Characterization

Characterization Definition

Characterization is a literary device that is used step-by-step in literature to highlight and explain the details about a character in a story. It is in the initial stage in which the writer introduces the character with noticeable emergence. After introducing the character, the writer often talks about his behavior; then, as the story progresses, the thought-processes of the character.

The next stage involves the character expressing his opinions and ideas, and getting into conversations with the rest of the characters. The final part shows how others in the story respond to the character's personality.

Characterization as a literary tool was coined in the mid 15th century. Aristotle in his Poetics argued that "tragedy is a representation, not of men, but of action and life." Thus the assertion of the dominance of plot over characters, termed "plot-driven narrative," is unmistakable. This point of view was later abandoned by many because, in the 19th century, the dominance of character over plot became clear through petty bourgeois novels.

Types of Characterization

An author can use two approaches to deliver information about a character and build an image of it. These two types of characterization include:

> Direct or explicit characterization

This kind of characterization takes a direct approach towards building the character. It uses another character, narrator, or the protagonist himself to tell the readers or audience about the subject.

> Indirect or implicit characterization

This is a more subtle way of introducing the character to the audience. The audience has to deduce for themselves the characteristics of the character by observing his/her thought process, behavior, speech, way of talking, appearance, and manner of communication with other characters, as well as by discerning the response of other characters.

Characterization in Drama

On stage or in front of the camera, actors usually do not have much time to characterize. For this reason, the character faces the risk of coming across as underdeveloped. In dramaturgy, realists take a different approach, by relying on implied characterization. This is pivotal to the theme of their character-driven narrative. Examples of these playwrights are Anton Chekhov, Henrik Ibsen, and August Strindberg.

Classic psychological characterization examples, such as *The Seagull*, usually build the main character in a more indirect manner. This approach is considered more effective because it slowly discloses the inner turmoil of the character, over the course of the show, and lets the audience connect better.

The actors who act in such roles usually work on them profoundly to get an in-depth idea of the personalities of their respective characters. Often, during such shows, plays, or dramas, no direct statements about the character's nature are found. This kind of realism needs the actors to build the character from their own perspective initially. This is why realistic characterization is more of a subtle art, which cannot directly be recognized.

Examples of Characterization in Literature

Example #1: *The Great Gatsby* (By F. Scott Fitzgerald)

There are many examples of characterization in literature. *The Great Gatsby*, is probably the best. In this particular book, the main idea revolves around the social status of each character. The major character of the book, Mr. Gatsby, is perceptibly rich, but he does not belong to the upper stratum of society. This means that he cannot have Daisy. Tom is essentially defined

by his wealth and the abusive nature that he portrays every now and then, while Daisy is explained by Gatsby as having a [voice]{.link} "full of money."

Another technique to highlight the qualities of a character is to put them in certain areas that are symbolic of a social status. In the novel, Gatsby resides in the West Egg, which is considered less trendy than East Egg, where Daisy lives. This difference points out the gap between Jay's and Daisy's social statuses. Moreover, you might also notice that Tom, Jordan, and Daisy live in East Egg while Gatsby and Nick reside in West Egg, which again highlights the difference in their financial background. This division is reinforced at the end of the novel when Nick supports Gatsby against the rest of the folk.

Occupations have also been used very tactfully in the novel to highlight characteristics of certain protagonists. The prime example is Gatsby who, despite being so rich, is known by his profession: bootlegging. He had an illegal job that earned him a fortune, but failed to get him into the upper class of New York society. In contrast, Nick has a clean and fair job of a "bond man" that defines his character. The poor guy Wilson, who fixes rich people's cars, befriends his wife; and then there is Jordon, who is presented as a dishonest golf pro.

Function of Characterization

Characterization is an essential component in writing good literature. Modern fiction, in particular, has taken great advantage of this literary device. Understanding the role of characterization in storytelling is very important for any writer. To put it briefly, it helps us make sense of the behavior of any character in a story by helping us understand their thought processes. A good use of characterization always leads the readers or audience to relate better to the events taking place in the story. Dialogues play a very important role in developing a character, because they give us an opportunity to examine the motivations and actions of the characters more deeply.