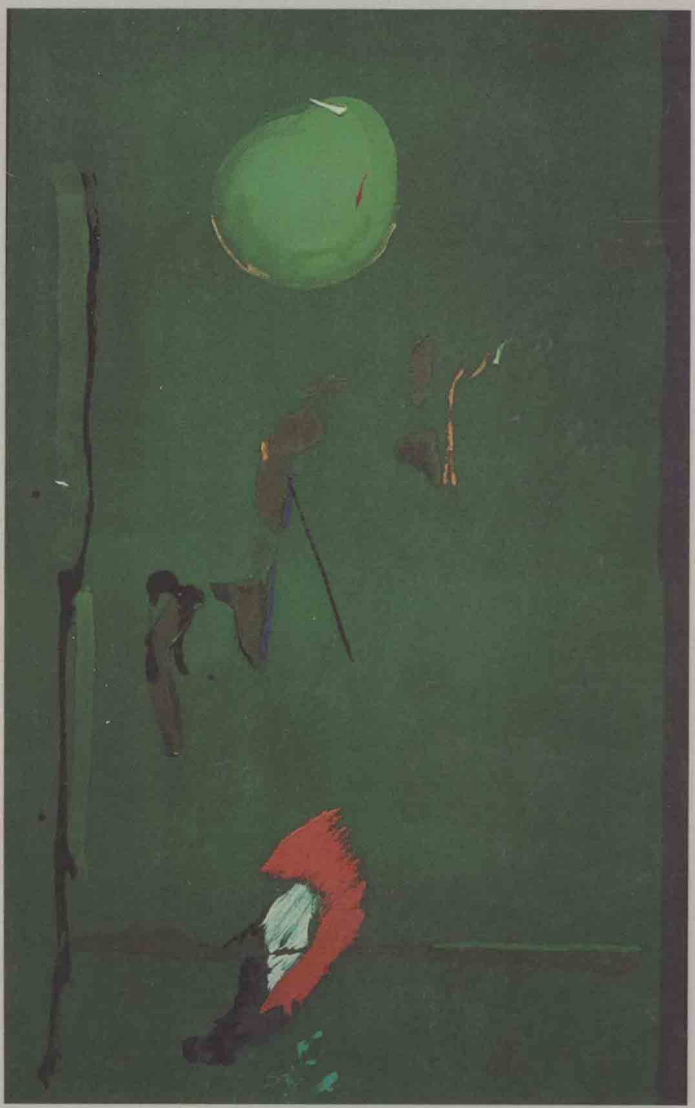
THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT FICTION



SHORTER
FOURTH
EDITION

R.V. CASSILL

THE
Norton Anthology
OF
Short Fiction

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Brown University

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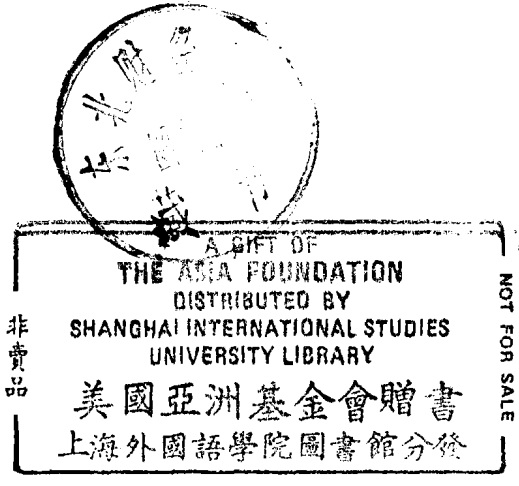

Preface

The first principle for composing the ideal fiction anthology is self-evident: Fill it with stories that discriminating readers have liked most. "Nothing, of course, will ever take the place of the good old fashion of 'liking' a work of art or not liking it," said Henry James. He called this the "primitive" and the "ultimate" test—stressing at the same time the necessity of other critical tactics and measures to be employed along the way. As usual, James was right.

It can be taken for granted that the anthologist likes the stories he has included, but that is not quite enough. Teaching is a collective enterprise. So, in assembling the contents of this book I leaned very heavily on the advice, opinion, and preferences that my publishers had assembled from correspondence with teachers of fiction at colleges and universities across the country. In a real sense, then, the table of contents represents a collaborative effort. This is a collection that has met James's fundamental test of being liked by many experienced and devoted readers.

An anthology designed as a teaching instrument must also, however, entice and guide those who are just learning to like what has long been delighting others. It must provide the calculated variety that permits the teacher to lead the way with the least encumbrance and the largest resources to draw on. While this text makes no pretense of displaying "the history of the short story" in a systematic way, the selections were made with a view to supporting those historical interpretations that classroom teachers might elect to develop from it. The chronological table of contents provides the groundwork for such an approach.

Discreet footnoting was designed to make each piece accessible to the contemporary student reader. Questions appended to the stories will help students reflect on stylistic and topical features and may also outline the shape of class discussions or themes. Many questions are phrased to increase students' awareness of the technical options available to the storyteller, since in assembling the collection I chose works that will demonstrate the spectrum of contemporary techniques and show, in the work of earlier times, that technical variations are in themselves part of the meaning of fiction.

The amplitude of the text has permitted the inclusion of more than one story by several important writers. Where this is the case, care was taken to suggest the range as well as the particular voice and

manner of the author. Partial lists of each author's books point the way to wider reading.

The Glossary is a handy compilation of those critical terms most useful in a disciplined classroom discussion of fiction. And, since talking constructively about stories is so crucial a part of the experience that begins with reading them, I have shaped an introductory part of the book as an initiation to that rewarding practice. The short selections in "Talking about Fiction" are the gleanings of a lifetime in which I sought—and tested in the classroom—examples that would show with maximum brevity, clarity, and force the truly fundamental characteristics of the storyteller's art.

A glance at the table of contents will show you that many things in this book have been frequently anthologized. Some have never appeared before in anthologies. In the old as in the new, the freshness and vitality of the collection as a whole was the governing consideration. The goal was to put together a very large group of stories that would, in detail and overall design, express both the living tradition of short fiction and the culture of which it is a part.

For their generous and invaluable help in the movement toward that goal I want to thank M. H. Abrams, Cornell University; Donald K. Adams, Occidental College; Martha Y. Battle, University of Tennessee at Martin; Steven D. Blume, Marietta College; E. C. Bufkin, University of Georgia; Pat M. Carr, University of Texas at El Paso; Thomas Cooley, Ohio State University; Richard C. Day, Humboldt State University; James E. Evans, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; Suzanne Ferguson, Ohio State University; H. Ramsey Fowler, Memphis State University; John R. Griffin, Southern Colorado State College; Cyril Gulassa, De Anza College; Carolyn Heilbrun, Columbia University; Mary Hesky, Goucher College; Michael Hoffman, University of California at Davis; Irene Honeycutt, Central Piedmont Community College; William L. Howarth, Princeton University; Michael Joyce, Jackson (Michigan) Community College; Sylvan M. Karchmer, University of Houston; Anne Thompson Lee, Bates College; Frank Lentricchia, University of California at Irvine; Michael McKeon, Boston University; Rose Moss, Wellesley College; Raymond M. Olderman, University of Wisconsin; Guy Owen, North Carolina State University at Raleigh; James K. Robinson, University of Cincinnati; Robert Storey, University of Pennsylvania; Walter Waring, Kalamazoo College; Shirley Yarnall, The American University; James L. Yoch, University of Oklahoma. My assistant Wayne Eason deserves special thanks for his help in preparing the manuscript.

R. V. CASSILL

Preface to the Fourth Edition

In a wisely witty poem Marianne Moore says that the truly vital elements of poetry are important because they are "useful." That adjective may startle us, because we are not perhaps accustomed to thinking of poetry as utilitarian. Is it useful for planting and harvesting, for opening cans, for nailing up a wall? Of course it is not. Its powers are disposed elsewhere. Its use is in nourishing spirit and mind, in fretting and soothing the yearnings of our deepest nature.

And the same must be said of short fiction. It is not merely useful as an introduction to literary studies, though, to be sure, it has proved an excellent resource for the development of capacities for critical reading in a host of curricula. It is comfortable and manageable for classroom use as the other forms may not be. Some elements of literary structure can best be perceived and compared where the bulk is slight and the language apt to be familiar to the great majority of students. But beyond such conveniences, short fiction is useful in the large, high sense that Moore summons us to recognize. It is as limitless as any other mode of literary expression. The insights are as keen, the play of invention as nimble, and the revelations as profound as the imagination can compass. It abides on the same plateau as poetry, drama, or the novel.

These comments could as well have prefaced any of the three editions of the anthology that preceded this one. The importance of short fiction has long been admitted, as its popularity inside and outside the academic fold has steadily expanded. There are major constancies spanning the decades, though the short forms have been diversified and enriched by ever more numerous talents as the generations have succeeded one another.

It is not within the scope (or intent) of this anthology to keep abreast of all the experimental movements and extraordinary individual accomplishments that have quietly or noisily laid their claims on the reading public, but I have sedulously tried to make some room for what is very new, as I have (sometimes regretfully) dropped stories that seem no longer to strike the response that they did once. As best I could I have kept track of what has bloomed and what has faded, with the help of numerous associates actively engaged in classroom use of this book, and with writers and editors who have been busy on this fertile ground. If I cannot by name single out all who have helped with my choices in these most recent years, I wish at least to express my gratitude to one and all of them.

Talking about Fiction

Discussion and analysis follow naturally from the imaginative responses we make while we are reading. There need be no deliberate decision to "take the story apart." The illusionistic aspect of fiction begins to come apart almost at the instant it is experienced, fading passage by passage behind us as our reading moves from the beginning toward the end. When the spell cast by the whole is dissolving in our memory into its component parts, we are in a favorable position to sort them out and ask what each part did to direct our imagination along lines imagined by the person who wrote the story for us.

Readers with some degree of critical experience have the habit of noting aspects of plot, character, tone, theme, imagery, point of view, and numerous other variations of literary form as they sum up and discuss their reading experience. But before we begin to examine any of these aspects in isolation, we can here consider some truly basic features characteristic of fiction in general. We can do that conveniently with the pieces in this section because they are all brief enough to permit an easy reference from text to commentary. They include a poem, three excerpts from stories printed in full farther along in the book, and four selections that are essentially complete short stories. For all their brevity these four display the unity and completeness you will find in the rest of the stories included in this anthology.

Character and Setting

Nothing is more fundamental to creating a story than establishing a spatial, temporal environment and peopling it with actors. Here is an example by a modern master.

Ernest Hemingway

story from **In Our Time**[1]

Nick sat against the wall of the church where they had dragged him to be clear of machine-gun fire in the street. Both legs stuck out awkwardly. He had been hit in the spine. His face was sweaty and dirty. The sun shone on his face. The day was very hot. Rinaldi, big backed, his equipment sprawling, lay face downward against the wall. Nick looked straight ahead brilliantly. The pink wall of the house opposite had fallen out from the roof, and an iron bedstead hung twisted toward the street. Two Austrian dead lay in the rubble in the shade of the house. Up the street were other dead. Things were getting forward in the town. It was going well. Stretcher bearers would be along any time now. Nick turned his head carefully and looked at Rinaldi. "Senta Rinaldi. Senta.[2] You and me we've made a separate peace." Rinaldi lay still in the sun breathing with difficulty. "Not patriots." Nick turned his head carefully away smiling sweatily. Rinaldi was a disappointing audience.

The first sentence specifies a battle setting (by mention of the machine-gun fire in the street) and the particular spot, the foot of a church wall, where Nick is seated. His name, the bare beginning of characterization, is given, and we quickly learn that he has been wounded.

The ruined house across the street is a consistent and specially meaningful part of the setting. Nick is looking at it "brilliantly"—seeing it, that is, with the sharpened, almost desperate awareness that accompanies his injury. The dead bodies of Austrian soldiers mean (to Nick, who is obliged by his role to see them as enemies) that the battle is "going well." The split between his personal concern and his merely military recognition of things is signaled by his next thought: Since the battle is going well for his side, stretcher bearers will soon come to pick him up. This consoling thought leads directly to one more consoling yet: For him the war is over. With an effort at cheerfulness, Nick puts his realization into words, saying, ". . . we've made a separate peace."

His wounded comrade Rinaldi does not answer. Perhaps he can't. His silence suggests that Nick's joy at the prospect of getting

1. Chapter VI of the pamphlet *in our time*, published in a limited edition in January, 1924; each of its chapters was virtually a miniature short story in the mode Hemingway was then perfecting. In the following year these nonconsecutive chapters were printed in alternation with longer stories in an expanded volume called *In Our Time*. 2. "Listen."

out of the war is a limited and probably temporary response to the bad thing that has happened to him. Such a suggestion gives a bleak coloration to the inferences we can make about Nick's future, though the story stops short of any explicit prediction.

Action, Plot, and Complication

Much of what we understand and feel about people comes from watching them act in relation to others and to the entanglements they create as the action proceeds. The following story by a medieval writer depends almost exclusively on elements of action in developing the complications which give meaning to its plot.

Giraldis Cambrensis

Revenge

. . . The lord of Chateau-roux in France maintained in the castle a man whose eyes he had formerly put out, but who, by long habit, recollected the ways of the castle, and the steps leading to the towers. Seizing an opportunity of revenge, and meditating the destruction of the youth, he fastened the inward doors of the castle, and took the only son and heir of the governor of the castle to the summit of a high tower, from whence he was seen with the utmost concern by the people beneath. The father of the boy hastened thither, and, struck with terror, attempted by every possible means to procure the ransom of his son, but received for answer, that this could not be effected, but by the same mutilation of those lower parts, which he had likewise inflicted on him. The father, having in vain entreated mercy, at length assented, and caused a violent blow to be struck on his body; and the people around him cried out lamentably, as if he had suffered mutilation. The blind man asked him where he felt the greatest pain? When he replied in his reins,[3] he declared it was false and prepared to precipitate the boy. A second blow was given, and the lord of the castle asserting that the greatest pain was at his heart, the blind man expressing his disbelief, again carried the boy to the summit of the tower. The third time, however, the father, to save his son, really mutilated himself; and when he exclaimed that the greatest pain was in his teeth; "It is true," said he, "as a man who has had experience should be believed, and thou

3. Kidneys.

hast in part revenged my injuries. I shall meet death with more satisfaction, and thou shalt neither beget any other son, nor receive comfort from this." Then, precipitating himself and the boy from the summit of the tower, their limbs were broken, and both instantly expired. The knight ordered a monastery built on the spot for the soul of the boy, which is still extant, and called De Doloribus. . . .[4]

The revenger's wish to pay back the man who has blinded and castrated him provides the initial motivation from which the fictional plot spins forward. The sequence of following events, complicating the plot, represents an accelerating contest of will and cunning between the chief antagonists. The three blows to which the father submits are graduated tests of his affection for his son and of his confidence in his ability to outwit his opponent. Since affection, confidence, and cleverness are attributes of character, we see thus how progress in the action reveals character.

The blind man's response to the blows is motivated by his interpretation (correct in each case) of what has really happened. Note that in the case of the first two blows a part of what has happened is a further attempt to victimize him, by deceit. At each test the father's confidence diminishes, and he is motivated by this progressive diminishing of confidence, as well as by growing anxiety for his son, to submit to castration. Probably it is his mushrooming panic that prevents his considering what may happen after he has yielded to the demand.

The straightforward movement of the plot toward the anticipated end shifts when the revenger declares himself only partially satisfied by the father's castration. The suicide and murder of the boy held hostage carry the action to the point of fully measuring the degree of fury that began it.

We should note that in this story the characterization—aside from that accomplished by the action itself—is kept to a stark minimum. Nevertheless it may stimulate our imagination to speculate on the variables of sensation and emotion that are usually included in fictional characterization. The momentum of excitement generated by the force of the action carries us into wondering what the boy may have seen as he looked down from the tower where he was held captive. What did he remember as he heard his father bargain for his life? What did he want his father to do? Perhaps we are even impelled to imagine answers for such questions; a good story incites

4. Place of Sorrow.

the reader's imagination to go a bit beyond what is actually and literally told.

Point of View

We are moved to make judgments about characters by their actions in a story, by what they choose to do and what is done to them. Our response is enhanced and given particular coloration by the attitude, personal vision, and interpretations with which the characters respond as the events of the story unfold. This individualized response is called point of view. *It is an element in stories told in the third person as well as in the first, though the degree to which an author exploits it may vary over wide ranges.*

Alice Walker

from **Everyday Use**

Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program. . . . Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once she thinks orchids are tacky flowers.

In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. . . . I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing. I can eat pork liver cooked over an open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the hog. . . .

This woman is intentionally portraying herself without any attempt to falsify the harsh demands of her life, her daydreams, or her appearance. But her candor and the touch of self-mockery in her dream of appearing on TV are testimony to a certain kind of self-confident pride. She knows who she is, after all, and speaks as someone who knows how to make the best of her strength and her shortcomings.

Her narrative voice will remain a stabilizing force throughout the story, guiding the reader's discriminations between the claims

made by different life-styles as they conflict and compete. Thus the point of view contributes a necessary trust to the outcome, in which certain strident claims are vanquished.

But it is not only in stories told in the first person that we look at the objective world through the eyes of a character.

Flannery O'Connor

from **Everything That Rises Must Converge**

His mother continued to gaze at him but she did not take advantage of his momentary discomfort. Her eyes retained their battered look. Her face seemed to be unnaturally red, as if her blood pressure had risen. Julian allowed no glimmer of sympathy to show on his face. Having got the advantage he wanted desperately to keep it and carry it through. He would have liked to teach her a lesson that would last a while, but there seemed no way to continue the point. The Negro refused to come out from behind his paper.

This passage begins with a statement that is essentially objective. It could have been made by a neutral reporter without any special insight or interest in Julian. But then we are moved briskly to where Julian's special and prejudiced point of view prevails. When we come to the word seemed *in the third sentence, we know that his mother's face seems particularly red because of his intimacy with her and his inverted concern with her blood pressure. We move then beyond his notation of her symptoms into the hostile wish that is motivating his behavior in the bus. Now we are fully in his point of view, seeing things as he does and beholding the malevolence that shapes his vision. "He would have liked to teach her a lesson that would last a while. . . ." This glimpse into his mind underlines his complicity with the deadly forces gathering to finish the woman off.*

Some stories told in the third person may shift the point of view from that of one character to another's, and in some it is hard to say with certainty that the author has adopted the point of view of any *of the characters, for some styles and types of diction will indicate that we are reading of matters that could only be known by the writer. There is a great range of possibilities in the distance that can be set*

between the creator and the imagined creatures populating the printed page. For the reader it is always well to assume that something in the nature of the material has influenced the writer's choice to move in close or keep an Olympian distance. The closer he or she wants to be to the characters in their travails, the more the writer will immerse himself or herself in the point of view of this person or that in the story.

In the story from which the following excerpt is taken, Freeman mostly chooses to show what is happening from the point of view of her main female character. But just for a little she lapses, intruding with summary and evaluative comment on certain developments. This "author intrusion" (see Glossary) is generally shunned because it dilutes the concreteness and sensuousness of the action being rendered.

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

from A New England Nun

. . . Louisa's father and brother had died, and she was all alone in the world. But greatest happening of all—a subtle happening which both were too simple to understand—Louisa's feet had turned into a path, smooth maybe under a calm, serene sky, but so straight and unswerving that it could only meet a check at her grave, and so narrow that there was no room for any one at her side.

You will find when you read the whole story that such judgmental authorial comment is by no means typical of most of the narrative manner. But in this quoted passage we are unmistakably being told things Louisa could not know about herself, and a projection into the future is made. For the moment the author is speaking directly to the reader—and perhaps unnecessarily lapsing from the disciplined point of view she chose. But if we were to call this a fault, we would certainly concede that it is a very minor one, which might readily be excused by citing the nature of the material. After all, the narrative covers a period of many years, and compression of some parts is absolutely required. I have cited it here not to criticize it but only to illustrate another of the choices available to the fiction writer.

Indirection

The revelations of fiction are not usually made by direct statement. The "bottom line" is not spelled out in a positive or unambiguous summation. Rather the tactic of the fictional art is to guide, direct, and entice the imagination of the reader to a point where intuition blends with a comprehension of detail to engender a sympathetic understanding still shaded by mysteries of a moral or psychological sort.

Barbara L. Greenberg

Important Things

For years the children whimpered and tugged. "Tell us, tell us."

You promised to tell the children some other time, later, when they were old enough.

Now the children stand eye to eye with you and show you their teeth. "Tell us."

"Tell you what?" you ask, ingenuous.

"Tell us The Important Things."

You tell the children there are six continents and five oceans, or vice versa.

You tell your children the little you know about sex. Your children tell you there are better words for what you choose to call The Married Embrace.

You tell your children to be true to themselves. They say they are true to themselves. You tell them they're lying, you always know when they're lying. They tell you you're crazy. You tell them to mind their manners. They think you mean it as a joke; they laugh.

There are tears in your eyes. You tell the children the dawn will follow the dark, the tide will come in, the grass will be renewed, every dog will have its day. You tell them the story of The Littlest Soldier whose right arm, which he sacrificed while fighting for a noble cause, grew back again.

You say that if there were no Evil we wouldn't have the satisfaction of choosing The Good. And if there were no pain, you say, we'd never know our greatest joy, relief from pain.

You offer to bake a cake for the children, a fudge cake with chocolate frosting, their favorite.

"Tell us," say the children.

You say to your children, "I am going to die."

"When?"

"Someday."

"Oh."

You tell your children that they, too, are going to die. They already knew it.

You can't think of anything else to tell the children. You say you're sorry. You *are* sorry. But the children have had enough of your excuses.

"A promise is a promise," say the children.

They'll give you one more chance to tell them of your own accord. If you don't, they'll have to resort to torture.

This little story is a teaser, crafted not only to keep the children (and the narrator) baffled about what "important things" are, but to lure us into our own creative speculation about the great secrets of existence. By a process of elimination, those things we would readily think of as important are dismissed as unsatisfactory. The fundamentals of common knowledge are denied their fundamental status. The challenge to name what is truly important slips by the narrator and is slyly posed to us. Once the attempt at direct answers is used up, the story has put it up to us to scrape our souls for what we have to declare.

In some sense most of the stories we will encounter in this book bring us to the same pass, for even in those where the author has come down hard with a positive declaration about what is important, there will be a nimbus or shadowy fringe in which conviction and full comprehension can only be established by our emotional insight and a seizure of implications that are not spelled out in the text. Most stories—much larger than this one in bulk—stir up questions of right and wrong, of what is worth living for and dying for. Truly these are "important things," and authors work with all their skill to guide us to a point where the inexpressible can be sensed. It is the best tactic of fiction to move circuitously to the point of revelation. Then those readers who have followed the path of indirections complete the reading transaction by going somewhat farther than they have been led, by drawing from themselves the impassioned judgment that will make the story whole.

The Part and the Whole

In our reading of fiction (or any literary form, for that matter) we will often pause to consider the relation between some single word

and the overall meaning of the situation and action, between a significant part and the significance of the whole, as in this poem:

William Stafford

Traveling through the Dark

Traveling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

Like many other poems, this one tells a story, and our immediate concern with it is to demonstrate how one part—the verb to swerve—*expands the meaning of the episode, opening dimensions of thought that may be inherent in the action but might elude a casual observer of what is being done.*

There is probably no way the narrator can save the life of the unborn fawn trapped in the dead body of its mother. Yet the very hopelessness of the fawn's plight calls to him to take sides with it against the threat of extinction. So he faces a dilemma. If he does not kill the fawn by pushing the deer into the river, he will have failed in his duty to other people who will be using the road, and he may be to