

Skill Builder: Chapter 9

A symbol is a method used by a writer that is achieved through the choices they make. That's to say that it belongs to Level 2 in our system, not Level 1. Just like you can't casually say that a character is characterised as brave or as accepting their role within a rigid social structure without providing proof by analysing the effects of authorial choices at Level 1, you can't casually assert that a hat symbolises a character's desire to be different without substantiating also providing proof at Level 1.

Below, there's some evidence from this chapter regarding Changez's beard. Select the most appropriate evidence for each of the two "mini analysis tables" and analyse it accordingly at Level 1.

"Do not forget to shave before you go," my mother said to me. "Why?" I asked, indicating my father and brother. "They have beards."

[...]

Given your background, you will doubtless have experienced the peculiar phenomenon that is the return to an environment more or less at peace from one where the prospect of large-scale bloodshed is a distinct possibility. It is an odd transition. My colleagues greeted with considerable—although often partially suppressed—consternation my reappearance in our offices. For despite my mother's request, and my knowledge of the difficulties it could well present me at immigration, I had not shaved my two-week-old beard. It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity, or perhaps I sought to remind myself of the reality I had just left behind; I do not now recall my precise motivations. I know only that I did not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who were my coworkers, and that inside me, for multiple reasons, I was deeply angry.

It is remarkable, given its physical insignificance—it is only a hairstyle, after all—the impact a beard worn by a man of my complexion has on your fellow countrymen. More than once, traveling on the subway—where I had always had the feeling of seamlessly blending in—I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares. Wainwright tried to offer me some friendly advice. "Look, man," he said, "I don't know what's up with the beard, but I don't think it's making you Mister Popular around here." "They are common where I come from," I told him. "Jerk chicken is common where I come from," he replied, "but I don't smear it all over my face. You need to be careful. This whole corporate collegiality veneer only goes so deep. Believe me."

I appreciated my friend's concern, but I did not take his suggestion.

[...]

"Listen, kid," he said, "some people around here think you're looking kind of shabby. The beard and all.

Evidence
Level 1:
Level 2: <i>As a result, Changez's beard becomes a symbol of his rebellion.</i>

Evidence
Level 1:
Level 2: <i>As a result, Changez's beard becomes a symbol of his marginalisation.</i>