

## UNIT ONE

### (a) A PIECE OF STRING by Guy De Maupassant

#### Questions for discussion:

The voice that narrates this story does not belong to any character in the story and has a point of view independent of the characters in the sense that it has knowledge that none of the characters possesses; in particular, it knows everything relevant to the story that the main character knows and more besides. What is the function of this surplus of knowledge? Why does the narrative voice expend so much description in such a brief text upon the manners and habits of the peasants in the story? Does the difference in point of view with respect of knowledge accompany a difference in point of view with respect to ethical judgment—a difference, let us say, in a sense of values? Throughout the tale, Maître Hauchecorne tells what the narrative voice calls “his story”? In what respects is the story told by the narrative voice and the story told by Maître Hauchecorne the same story? In what respects are they different stories? Or should we say that they are versions of each other? Would the *basic schematism* apply to them in the same way? The townsfolk, too, have a version of Maître Hauchecorne’s story, one in which, we are told, Maître Hauchecorne might well have figured as a clever fellow but instead it makes him look a fool. Can you explain why a relation of the same events (the story as told by the townsfolk) might have brought credit upon Hauchecorne but actually makes him discreditable? In the end, Maître Hauchecorne dies of the effort to make his version of “his story” prevail. What values are promoted by a story in which one dies in this way?

### (b.) “The Killers” by Ernest Hemingway

#### Questions for discussion:

The narrative voice in the short stories of Ernest Hemingway is famous for the absence of a deeply marked point of view. In one story, indeed, the text consists entirely of a dialogue between a man and a woman, with no narrative description, other than “he said” and “she said”. And yet the narrative voice follows the point of view of individual characters in respect of knowledge; it knows what Henry knows, sees and relates what Henry sees and relates, then shifts to Nick. How marked are the shifts in narrative point of view from the standpoint of knowledge? Does the shifting of point of view in this respect make for any difference in conveying a sense of values? Siodmak’s film opens with what is apparently a simple translation of the text of the written story into the form of a film script. What is lost in this transition? What information does the film convey to the viewer that is not conveyed by the written text? Suppose (what is very nearly but not quite the case) that the speech in the film was simply, without addition or subtraction, the speech of the characters in the written story. Would the film have enhanced the story or diminished it? What information is conveyed in the written text that is not conveyed by the film and why do you suppose that the film-makers eliminated it?