is she awful?'

'She takes porter, father,' I said, knowing well from the way Mother talked of it that this was a mortal sin, and hoping it would make the priest take a more favorable view of my case.

'Oh, my!' he said, and I could see he was impressed.

'And snuff, father,' said I.

'That's a bad case, sure enough, Jackie,' he said.

'And she goes round in her bare feet, father,' I went on in a rush of self-pity, 'and she know I don't like her, and she gives pennies to Nora and none to me, and my dad sides with her and flakes me, and one night I was so heart-scalded I made up my mind I'd have to kill her!'

The priest was listening. Maybe he is enjoying this kind of imagination. Look what he said:

'And what would you do with the body?' he asked with great interest.

'I was thinking I could chop that up and carry it away in a barrow I have,' I said.

'Begor, Jackie,' he said, 'do you know you're a terrible child?'

'I know, father,' I said, for I was just thinking the same thing myself. 'I tried to kill Nora too with a bread-knife under the table, only I missed her,'

He continued the confession.

'Someone will go for her with a bread-knife one day, and he won't miss her,' he said rather cryptically. You must have great courage. Between ourselves, there's a lot of people I'd like to do the same to but I'd never have the nerve. Hanging is an awful death.'

'Is it, father?' I asked with the deepest interest - I was always very keen on hanging. 'Did you ever see a fellow hanged?'

'Dozens of them,' he said solemnly. 'And they all died roaring.'

'Jay!' I said.

'Oh, a horrible death!' he said with great satisfaction. 'Lots of the fellows I saw killed their grandmothers too, but they all said 'twas never worth it.'

You see how he deals with the situation.

We have to stop here for today. Please continue reading it.

Next time we are going to move to page 111, Literary Criticism, then we are going to move to page 147, Drama and Dramatic Arts.

Student: Should we read the whole story or just the paragraphs that you selected?

Professor: No. You have to read it all sentence by sentence and word by word. It is very important.

«THANK YOU»



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مؤسسة العائدي للخدمات الطلابية

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