

Character analysis: "substitute facts" vs. reality



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In any fictional or non-fictional literary story, the plot is supported by some solid well-developed characters. Additionally, it's not simply the most heroic or dynamic character, however, even the supporting characters should be well written and complete.

A character is " a fictional representation of a person—usually (but not necessarily) a psychologically realistic depiction," (Kirszner and Mandell P. 156). Developing a character is an important and lengthy process. Characters are composed of many components such as their physical characteristics and attributes, their motivation, backstory, and whether they are flat or rounded and dynamic or static. A character can also act as a foil or stock character. In this analysis, these qualities will determine how and if a character will influence or not contribute to a story and how and why a character is important to the story.

In the stories " A&P" and " Gryphon" both protagonist Sammy (" A&P") and Tommy (" Gryphon") Both are faced with major struggles that will not only change their stance and viewpoints on their current situation but allows them to develop into dynamic characters versus the latter in the end. A dynamic character " grows and changes in the course of a story, developing as he or she reacts to events and to other characters," (Kirszner and Mandell P. 158). Whereas, a static character " may face the same challenges a dynamic character might face but will remain essentially unchanged" (Kirszner and Mandell P. 158). In the story " A&P" Sammy is faced with the struggle of should he confront his manager and superior, Lengel and defends Queenie and the other girls inside the grocery store where he works, or should he ignore the situation and let it pass. Whereas, in the story " Gryphon" Tommy battles the conflict of, will he support his substitute

teacher, Miss Ferenczi and defend her against the other students in his class or will he follow the other students in the story? A character's motivation is "the reasons behind his or her behavior—or why we will not believe or accept that behavior" (Kirszner and Mandell P. 159). In each story, Tommy and Sammy are set up against a conflict that they have never encountered before, and their "motivation" is to determine what they must do, and the way they must approach the matter.

Although, each story is written by a different author they each present similarities of the attributes of the principal characters. Tommy and Sammy are confronted with adversity they had never beforehand had to face. Sammy needs to choose should he defend the young ladies by quitting and becoming the hero or should he tend to his very own concerns and keep his job. He is compelled to rapidly settle on a choice which his supervisor Lengel feels he made to thoughtlessly. "' I don't think you recognize what you're stating,' Lengel said" (Updike, Pg. 165). For Sammy, his choice is the thing that he believes he needs to do, and he does not regret his decision. Tommy is faced with the adversity of a different nature, he needs to choose should he trust and support Miss Ferenczi, and listen to her tales or should he, similar to the other students, believe she is manipulative and a liar. When she loses her job, Tommy is compelled to settle on a choice, go up against the other student who got her dismissed, or remain calm and let the issue go as it isn't his concern. Tommy is portrayed as being fascinated by Miss Ferenczi's "substitute facts" leading him to get into an altercation with his classmate, Wayne for telling on her. "She was right," I yelled. "She was always right! She told the truth!" Other kids were whooping. "You were just

scared, that's all!" (Baxter, Pg. 185). For both the young men their actions could be beneficial to them, or it could cause them future issues, but both decide to take a stance and become well-rounded dynamic characters because of their choices.

In the story, "Miss Brill," by Katherine Mansfield, Sundays are a mystical day for the story's protagonist Miss Brill until the point when she is forced to venture out of her fantasy and face reality. Each Sunday Miss Brill, a timid English teacher, goes to the Public Gardens and takes her "special" seat to look forward to tuning in to the discussions of others. Miss Brill has become a master at eavesdropping since attending the "show" on Sunday's. Miss Brill begins to see all that she observes on Sundays as a delightfully arranged theatrical performance in which everything, including herself, plays a major role. This is where she feels as if she "belongs" and feels as though they are all one big happy "family." One Sunday her dream is crushed by the discourteous and rude comments of the young couple, her hero, and heroine of her play. Mansfield demonstrates to us how devastating reality can be to individuals who haven't understood or acknowledged the truth in which they live. Miss Brill is similar to Baxter's Miss Ferenczi in the story, "Gryphon" they both are unique and unusual characters in their appearances as well as their actions which cause them to suffer in the end. Miss Brill is an unusual elderly lady that wears a fur necklet and watches others in a park and believes she is an actress in her worldly play at the gardens she attends every Sunday. Whereas Miss Ferenczi lives in her magical world dresses differently each day, as if she is in costume playing a character each time, she has marionette lines like "Pinocchio," and tells tales that she calls, "

substitute facts." They both exhibit unusual behavior and live in their own worlds. The difference is Miss Brill is a well-rounded and dynamic character and Miss Ferenczi is not instead, she is a static character. A round character is classified as a "well developed, closely in and responsive to the action" (Kirszner and Mandell P. 157). The reader understands Miss Brill and her daily life as the story progresses compared to Miss Ferenczi that just creates her backstory along with many other tales we do not know much about her in reality. Miss Ferenczi's character cannot be dynamic because she does not grow or change within the story, but the reader can infer from Mansfield that Miss Brill is dynamic and will change. After hearing the young couple's harsh remarks about herself she goes home and puts her fur away, stating when she did "she thought she heard something crying." (Mansfield, Pg. 171) The crying at the end of the story was her sobbing. She cries because she is humiliated about what the young couple had to say about her and she realizes how lonely and how much of a fantasy her life is.

Additionally, in the story, "Gryphon" the reader sees Tommy's mom as a cliché, exhausting sort of housewife and a "typical adult." Throughout the story his mom did not play much of a role, nor did she change or develop in any way making her a flat and stock character. A flat character is a "barely developed or stereotypical," (Kirszner and Mandell P. 157) She does play an essential role as a foil character for Tommy's teacher Miss Ferenczi by showing the complete inverted and opposite traits. A foil character is "a supporting character whose role in the story is to highlight a major character by presenting a contrast with him or her." (Kirszner and Mandell P. 157) Tommy even refers to how people thought his mother's face and hairstyle

reminded them of " Betty Crocker," but to him, his mother face just looked white (Baxter Pg. 180). Then again, we see Miss Ferenczi as a static character compared to Miss Brill. Although, we see Miss Ferenczi as a static character whose deceptive, misleading, and misunderstood. We can infer that her motivation for acting and speaking to the students how she did was to encourage Mr. Hilber's students to form their own conclusions and opinions in a very unconventional way.

Furthermore, another example of a static character is Maurice in Zadie Smith's " The girl with bangs." The protagonist is fascinated by a female character named Charlotte, just like Sammy is with " Queenie" and Tommy with Miss Ferenczi. Unfortunately, the protagonist does not know that Charlotte is having an affair with a French-accented male name, Maurice, and another gentleman whose name is unknown. The narrator knows a lot about Charlotte and her motivation is to have a real connection and mutual relationship with Charlotte, but the protagonist could not reach her goal of building an actual relationship with her due to Charlotte's promiscuity. Charlotte's character is described as disheveled, promiscuous, and careless from her introduction to the conclusion of the story her character does not change making her a flat character. She seems to not care about any of her relationships or bonds which is why she chooses to sleep with whomever she pleases. At the end of the story when she is caught with another man cheating on Maurice and the narrator she does not show any remorse or change. The protagonist continues to break off the relationship with her deciding that it was best for her overall. On the other hand, Maurice although he was confronted with Charlotte's infidelity just as the protagonist was he

decided to continue to pursue a relationship with her and ultimately marries Charlotte making him another static character.

In conclusion, characters in a story are one of the essential components when reading a well-composed literary work. Whether the character is the story's protagonist or if the character acts as a supporting character it is important to understand why these characters are there and how they may influence or change a story's outcome. All characters in a story whether dynamic, static, round or flat help keep the readers engaged and allows the story to progress. Understanding a character allows the reader to know what the characters motivation is and get insight into how they may act or react to defining situations and conflicts. In John Updike's "A&P", Katherine Mansfield's "Miss Brill", Charles Baxter's "Gryphon", and Zadie Smith's "The Girl with Bangs" they all accurately portray and represent a different element of character within their stories.

Work Cited

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