

THE SPEECH by Lord Dunsany

Summary and Analysis

Please fill in: annoy - clues – delivered – for the sake of - issued - likely - motive - peace – precautions - preparing – prevent - solve –suspect - threats - tricked

The classic detective story is bound by two fundamental rules.

First, the reader must receive _____ at the same time they are presented to, or discovered by, the story detective, the police, etc.

Secondly, these clues should enable the reader, through a process of logical, if inspired, reasoning, to _____ the crime. In this sense "The Speech" is a variant of the classic detective story. However, the question here is not so much "whodunnit?" — that is, who is the murderer and what is the _____ — but rather how it will be done.

The fact that the reader is subtly led astray, allowed to assume that the supposed victim is the actual victim, is also typical of this sub-genre. Have we, as readers, been fairly treated? Or have we been _____, however cleverly? Certainly, compared with Scotland Yard, not to mention poor old Lord Inchingthwaite, we cannot complain.

An old, unnamed journalist, chatting about crime with younger journalists at their club, relates a story that took place in his younger days. It would have made such a good (news?) story then, but at the time it had been hushed up. It was kept quiet because the very _____ of Europe (some time prior to World War I) was at stake.

At that time, a young, up-and-coming Member of the Opposition in Parliament — Peter Minch — was _____ to give a speech in the House of Commons. His speech would not only _____ the party in power, but would also severely annoy the Austrians and, in turn, the Germans and the Russians. War would be the _____ result. An unidentified but powerful organization seeks to _____ this war by stopping the young M.P. from speaking. Three warnings (the traditional number!) are _____ by the group. Two come orally from an emissary, a Mr Hosken. The third comes to Minch in the form of a note _____ a few hours before he is to speak in the Commons.

After each warning, the Opposition and Minch become even more determined to go ahead with the speech. Scotland Yard take all _____, and Minch's security seems assured. Nothing and no one, it would appear, can prevent the speech. But then, just under three hours before the speech, word comes that Minch's father Lord Inchingthwaite has been murdered. Because the peerage is a hereditary one, the son automatically becomes the new Lord Inchingthwaite. Therefore, he may not deliver his speech in the Commons, his entry to the House of Lords takes time, and his presenting the speech outside of Parliament lessens its effect. All _____ have been made good, and war has been averted, at least temporarily.

We as readers are nonetheless in good company. If the best of the Yard were fooled, then we — comparative innocents — may not be such fools after all. And we really may not have wanted to look too closely. Minch is not such an appealing character, risking millions of lives _____ of a political point or two. And one might _____ that Scotland Yard share a few of our sympathies for the gang. It's sad, of course, about old Lord Inchingthwaite, but in a way, he did serve his country. Oh, and by the way, did you catch that old journalist's name? Did he say "Hopkins"? Or was it ... Hosken?

Unit I

The Narrative Situation

1. Listen to (or read) the story up to line 24.

2. Establishing the situation

What is happening at the beginning of the story?

- Who is speaking at the beginning of the story? Name? Age? Profession? Nationality? Trustworthiness as witness?
- Who is he speaking to? Names, etc.?
- Where are they speaking? Location? Does the story take place in the same place(s)? If not, where?
- What is being talked about? Does the topic change?
- When does the discussion take place? Did what is being talked about take place at the same time? If not, when? Over what period of time?

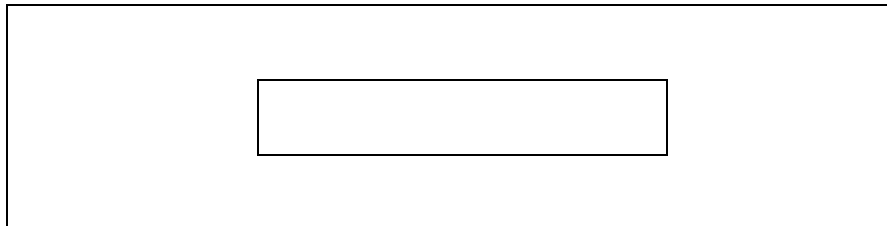
3. The frame story — a story within a story

Who is the narrator in this story?

Lord Dunsany is telling a story about an older journalist who is telling a story about... So to answer this question we must first clarify which 'story' we are talking about. In the outer 'frame', about some journalists chatting in a London club, we have a detached author-narrator.

One of these characters — the "old journalist" (40 1, 6,24) — then becomes the narrator of the inner story.

Please fill in: story about journalists in their club,
story about Peter Minch, told by the old journalist.
told by Lord Dunsany



4. Effect of the 'frame story' technique

How else could the author have started telling the story about Peter Minch and his speech?

a) The author could have told this story directly in third-person form, without bothering about the journalists in their club, e.g.

It was a time of great tension in Europe, when politicians.....

b) Alternatively, the author could have used the old journalist as first-person narrator right from the start, e. g.

One reads a good deal about violence nowadays, but I never read of a crime that would make a story like the one that there was when

What differences are there between these approaches? Does one seem more natural than the others? Which way, do you think, makes the story that follows sound true?

The a).

Version b)

Unit II Mystery and Suspense

1. Comprehension questions

Who is Peter Minch?

What type of a man is he?

Why doesn't the organization want him to speak?

What reasons are given for the Opposition's refusals to accept the warnings?

In general, did most Members feel that Minch should be allowed to speak?

The organization gives three warnings, each in the form of a prophecy. What are they?

What action do the police take? Why isn't Hosken arrested?

How did the organization carry out their threats?

Why did this stop the speech?

Did this stop the threat of war?

2. The development of tension

How does the author manage to keep you interested in the story?

- (40 1-4) Old journalist's reference to crime, violence and official secrecy catches reader's attention and excites curiosity.
- (40 6-8,14-20) Reference to the special nature of the crime, its connection with the danger of war.
- (40 30 - 4111) Passage presenting the terrorist organization's determination to prevent the speech, by killing if necessary - first inkling of what the "crime" might be.
- (4112-15) Reference to massive police precautions — stresses the reality of the danger.
- (4131-34) Hosken's confidence adds to the tension.
- (42 11-20) Here the narrator tells us directly that the "tension was acute", and sums up the tense situation.
- (42 24-31) Approaching the time of the planned speech, details of the massive police precautions and the apprehension of everybody involved.
- (42 32-33) Reminder of the gang's determination and confidence.
- (42 38-39; 43 1-5) More direct statements about the tension and examples of people's nervousness.
- and then the crime (42 6-26), in spite of all precautions.

The sequence and timing of these references has obviously been carefully thought out. Note that each explicit mention of the tense situation comes closer together. The traditional trio of warnings also serves to build up tension, as each warning remains so self-confident in tone. Also, the very weight of the questions involved — i.e. war, murder, freedom of speech, blackmail — heightens the tension as the narrator constantly reminds his audience what is at stake. Finally, there is the polite tone and behaviour of all involved — Hosken is not crude, does not scream threats, the Chairman of the Opposition "as politely as possible" (41 9) tells him to go to hell, the police do not beat information out of Hosken, polite forms are used - Mr Hosken, Mr Minch, "Certainly, sir," (42 7). This air of (British?) reserve and politeness adds to the tension by its contrast with the possibility of war and murder.

3. The mystery element

Did you guess how the story would end?

Now that we know what happened, what clues were given in the story that might have led us to the correct victim?

4. Free discussion

- *On page 42, the stranger (Hosken) says "We — that is, they — consider war to be the greater evil." Remember that it is the old journalist who tells us what Hosken said. Do you think that Hosken made the slip of the tongue, or the old journalist? Why?*
- *How do you interpret/react to the last sentence in the story, "Not that it made any difference in the end"?*
- *On page 41, mention is made of the group's belief that "the death of one man is preferable to the risk of disturbing the peace of Europe." Do you agree or disagree with this belief? And what if you were that one person?*