

INTRODUCTION TO CHARACTERISATION

We use the term characterisation to describe the strategies that a novelist uses to present and develop the characters in a narrative. This use will vary from character to character. Some characters are central to a story; often there will be one main character, around whom the narrative revolves.

We expect that such characters, and others close to the heart of narrative events will be presented to us in great detail; we may be allowed access to their consciousness, either by the use of first-person narration or third-person **focalisation**, and it is extremely likely that they will undergo some sort of significant personal change (for better or worse) as a result of their experiences.

These kinds of characters are sometimes known as *dynamic*. Other characters, often described as *static*, may be much less thoroughly-drawn; they may be introduced to the narrative primarily to perform a particular narrative or thematic function, and will probably undergo little or no change in the course of the story.

Another useful distinction between types of characters was proposed by E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*. 'We may classify characters into **flat** and **round**,' Forster suggested (1927, p. 65). What do you think he meant by these terms?

The word '**flat**' suggests a one-dimensional figure, and what Forster meant by 'flat' characters were **those who are largely taken to represent a particular idea, human trait or set of values**. They are caricatures who can be easily and quickly summarised;

'Round' characters, by contrast, are described and developed in such a way as to achieve three-dimensionality, a physical and psychological complexity that mimics that of the real people we come to know in our everyday lives.

Characterisation may rely on 'telling' us about a particular character or on 'showing' us by reporting their speech directly and allowing us to draw our own conclusions about the character's attitudes and values.

The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round. It has the incalculability of life about it – life within the pages of a book. And by using it sometimes alone, more often in combination with the other kind, the novelist achieves his task of acclimatization, and harmonizes the human race with the other aspects of his work.

Characterization

Characterization is the art and technique of representing fictional personages. It is a literary device that is used step by step in literature to highlight and explain the possible details about a character in a story. Characterization is defined as the way in which authors convey information about their characters.

It is also the act of describing the character or qualities of someone or something and the concept of creating characters for a narrative. (www.characterization.org). Characterization is also the process which allows us to sympathize with the different characters and thus, feel as if what is happening to them in the story is really happening to us. It also gives us a sense of verisimilitude, or the semblance of living reality.

Characterization is actually the first activity which moves the story along in the sense that it gathers and compels characters in good and difficult situations and enables them to create, each, their own plot.

Characters.

1. Definition.

A character is someone who acts, appears, or is referred to as playing a part in a literary work, usually in a fiction or a drama (The Norton introduction to literature, P. 140). According to (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/character-arts>), a character is a person in a narrative or work of art

(such as a novel, play, television series or film), who guides readers through their stories by helping them to understand flats and ponder them.

1. Kind of characters.

In fictional literature, authors use many different types of characters to tell their stories. The characters can be human beings, animals, geometric shapes, flower etc.

Different types of characters fulfil different roles in the narrative process. They go on and on changing according to the role they play and their frequency in a literary narrative. With a little analysis, we can **detect some or all types of characters in terms of their characteristics**. They can be **round**, also called **dynamic characters**, or they can be **flat, i.e. static characters**.

Characters in a narrative can be presented by

- means of description,
- through their:
 - actions,
 - reactions,
 - reputation
- speech, (the language they use)
- thoughts
- and also throughout their interactions with other characters.

Flat / static characters.

Flat characters are characters that do not change over time. Their personalities do not evolve or undergo any transformation. They are notable for one kind of personality trait or characteristic. Flat characters are simple but very important in a literary work. They present some advantages and disadvantages in the analysis of a literary narrative, as M. Forster (1971: 76 - 71) states. First of all, flat characters present the advantage of easy recognition. This means, they are easily recognized whenever they come in or intervene in a work of art; they are recognized by the audience. They are not only useful to the audience but also to the others in the sense that they never need being reintroduced, they never run away, and they do not need to be watched for development as they provide their own atmosphere.

Second, flat characters are advantageous for the audience easily remembers them afterwards, even if they are very simple. Once the audience comes across them, they remain unalterable in their mind because they never change by circumstances. They move through situations without losing their traits even if the situations differ.

The major problem with the flat characters is that they do not inform the audience sufficiently about themselves, or their own personality. Their behaviours are not well revealed. Thus, they are sometimes confused with status or photographs which appear without bringing any piece of information on the pictures they present. **But flat characters are not really photographs**, nor are they status in a vigour movement. Flat characters are not in themselves as big achievements as **round** ones. M. Forster (1971: 80) explains that featuring characters are more interesting when they are comic in a literary narrative, and they are boring when they play a serious or tragic role.

Round / dynamic characters.

Round characters are characters that have a complex personality. They are often portrayed as conflicted and contradictory persons. They change over time, usually as a result of resolving a central conflict or facing a major crisis. Most dynamic characters tend to be central rather than peripheral characters, because resolving the conflict is the major role of central characters.

Round characters are well-developed and they are usually having many traits that bring the audience to feel as if they (round characters) were real people. They have unpredictable actions and reactions because of the fact that they go on and on changing as the story keeps evolving.

As far as their traits are concerned, these characters are very important for they reveal what they really are. They are self explanatory and cannot be summed up in a single phrase. It is recommended to study these characters in connection with the great scenes through which they pass as they are modified by the some scenes. They behave like real human beings.

Round characters are the kind of characters able to surprise the audience in a convincing way and move them from one feeling to another. A character that never surprises or can surprise without convincing is said to be flat. **Round characters always present changes in attitude, behaviour, in appearances or in personalities.** These changes are considerable and bring change within the whole narrative.

There are different ways of studying characters. They may be studied in isolation, as it is the case of isolated and independent personalities. In fact, isolation is one of their ways of proceeding but not a good one. It is said not be a good way of doing because all the characters are members of a society. They depend on the need of their society, as D. Pringles (1987: 51) supports. David Pringles also says that characters are studies in relationship with other characters for without them they have no identity, they cannot do anything and they cannot exist. In any literary work, the story is built around a central character who is the vital character to the development and resolution of the conflict, beside subsidiary characters who serve to complement the major character and help move the flat events forward. **The analysis of characters in relationship with other characters is very important for it puts emphasis on their actions, reactions and interactions in their society.** Besides, it also looks/takes into considerations the contribution of each single character to the resolution of the conflict raised in the narrative.

David Pringles argues that studying characters in relationship with others is the best method, as he puts it in these words:

“The discussion of characters in relationship with others is one of the best characterization strategies used nowadays because the society is made up with groups of people who act and interact”.

1.1.3. Statement of literary strategies in characterization

Characterization is a process that the writer uses to reveal or present characters. There are two major strategies used for discovering characters:

The direct presentation or direct characterization: it refers to what the speaker or narrator directly says or thinks about the character. In other words, in the direct characterization **the reader is told what the character is like.** The narrator or speaker is used by the author to tell what the characters are like.

The indirect presentation or indirect characterization: this refers to what characters do and say. The writer shows/presents things that reveal the personality of characters. The readers try to understand by themselves what the characters are all about. This shows how we understand people in real world, since we cannot get in their minds. The audience itself is obliged to figure out what the characters are like. For a good understanding of characters in indirect characterization there are five different methods that can be used.

Speech: while studying characters, a critic must look at what the characters say and how they say it.

Thoughts: what the characters are thinking about must also be taken into condition for a better understanding.

Effect on others toward the character: the critic must also look at the way other characters feel or behave in reaction to the characters under study. He has to understand what is revealed through the characters' effects on people.

Actions: the critic must also see what the characters do; how they behave.

Looks: the characters' appearance also helps the critic understand them. What do they looklike, how do they dress, etc. are the main concerns in this move.