

charged, assured, not a word wasted, balance and extraneous are all vague and nearly meaningless analytical or technical ideas.

nothing in the text about narrator remembering or writing.

as if someone is concealing it?

um, telling what?

what does revelatory mean here?

Glover handout. samples of bad readings of Elizabeth Tallent's story "No One's a Mystery"

This concise short story is charged with characterization. Tallent's authorial voice is assured; not a word is wasted. She strikes a balance with regard to imagery and dialogue. And her details are motivated by action. The 18 year old girl narrator remembers this day vividly for one obvious reason: it is her birthday. Her older married boyfriend Jack has given her a diary (another reason to be writing and observing). And in the first paragraph we are treated to a host of telling details about the inside of Jack's pickup: it is dirty, the ashtray filled with butts, country music playing on the stereo, a bottle of tequila between his legs, his nearly new denim jeans bleached white, his crotch zipper golden. None of the details appears extraneous; it is all motivated by the opening tension marked out by Tallent's plot device: Jack's wife's Cadillac approaches in the distance. He pushes the girl's head down. This is what she sees.

not exactly but close.

triggers, a pop critical word that mean nothing technical.

correct about conflict more or less

Not only the description of Jack gives his character away. The dialogue is revelatory. We hear of the things that bug him about his wife: leaving the headlights on during the day, driving the speed limit, her relentless predictability.

not in text

Yes, fawn is a good word.

Why apt? Who decides?

After noticing Jack's old boots with the stitched-in elk heads, scuffed toes, and wedged-in clod of manure, the narrator remarks on the pop tops littered on the floor, which she says a kid could cut a foot on. This triggers the central action of the story: a debate of sorts, in part gently romantic and flirtatious, in part sarcastic and cynical — a conflict between Jack's vision of their future together and the narrator's. As the narrator prepares to hear Jack's version first, we have a nice block of description: the butterfly of dust on her jeans (butterflies being an apt image to associate with an 18 year old). She looks out and we have some exposition of the setting, a warm Wyoming day, the fawn and yellow wheat fields and their hidden irrigation ditches. Note the appropriateness of the adjective "fawn" to describe not only the color of the wheat (light yellowish brown) but its associated noun, referring to a young deer, or the verb form "to bring forth young" — From her youthful, innocent perspective, the world is a fertile, dazzling, romantic place about to come into flower.

Where is this in the text?

Not in text.

Story summary, not analysis.

Jack's vision though is a dramatic contrast. While both their visions start the same way ("I can't imagine anybody loving anybody more than I love Jack."), Jack — the older, more cynical, world weary, unchangeable, and fatalistic male — spins off into a prediction of a relationship that will have gone bust in a year. In two he will have been forgotten. Her vision is a foil is his. She sees devotion, domestic bliss, a quick wedding (to which Jack sneers, it must have been a quick divorce), followed by babies and happy days of child rearing. For a moment, Jack's cynicism is arrested, ever so briefly, as he admits to her "That's nice." He likes her vision, but he is quick to add, he believes in the certainty of his. The narrator wants to believe that deep within, in his "heart of hearts", Jack is redeemable, that a romantic lies dormant, waiting to be roused. With his parting shot in the story (Jack gets the last word), he tells her that the smell of the baby's breath wouldn't be vanilla, but a bittersweet one.

And so the story finishes. Open-ended, inviting us readers to decide on their fate. The story's central themes are left for us to ponder. How predictable are we? Can people change their ways? Are young people fated to be perpetually naive? Are older people doomed to fatalism and cynicism? Whose version of the future is truer? What are the implications of your answer to that question? This brings us around to the story's title. Is it true that No One's a Mystery? And we

This is "garbage writing" with no reference to the story text.

Um, what has this got to do with what is written in the story?

Words fail me. Is the narrator going to be in therapy? Where is that mentioned?

Not in the story even if you read futher.

also need to reconcile the title with the John Hiatt song "It Hasn't Happened Yet", covered by Rosanne Cash. In the lyric, she sings "Nobody's into Me / No one's a mystery". Which character is going to take ownership of this lyric? At first take we might say Jack, but in time, the narrator might appropriate it for her own therapeutic purposes.

Reading further into the story, we see some intriguing complexities. Jack, who expects to be forgotten, has given her a diary, which is used for writing and for remembering. Does Jack, cynic that he is, secretly want to be remembered by her, to be memorialized? One would assume he would like not to be forgotten, but he fears with a crass certainty that he will. Note also the foreshadowing in the first line of the sotry, that the lock on the diary "didn't seem to want to work," an ill omen for their relationship. We might also speculate on the narrative occasion for writing the story. At one point is the narrator sitting down to tell us this story? Is it the first thing she writes in the diary? Is it later? Is she still with Jack at this point, or is already part of her past?

Jack's character needs certainty, predictability. He doesn't change. His character is static. The narrator, we assume, is going to be dynamic. She probably wouldn't, and shouldn't stand by her man. At some point she will see it Jack's way, but this is going to be a pyrrhic victory for Jack, who will have either been found out by his wife or dumped by the narrator. We imagine the narrator might look back on her times with Jack with regret and shame. Her overcoming of this first affair with an older man, if it goes as Jack predicts, will very possibly be the acid that corrodes her romantic, idealized visions, but it also means the loss of something likeable, endearing, and special. Hence the bittersweetness. Tallent has taken a snapshot at the critical moment in this relationship, right before it turns from sweet to sour.

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No One's a Mystery by Elizabeth Tallent is about a 18 year old girl. She is pushed down on to the floor of her boyfriend's truck by her boyfriend, Jack because he sees his wife's Cadillac in the distance. The floor is filthy and the car stunk of stale cigarettes. They had been sharing a bottle of Tequila. Rosanne Cash is in the tape deck singing, "Nobody's into Me, no one's a mystery.

Once the wife passes, the girl is allowed back up on the seat and they talk about the birthday present Jack gave her for her 18th birthday. He said, "I know what you'll be writing in that diary." He goes on to say how first she will write how much she loves him but in the future will write how she doesn't understand what she ever saw in him. Of course, she disagrees.

This is a very short story at less then 3 pages but it says a lot. It is well written and entertaining but with quite a bit of symbolism. For instance, I am pretty sure the diary represents the future. Also Rosanne Cash was the perfect one to be playing in the back round. I was able to clearly visualize the whole story.

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How does Jack's present to the narrator, the five year diary with a latch and a key function symbolically in the story?

The diary represents the student, the latch the student's reluctance to do their own thinking, and the key the true learning that they will gain if they answer their own questions.

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Fore-shadowing, yes.

Speculation w/ no basis in text.

Interpreting Jack's character.

The verb assume and the verb imagine ( twice) signal pure speculation w little relation to text.

I love this: 2 theories about the symbol of the diary. Is it a symbol?

Characterization by interpretation--these words are not actually in the text and don't seem correct.

Reader reaction to characters. Nothing in the text about this.

Not in the story.

The story, "No One's a Mystery" by Elizabeth Tallent explores the relationship of two characters, whom are both rather disputable. The young girl in the story remains unnamed and could be considered naive and dim-witted while the guy, Jack, is a chauvinist pig, who thinks he is God's gift to women. With that being said, the final scenarios at the end described by Jack and the girl are no surprise from the way in which they celebrate her eighteenth birthday, the way Jack treats this girl, and how this girl can possibly put up with a guy like him. Jack is one of those characters where you just want to take your hands, rip him out of the book, and strangle him. Any true man would not celebrate his significant other's birthday the way he did with the girl. For a present, he gives her a diary, probably old and used, with a latch that does not even work while they spend the day in his dingy truck, hiding from his wife and drinking tequila. As they sit there, they begin

Reader venting in lieu of analysis.

What she sees in him at all remains a mystery. One wonders why this girl could even be in a relationship with a guy like Jack in the first place. Therefore, it is no surprise that each of them have different scenarios of their futures. As for the girl, whose name remains anonymous to readers, she is just one of those people who you just want to shake and ask, "What the heck are you doing with a guy like him?" She is not too intelligent either as she stays with Jack, a sexist man who has no respect for her or her feelings. Had he any respect for her, he would have at least put some thought into her special day instead of spending it in his pickup wearing his manure-covered boots with a bottle of tequila against his crotch. Had he cared about her at all, he would have at least had the decency to divorce his wife for this girl instead of forcing her to hide at the floor of his truck just to save his own butt. Even so, it is pathetic the way she lets him push her head down to avoid his wife from seeing her while she inhales the musk of his cigarettes. First of all, Jack gives her a careless birthday present and treats her like dirt while she is naive enough to put up with it all. It just goes to show that she is so naive and oblivious to being in an intimate relationship with somebody, and as a result her predictable scenario of having kids with Jack is all part of her immaturity. Perhaps, it is because she has no one to love her. After all, it's bad enough that he is cheating on his wife, but it's even worse that he's cheating on her with an eighteen year-old girl, whom he still considers a "kid" and has no respect for at all. Consequently, neither Jack's nor the nameless girl's visions of the future are a shock to the readers. The girl fantasizes about having a family with Jack, despite the fact that Jack is saying in years they will be broken up and she will have forgotten about him. From the way he treats the girl now, it is no surprise he does not see a future with her.

Within fiction, authors often use the persona and substance of a specific character to portray a certain truth. Whether or not the naive character uncovers this truth triumphantly or plummets to a fated downfall is solely up to the character. In both Frank O'Connor's "First Confessions" and Tallent's "No One's A Mystery", naïveté between both narrators is exhibited under two dissimilar outcomes through the prevail of a "wise" youth and the downfall of an idealistic dreamer. Both stories share a similar use of elements and conventions to help place emphasis on the lesson learned, and strengthen the morality of the story.

Incoherent.

~~The characters, as depicted in both stories, share a significant individual that foils the other to help highlight the various facets of the main character's personality. In "First Confessions", Jackie is portrayed as an innocent child who displays ignorance as well as a lack of~~

Platitude--reader pretending he has read a lot of fiction and come to this stunning conclusion.

Seems to be about the bizarre idea that the character has some say in how the story goes.

Reader pretending to know jargon.

In this essay, the reader focuses on the word naïveté which does not appear in the story and makes that the theme of the analysis. It is not clear to me that Tallent wants the girl to appear naive.

bias. No change is expressed in Jackie's behavior whether in the Church confessional or at home. Distinctions of this naivety in behavior is shown when he confesses to the priest stating, "I had it all arranged to kill my grandmother...I was thinking I could chop that up and carry it away in a barrow I have." Jackie's absolute admission to murderous intentions presents his lack of understanding upon the matter. In contrast to Jackie is his sister Nora. Nora holds a hypocritical "church" persona in which Jackie is able to perceive with his slight wisdom of youth. Compared to Jackie, Nora only proves to show somewhat decency when she steps foot into church. She mocks Jackie by exhibiting "pity" exclaiming, "Oh, god help us! Isn't it a terrible pity you weren't a good boy? Oh, Jackie, my heart bleeds for you! How will you ever think of all your sins?" Little to Nora's knowing, the priest understands Jackie's sense of fear and rewards him with subtle penance. The overall understanding of the situation is displayed as Jackie realizes that the perception of confession is not all it is inclined to be.

In "No One's A Mystery", the narrator is depicted as an immature optimist who lacks the true understanding of commitment. She appears to be blinded by the nature of her "lover", Jack. As the narrator holds the naïveté of youth, Jack possesses the wisdom of experience. He holds a cynical yet realistic outlook on the overall outcome of their "secret" relationship with each other. Jack's awareness of the situation is administered when he states, "In a year you'll write, 'I wonder what I ever really saw in Jack. I wonder why I spent so many days just riding around in his pickup. It's true he taught me something about sex..." but the narrator replies to the statement, "I won't write that." Both characters share a different perspective on the future as Jack realizes a inevitable end while the narrator idealizes a never ending, romantic adventure. Through his statements, it is implied that Jack has contributed in similar affairs prior to the one engaged currently. Even though the narrator has been wrapped in a deep love for Jack, it can be stated that she was not the only one. The distinction of maturity levels separates the mature, married one from the immature, "single" one. Jack's exhibit's a lack of change in which will be the acid that corrodes the narrator's romantic, idealized visions of the future. Unfortunately, similar to Jack's former lovers, the narrator is bound to face the imminent doom when Jack searches for new prey to feast on.

Not in text.

Where in the text?

Interesting reference to theory of character change. But this theory is unexamined, assumed rather than explored.

In summation, naïveté is displayed under two different perspectives with two dissimilar outcomes in the stories discussed. The naïveté of Jackie resulted in an achievement of self awakening and understanding of situations more clearly. In contrast, the naïveté of the narrator in "No One's A Mystery" expressed no change but will prove to have a broken heart as time elapses. The personality and outcomes of these characters proved to stylistically be displayed through their individual foils in their respective stories.

The three stories have in common contrast and archetype. The horrors of Le Guin's and Jackson's stories lie in the fact of human suffering and sacrifice for the purpose of the well-being of the greater majority. There is a common understanding that the suffering is necessary. In Tallent's story, the contrast is between the reality and the ideal. The ideal of love and marriage with Jack will never be a reality. To a degree, there is also juxtaposition between the sacrifice tradition in "The Lottery" and the reality of its true effect. Questioning this effect emphasizes the horror of the event. In all three stories, the symbolism is drawn from the common human experience, and often from the psychology of the subconscious. This provides each story with an

Use of the idea of a character foil to pretend to technical knowledge. Jack isn't so much a foil; he is part of a conflict pair which is a bit like a foil but far more significant structurally. The wife is also a foil, a contrast to Jack.

Analyzing the story for theme, a generalized tag.

This essay is going to talk about symbolism and the subconscious. But the subconscious is not mentioned in the story. Anything said about the subconscious is purely speculative.

Generalizing about life to explain what the story is about.

The reader finds a name for the narrator that never appears in the story.

Speculating on state of mind.

atmosphere that forces the reader towards a conclusion that is not pleasant.

In the short story, "No One's A Mystery", Tallent briefly explains this story. Life consist of very many choices that should be made through the right state of mind. Even though there is not anyone there to look upon you all the time, you should always be able to discover what's right from wrong. The characters in this story are acting out of curiosity and getting a thrill and even a little pleasure. In other words, she romanticizes his thoughtless, selfish actions.

In life people sometimes romanticize a situation or relationship rather than see it in the dirty light of reality. For example, after being shoved to the floorboard of the truck, Mary begins to see her new found settings in a non-existent positive light. Even though Jack's pushing her to the floor, symbolizes their relationship and the roles that they play, she sees it merely as part of the trials they must endure in order to pursue their future together. While on the floor, she even looks at his old boots through rose colored glasses. Mary sees the, "frayed thread...manure between the heel and the sole," but she then recalls how they are, "the same boots he had been wearing for the two years I'd known him." These tattered, gross boots become precious to Mary because of the two years they represent in her life: Jack and her being together. After viewing his boots, Mary turns her attention towards the floor to spot pop tops. She is quick to make conversation about them, "There are about a hundred pop tops on the floor, did you know that?" Clearly Jack must know this because it is his truck and most likely his pop tops, but deep down Mary realizes how little the couple actually has to talk about. Their conversations consist of music, pop tops, and smoke filled dreams; therefore, M...

"Symbolizes" is perhaps not quite the right word here. To symbolize is to let one thing stand for another whereas pushing the narrator down actually enacts their relationship. Maybe it is a symbol. Not the way I would talk about it. Every action in the story will be a subset of the larger conflict.

But "deep down" is not in the story text. Once again the illusion of hyponia, the under-meaning backed up with speculation beyond the text. As soon as a reader says deep down or assume or implies in connection with a text, we know he is going off the rails.

No kidding. This is a perceptive reading.

Nothing about this in the actual text.