Characterisation - an intrinsic aspect of dramatic text

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Abstract: *A playwright creates a play text with many inherent parts like plot, character, idea and language. Among these parts, characterisation is an important aspect as it helps to further the plot, to express idea and contribute to spectacle. A playwright creates character appropriate to the play and according to the dimensions in which it revolves such as physical, social, physiological and spiritual dimension. Therefore this study explores the process of character development by the play wright in the dramatic text and perseverance of this character construct in performance.*

I. Introduction

Character represents human personality. Dramatic characters are inventions in a work of art. They can be seen as both imitations of human beings and as the function of the dramatic task. Dramatic characters are performed by actors to create a convincing imitation of real people. Characterisation is the process of producing a character through typifying its actions, words and thoughts. Character development is very important in a text. Each dramatic character has a function or a need. A character without function is not valued. Every character can be analysed in every scene for its function in terms of the plays parts. The character helps to further the plot, to express idea and contribute to spectacle. Thoughts, words and deeds of character help in understanding the character in a better way.

II. Different kinds of Characterisation

A playwright's success ultimately depends on his ability to create a character of which an actor can bring to life in performance. A playwright creates character appropriate to the play and therefore character varies with different kinds. Two major kinds of characterisation are type character and stereotype character.

The character which is defined by a single dominant humour is called a type character. It is not flat or one dimensional. They have human complexity but one humour is the chief trait of it, whereas a stereotype character is flat and one dimensional. They are called as stock characters which appear repeatedly in various forms in many plays. Comedy is particularly a fruitful source of stock characters, such as the boastful coward, the nagging wife, the coquette and others. A stock character is also seen in the revenge scenes of Renaissance tragedy. The role of Hamlet demonstrates how such a stereotype is modified by an author to create a great character, combining the stock elements with individual ones.

Ben Jonson tried to identify and classify humanity as of four major types such as phlegm, choler, blood and melancholy. They are called as the four "humours". The term "humour" is derived from the psychological and physiological principle of Jonson's day. Ben Jonson believed the four humours are formed by the four liquids that controlled the human body. Ideally, these four liquids such as phlem, yellow bile, blood and black bile existed in harmony and thus produced a perfect physical and mental health. When one of the humours becomes dominant, corresponding imbalance in the temperament of the individual is created. Ben Jonson believed that based on this idea the character is defined and the playwright created the characters as type and stereotype character according to the situation and context. This is so because the context and situation judge the temper of the character.

III. Dimensions in Characterisation

Characterisation is classified according to the dimensions in which it revolves. Most of the plays are classified under four main dimensions such as physical, social, psychological and spiritual dimension. The characterisation concentrated with physical dimension exists mainly with the ideas based on human and physical capabilities. Such types of drama are mainly governed by set of conventions and make an impact over the audience concentrating the emotion or amusement. This kind of dimension in characterisation can be seen in George Bernard Shaw's plays. The description of Sergins in **Arms and the Man** or the meticulous Way in which Ibsen differentiates the eyes, hair and clothes of Hedda and those of Thea in **HeddaGabler** are good examples of physical description.

The social dimension concentrated upon a character depicts the background from which the character hails. This kind of characterisation reflects the peculiarities of society and acts as the realistic representation of society and morals. Oscar Wilde's plays are mainly concentrated with such type of characterisation. The allegorical manners of christening his characters such as Chasuble for a priest and prism for a governess are fine examples of social dimension. On the other hand psychological dimension moves a step further to present the character not only as socially driven but also biologically driven. The characters in Ben Jonson's plays classified under this kind as his characterisation is based on the idea that each man is possessed and governed by some one particular quality or 'master passion' which may be regarded as the backbone and central feature of character's personality.Jonson's classification and identification of 'humour' or passion in characters provide the mode of behaviour which determines the character's major trait. The other kind of dimension concentrated in characterisation is spiritual dimension. It is the ultimate point which conventionally depicts the values of the character as a human individual.

Characters are defined according to their nature and function. They are classified into different types. Loosely, there are two kinds of literary characters, which E.M Foster calls "round" and "flat". The round characteris life like. It grows and changes as in real life in course of the action. A round character is a dynamic character. It is the one that changes significantly during the course of the plot action. Usually the protagonist is dynamic, and his growth and development as a reaction to circumstance creates the central interest in the story line. The characters Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's **Macbeth** are dynamic as they change over the action of the play.

In contrast to the round character, the flat characters in a play are known only by certain characteristics and never grow like a 'round character'. It is called as the static character which remains dominated by a single quality throughout the plot. It never undergoes any significant change. Such characters usually surround the more complex, dynamic characters around which the plot evolves. In Shakespeare's play **Hamlet**, the protagonist Hamlet is dynamic whereas the character Polonius is static. The flat character remains the same in nature like "types".Most plays contain major characters and minor characters. The major character is called as the dominant character that plays the central role of action. The delineation and development of major character is essential to the play. The principal character is referred as protagonist and remains as the central figure of action. The minor characters to the subservient characters are also important as they support the major character. Therefore the action is furthered with both the major and minor character of the play.

Some characters are stated as archetypal characters as they are based on a particular archetype, which is a common character pattern. Jungian archetypes are modelled after mythology, legend and folktales. For instance the character Puck in William Shakespeare play **A Midsummer Night's Dream** is an example of Jungian trickster archetype because they defy established standards of behaviour. A single character may fulfil more than one archetypal role. A single character can also have many traits and feelings. A complex character may blend characteristics from different archetype, just as real people embody aspects of many archetypes.

Sympathetic and unsympathetic characters are created by the playwright so as either to appeal to the audience or to repel it. Authorial character or *raisonneur*is the one who speaks for the author, subtly giving the author's moral or philosophical ideas.

IV. Transformation of Playwright's Characterisation in Performance

Actors impersonate the actions in performance and therefore they are the keystone of performance. The nature and the function of characters in a play text are perceived by the actor to produce the character's role on stage. It provides the audience better understanding of the character than a reader would set. To transform themselves into the role of character, they engage in a creative act whose end product is a construct. This construct is an entity made by the actor for a particular purpose. To impersonate the actions in a make believe manner, the actor must use parts of his or her own real self, observations of other people, and imagination.

Imagination is the rich source of actor's understanding and playing of character. The stage creates the definite physical shape for acting. Set designing and lighting on stage produces a visual environment for the play's action. Thus the elements of performance add to the better understanding of the playwright's character. The visual impact created by theatre leaves the traits of character in audience mind forever.

V. Conclusion

Characters make a play active, interesting and consistent. The timing in characterisation creates a great impact over the character's action. A character should execute the speculated movement within the dramatic timing. The rhythmic acceleration of the action forces the readers and audience to feel the increased intensity. Thus a well-developed character is one that has been thoroughly characterized, with many traits. The closer the reader feels with the character, the better the character development. Characterisation conveys the information

about characters which is usually presented by the description. Therefore the playwright's characterisation is very important to understand the idea of the play.

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