

## CHARACTER, CHARACTERIZATION AND DIALOGUE

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Text interpretation has always been a most intricate and challenging task due to various elements that work in unison to create the desired aesthetic impression on the reader. Characters, being one of the underlying elements of fiction, make the task even more challenging since they act as “a net of voices”. The author, the narrator and the characters, that most frequently appear as independent individuals, speak in one voice. Hence, the application of linguo-stylistic and linguo-poetic methods of research and analysis of dialogue on the semantic and meta-semiotic levels may serve as not only an efficient tool in revealing the dynamics of a certain piece of writing, but also a means of characterization of personages portrayed. To be noted, dialogue is a widely used technique by writers to reveal the true nature of the characters indirectly. In case the reader is able to disclose the nature of the characters, he/she may get an access to the hidden intention of the author.

*Keywords:* characterization, dialogue, text interpretation, author, authorial intention

### Introduction

A literary text is a combination of a number of key elements, namely of some story (plot) usually told by a narrator and characters that propel it. The analysis of the language material of both may help better understand the intent of the author and reveal the message it contains, and in doing so, get closer to the underlying meaning of the text. Strangely, characters are usually regarded as separate entities independent of the author. We are accustomed to citing Hamlet, rather than Shakespeare, we speak of Sherlock Holmes and not of Conan Doyle. These characters are so complete and realistic that they have entered our lives as real people and with real personalities with their own history. However, this is an idea S. Chatman would not share. To him, the text-independent life of a character does not mean “that their ‘lives’ extend ‘beyond the fictions in which they are

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Received: 15.02.2023

Revised: 19.03.2023

Accepted: 09.04.2023



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involved.’ Characters do not have ‘lives’; we endow them with personality only to the extent that personality is a structure familiar to us in life and art”.

Along with the rise of the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the number of characters involved in the plot increased and became deeper, more complicated, unique and realistic. Hence, literary theories grew more infatuated with the investigation of this intrinsic element of fiction. As a result, a great many literary theorists have attempted to come up with their own definition of a literary character which was quite a challenging task since a literary character is not simply one who is present in a certain story. Besides being a functional component that operates on discursive and story levels, a literary character that exists exclusively in and through the text (Fořt, 2008, p.56), also demonstrates psycho-social and cultural aspects that turn him into an individual and a quasi-real being. Tzvetan Todorov calls a literary character “a mass of signs” that are bound together by a proper name.

The role of the reader in establishing the character cannot be ignored, either (Iser, 1978). In this regard, a literary character may also be defined as a seat of attributive propositions, a term introduced by James Garvey to name the activity of the reader who constantly gathers the textual information about a particular subject and attributes it to its name (Rimmon-Kenan, 1988, pp. 37-40). It should be noted, though, that this integrative power of individual propositions might greatly vary from one reader to another since a trait that is important for one might be secondary or tertiary for another.

One cannot but agree with S. Chatman that a character is an autonomous and open being which is first coded by the author through the discourse (Chatman, 1980, p.130) and then reconstructed by the reader through the very same discourse (Chatman 1980, p.125) and while doing so the reader makes abundant use of his/her imagination to read between the lines and supplement the image encoded by the author.

The current research aims at studying dialogue as a means to achieve characterization. Unlike direct intrusions on the part of the author, dialogue helps characters reveal themselves through the language they use. Hence, the careful linguistic examination of the speech of the characters through linguo-stylistic and linguo-poetic methods is sure to provide solid evidence with regard to the true nature of the characters.

### Dialogue as a means of characterization

Characterization of literary characters i.e. the attempt to show the characters or the personalities of the characters portrayed, may be carried out directly (by telling) and indirectly (by showing). Unlike the direct method, when the author or narrator intrudes and makes commentaries on this or that occurrence, the indirect method heavily relies on certain indicators carefully hidden in the texture of the discourse and it is the responsibility of the reader to identify these clues and make the right inferences. To be more precise, there are numerous devices that assist indirect characterization. Nevertheless, they all share the same quality – *they display rather than tell*.

Among the major devices of indirect characterization one should distinguish actions, external appearances, environment and speech. While the first two are no less important, the current research aims to concentrate on the last one. As a matter of fact, speech and actions form an integral whole and are in a cause and effect relationship - X bites his nails, therefore X is nervous. (Rimmon-Kenan, 1988, p. 67)

In indirect method characters present themselves directly through their actions, behavior and speech and the reader has to analyze the characters themselves in several ways, namely through their dialogue where the tone of the voice, emphasis and the used vocabulary help identify the true nature of the character.

However, one has to acknowledge the fact that characters, as diverse and intricate as they might seem, too, are products of the author's mind. This fact, consequently, leads to new controversies. As a matter of fact, one of the most frequent questions any writer is asked is whether they have experienced what they have written about or whether they can identify themselves with any of the characters portrayed in their work. This reminds of the question Ronald Barthes poses at the start of his most famous article "The Death of the Author" which set a new era in literary criticism. Barthes wonders, "Who is speaking in this way? Is it the story's hero, concerned to ignore the castrato concealed beneath the woman? Is it the man Balzac, endowed by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it the author Balzac, professing certain "literary" ideas of femininity? Is it universal wisdom? or romantic psychology?" The critic calls this an impossible task since "all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices," and goes on to add "literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all

identity is lost” (Barthes 1977) and it is not possible to assign a specific origin to literature.

Hence, any attempt to answer the question is time and effort wasted, since as Barthes rightly notes it is impossible to bring the text down to one particular voice. Rather, it is a combination of a multiple of voices whose origin, is decided right from the start since they all belong to one and only – the author, an idea that Barthes rejects. More precisely, the self of the author is dissolved among all the types of characters. It goes well beyond them and embraces the whole of the context of a given story covering both semantic and meta-semiotic levels, the things said and unsaid. In this regard, it is worth quoting Oscar Wilde, “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth”. So, hidden behind his/her own characters that act as safe masks, the author starts telling his own story.

While description serves as a most effective tool to introduce the setting of the actions unfolding in the narrative and describe the state of affairs and characters, in general, the story actually advances through the dialogue between the characters. The role of this storytelling technique may best be revealed in plays and movie scripts where the reader is not introduced with the key features of characters. Rather he is left to make his/her own conclusions regarding their personal qualities through their speech and the language they use. It is long established that descriptions in movie scripts help tell the story while characters reveal themselves in dialogues. Hence, each word and pause matters especially when we consider the limited space of a script. The topics they address, the words they choose to express their thoughts serve as a most effective instrument to get under the skin of the character. As far as scripts are concerned, one can draw parallels with plays since they, too, are constructed in the form of dialogues only. However, we still get the full understanding of the depth of the characters. Shakespeare never comments on the character of Lady Macbeth himself, but when she utters the following words the reader needs no further explanations.

*Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead  
Are but as pictures: 'tis the eye of childhood  
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,  
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal;  
For it must seem their guilt.*

*My hands are of your colour; but I shame  
To wear a heart so white. ("Macbeth", Act 2, Scene 2)*

Nor does Moliere provide details on the character of Tartuffe unless he speaks for himself.

*Tartuffe. Yes, brother, I'm wicked and culpable,  
A sorry sinner, full of iniquity,  
As great a wretch as there ever could be.  
My entire life has been soiled with evil;  
It's nothing but a mass of sinful upheaval...*

*Why should you think that I'm superior?  
No, no, appearances are fooling you,  
I am the kind of man you should eschew.  
The whole world thinks that I have earned God's blessing,  
But the plain truth is . . . that I'm worth nothing.  
(Tartuffe Act III, Scene VI)*

We build our understanding of their characters mostly through the language they use. However, characterization or character revelation (Kozloff, 2000, p. 43) and advancement of the plot are two of the four main functions of dialogue in fiction. The other two are exposition and presentation of different perspectives. The former helps setting up the context and provides the necessary background information to the reader. The latter offers a new way of thinking so that the reader might look at the developments in another way, which does not necessarily coincide with that of the protagonist. Hence, dialogue helps make the writing realistic since in the real world people converse with one another and communicate their thoughts through dialogues. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that dialogues should be down-to-earth and close to the reality. If not, the characters might seem fake and unconvincing.

As is known, there are two types of narrators – objective and omniscient. While the objective narrator acts as a mere observer who provides the reader with plain information, i.e. whatever a third person, an observer might see and record from the side, the omniscient narrator acts as an almighty superhero who has access to the inner thoughts of the characters. He can reveal the true motives of each and every character. He is the one who sees and hears everything and

makes the task of the reader a lot easier. However, while this is quite an acceptable and possible writing technique to apply, scripts are devoid of this possibility. Here, the characters are revealed through their speeches only, which should not be too long. Rather, it is more advisable to use concise sentences which, despite their shortness, can convey the gist of the utterance. No explanation or comments are permissible. Hence, the scriptwriter faces an enormous and most challenging task - he has to mold the personality of the character through the language only.

There are two major types of dialogues – inner/indirect and outer/direct. To reveal the true nature of a character, many writers turn to the technique of inner dialogue. It gives the readers an access to the unseen and untouched world of the character. Now the reader gets true and objective information of the motives of certain actions. However, things are not that easy with the direct speech. It leaves the truth still hidden and it takes many efforts and a lot of insight on the part of the reader to put two and two together and make the right guess.

According to Kozloff, a dialogue has other functions, as well. Although his classification relates to films, it still may also be referred to, while considering the role of the dialogue in narratives. They are: anchorage of the diegesis and characters (provides orientation as regards their movement in space and time); communication of narrative causality (to communicate why and how and what next); enactment of narrative events (providing information about the key and pivotal events); control of viewer evaluation and emotions (Kozloff, 2000, pp. 34-51). She also distinguishes the function of thematic messages or otherwise state authorial commentary (Kozloff, 2000, pp. 56-57) with the help of which the author has an opportunity to convey social, moral or political message or something that he/she believes in or an opinion that he/she would like to share with the public.

To make the ideas stated more convincing it is necessary to draw parallels between the language of certain characters and their nature. To be more precise, it is more relevant to examine characters who reveal their true character in the course of the whole work without the intrusion on the part of the author. To get under the skin of these characters the reader needs to trace their development through the dialogues. The queen of detectives, Agatha Christie, is well known for the characters whose seemingly simple outward appearances skillfully conceal so many human weaknesses and vices. Another characteristic of Christie's writing style is the lack of authorial commentary on her characters. Her readers get the full reign and complete freedom to like and dislike certain

characters, to believe or cast doubt on the statements of theirs, to condemn and suspect any of the characters portrayed in her novels. However, even with this seeming complete freedom, some of her characters are sure to win the reader's sympathy, while others are despised right from the start. Thus, for instance, the character of Derek in *The Mystery of the Blue Train*. Here is a young handsome man, who despite his charm, is the black sheep in the family. He is an idler who enjoys parties, nice ladies and spending the money he has not earned. His language is mostly ironical, sarcastic, at times even cynical. However, one cannot help feeling affection towards this young fellow. It is common knowledge that irony as a stylistic device is mostly used to reveal and highlight the contrast between the reality and the expectations. It might be used to create comic effects and make the speech more emphatic, as well. When analyzing sarcasm and wit, Freud considered the latter an outlet for feelings of hostility that cannot be satisfied in any other way. Otherwise stated, people who feel oppressed, under pressure, but lack the courage to attack because we live in a more or less advanced society and any physical force could not be justified, choose to attack verbally. Being the most common form of verbal irony, sarcasm is used to convey thinly veiled disapproval or scorn. Still, the ultimate goal of irony is the revelation of the truth through the contrast or contradiction. It follows, that the frequent usage of irony might be an indicative of honesty, lack of hypocrisy. Another prerequisite of irony to succeed is the existence of the relevant context since this literary device can be identified in the context only - out of context it is simply an affirmative sentence with no least stylistic effect.

*Did I? Perhaps I did. Ruth was very beautiful, you know - rather like an angel or a saint, or something that had stepped down from a niche in a church. I had fine ideas, I remember, of turning over a new leaf, of settling down and living up to the highest traditions of English home-life with a beautiful wife who loved me..... but she's tough, you know. She's your daughter. Underneath the pink-and-white softness of her she's as hard as granite. You have always been known as a hard man, so I have been told, but Ruth is harder than you are. You, at any rate, love one person better than yourself. Ruth never has and never will.*

*“Well,” he said cheerfully, “what does my esteemed father-in-law want with me? You have come on his business, I take it?” ....*

The context of the novel reveals the unsuccessful marriage of Derek to the daughter of one of the richest men in America. Though absolutely beautiful, she is egoistic to the core. The words uttered by Derek make sense and sound ironical only in the context, i.e. after getting acquainted with the character of his wife. So, she was not *like an angel* who had *stepped down from a niche in a church*, nor there was anything *soft* in her character, nor did she *love* him as he had expected her to do. What is more, “*the esteemed father*” as he called him, is no one other than his rival who dreams to bring his son-in-law down on his knees.

Derek may also be characterized by the use of informal language sometimes even offensive language. Doing so the author manages to create the image of a young man belonging to the new generation. Someone who ignores the old and long-established rules of polite conduct:

1) “No,” said Derek, “*funnily enough it is not. You can go back to my father-in-law and tell him to take himself **and his bribes to hell. Is that clear?**....*”

2) “If I have any impertinence from you,” said Derek quietly, “***you go out by that window.**....”A duel, eh? My dear Count, I don't take you seriously enough for that. But I should take a good deal of pleasure in **kicking you down** the Promenade des Anglais.”*

“I was waiting for that,” he said softly, “*you blackmailing **brute!** I will not give you a penny. My wife is dead, and no scandal that you can make can touch her now. She wrote you foolish letters, I dare say. If I were to buy them from you for a round sum at this minute, I am pretty certain that you would manage to keep one or two back; and I will tell you this, M. de la Roche, **blackmailing is an ugly word both in England and in France.** That is my answer to you. Good afternoon.*”

On another occasion when invited to the police station to question, Derek looks and sounds absolutely sarcastic thereby casting doubt on the professionalism of the police.



*“Good morning,” said Derek Kettering curtly. “You sent for me. Has anything fresh turned up? “Pray sit down, Monsieur.” Derek took a seat and flung his hat and stick on the table. “Well?” he asked impatiently. “We have, so far, no fresh data” said M. Carrege cautiously. “That’s very interesting,” said Derek drily. “Did you get me here in order to tell me that?”. “We naturally thought, Monsieur, that you would like to be informed of the progress of the case,” said the Magistrate severely. “Even if the progress was nonexistent.”*

(The Mystery of the Blue Train)

As already stated, the role of dialogue in characterization is more obvious in movie scripts since the scriptwriter is deprived of any rights to make comments on the characters he is creating. What is more, the dialogues should be quite short and to the point containing the necessary message within a few short lines. Let’s consider one of the characters in one of the most popular TV shows made recently – Thomas Shelby in *Peaky Blinders*. The plot is set at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Birmingham and recounts the activity of a gang – Peaky Blinders after WWI. The understanding of the environment is crucial for the adequate interpretation of both the events and for the evaluation of the characters themselves. Events unfold following the First World War which acts as a turning point in the lives of all the characters. More precisely it serves as a demarcation line in their lives and destinies. The movie portrays people who were simply devastated after the war and were “spat back” into the society with no help whatsoever. They were people who had experienced the whole tragedy of the war, who had gone through the horror of the worst war in the human history and were left with a trauma they were unable to recover from.

Hence, Thomas Shelby, the brain of the gang, can be described as a most fascinating character – smart, quick and manly, relentless and fearless and at times merciless. He is the one that readily takes on the responsibility and never shuns it. His leadership qualities are made clear to the reader and later to the viewer in the first episode of season one. It is not least surprising, for the reader/viewer needs to identify the characters, he needs to know who is who so that the further developments in the movie could make sense.

THOMAS

*We're just all going to have to be more careful. That's all.*

He steps to the fire and throws the flyer into the flames. He turns back to Arthur and pointedly hands the authority back to him (now that the business is done)...

THOMAS (CONT'D)

*So, Arthur, is that it?*

Arthur is a little fuzzy and nods. Polly now has deep suspicions that Thomas knows more than he is saying. She gets to her feet...

POLLY

*This family does everything open.*

*You have nothing more to say to this meeting, Tommy?*

Silence. Thomas feels her suspicion and meets her stare.

THOMAS

*Nothing that's women's business.*

Polly stares back with cool certainty...

POLLY

*This whole bloody enterprise was 'women's business' while you boys were away at war. What's changed?*

Thomas is equally cool as he gestures around...

THOMAS

*We came back.*

The phrase “*we came back*” ends the conversation in a powerful note. It comes to establish the new rules of the game and the speaker's authority. The men of the family were at war and, consequently, the women were left to take

care of the business. Now, as Thomas says, things are back to the normal – the men are back.

The further characterization of Thomas Shelby is carried out with the help of other lead or secondary characters and through his own attitude to the rest.

*JIMMY JESUS (CONT'D)*

*What's happening Tommy?*

Thomas hands Jimmy the pack of cigarettes.

*THOMAS*

*Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut.*

Thomas Shelby is the one to give orders.

On another occasion, the second influential person in the family-gang – Polly says.

*POLLY*

*Thomas Shelby, you are bookmaker, a robber, a fighting man, but you are not a fool...*

So, the character is more or less complete. The reader/viewer already sees a strong and fearless young man in the face of Thomas Shelby. However, he is not an easy character, either. In order to create a compelling and unique narration, one does not need an unusual story, a story that is one of a kind. Moreover, if we take a closer look we can identify only handful of major topics across centuries – stories about love, friendship, courage, etc. To make a unique story one needs a simple plot and deep and compelling characters. So, Thomas Shelby is not what we see on the surface level. From episode to episode the author reveals deeper layers of his character so that the viewer can see another Tommy and can identify with him.

*THOMAS*

*So, what do you sing?*

*GRACE*

*Anything you want.*

THOMAS

*Right. Get up on the chair.*

GRACE

*Okay. Happy or sad?*

THOMAS

*Sad.*

GRACE

*Okay. But I warn you, it'll break your heart.*

THOMAS

*Already broken.*

The rhythm achieved by elliptical sentences (*already broken; happy or sad*) conveys some intensity and tension. The presence of words with negative load (*sad; broken*) evoke feelings of compassion and sympathy towards the protagonist.

### Conclusion

The everlasting controversy as regards the self of the author or the voice of the author that has exercised the minds of philosophers and literary critics, becomes more complicated with the introduction of real-life characters who seem to go beyond the discourse of literature and take on a life of their own. So, who is speaking to us? The author, the narrator, a certain character or all the characters taken together? Barthes found it an effort wasted since it is not feasible to discern a single voice in the net of multiple voices. In fact, it is not worth searching for a single voice in a piece of writing. Rather, a text should be viewed as a single entity, a single voice made up of multiple of other minor voices which speak to us in unison. The linguo-stylistic and linguo-poetic analysis of the language applied by the characters helps reach a deeper insight into the real nature of the characters. As can be seen, dialogue between characters becomes a most powerful tool to make the given character more complete without direct intrusions or comments on the part of the author. It follows that characterization is made possible through dialogues. Characters, as such, reveal themselves through the language they use while conversing with each other and in doing so

they lay themselves open for countless interpretations. Similarly, the author opens up himself and reveals his underlying motifs and feelings and his true character through his own writings, since he converses with the readers through his works, as the text *as a whole, is nothing but a dialogue between the author and the reader.*

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## ԿԵՐՊԱՐ, ԲՆՈՒԹԱԳՐՈՒՄ, ԵՐԿԽՈՍՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

Գոհար Մադոյան

Տեքստի հնարավոր համարժեք մեկնաբանությունը մշտապես բարդ խնդիր է եղել տարբեր գործոնների պատճառով, որոնք ներդաշնարկորեն համագործակցում են ընթերցողի վրա ցանկալի գեղագիտական ազդեցություն գործելու համար: Լինելով գեղարվեստական ստեղծագործության մեջ առանցքային տարրեր՝ կերպարները, որոնք հաճախ հանդես են գալիս որպես առանձին, ուրույն, իսկ երբեմն անգամ սեփական կյանք ունեցող անհատներ, էլ ավելի են բարդացնում տեքստի մեկնաբանությունը: Հեղինակը, պատմասացն ու կերպարները, որոնց ընդունված է առանձնացնել, երբեմն ստեղծագործության մեջ մեզ հետ խոսում են մեկ ձայնով: Լեզվա-ոճական և լեզվա-բանաստեղծական քննության միջոցով հնարավորություն ենք ստանում քննել կերպարների երկխոսությունը իմաստային և վեր-նշանային մակարդակներում և բացահայտել նրանց թաքնված էությունն ու հեղինակի հետ հնարավոր կապը:

*Բանալի բառեր՝ կերպարի բնութագրում, երկխոսություն, տեքստի մեկնաբանություն, հեղինակ, հեղինակի մտադրություն:*