

CHARACTER ANALYSIS METHOD

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Abstract

The paper proposes a method with two points of view, description and interpretation, for understanding the character. Reader has an important role in re-construction the image of the character. The markers helping him/her to discover the meaning of the character are called needs. There are simple needs and complex needs/supra-needs.

Keywords: *character, speech level, predicates, sequence, sentence*

1. INTRODUCTION

A character is set by an author from heteroclit elements (language, images kept in author's memory, perspectives on the person and world, reflecting the specificity of an epoch and lodged on his/hers consciousness etc.) and achieves density and presence through the reader's activity of re-construction. The reader collects the information spread out in the text and organizes it in a coherent assembly that needs interpretation or a hermeneutic process. If the character is defined as a flow of features spread out in the text, that are to be interpreted, than the access to these is supposed to develop some markers with orientative function. Markers are initial instruments serving to configurate the image of the character and offers a procedure to follow. What the nature of these markers is, that helps shaping the image of the character is the main interest of present paper.

There are two important aspects for the method I propose: description and interpretation; that is the revaluation of the text for obtaining pertinent aspects concerning the character, forming the assembly, and the moment of understanding or achieving their meaning, when three contexts are being connected: that of the writer, of the text and the reader's. The last moment of understanding is dependent by a larger context, as the text is placed at the

intersection of the historical context with the communicative one and the linguistic context. However, could we say that the reconfiguration of the character is possible outside these contexts?

2. CHARACTER ANALYSIS METHOD

As an element of the narrative structure, the character establishes connections with the other narrative components, of which I mention the actions, which are its distinctive patterns. As a subject or object of the narrative statements, it connects with the narrative predicates, verbs, nouns or adjectives. As I mentioned above, the method takes into account two points of view, which I briefly pose below.

A. THE DESCRIPTION

The meaning of the character is mostly encompassed within the semantic dimension of the verbs, nouns or adjectives which are being assigned to it, thus defining it. In advance, I suggest identifying these predicates which have a decisive role in establishing the identity of the subject (object) of the statement. The predicates always belong to a sequence; therefore, an important task will be the segmentation of the text into these sequences¹. Being a coherent unit of the text, the sequence is a narrative cell: it has a nucleus or a centre of significance, represented by the predicates that express a simple or complex demand/ a theme. Around this nucleus, the textual material is organised in order to enhance the content and the central implications by partially reinforcing them. There are two essential parts of the sequence, depending on their level of display: on the *surface*, through factual sentences, and within *depth*, highlighting a certain demand. I consider that the text is an

ensemble of such narrative cells or sequences between which different kinds of links are established, that may be identified through reading. The latter is the only method providing the possibility of establishing the ensemble of demands governing the text. The repeatability criterion could be considered as a possibility for the identification of a demand, but sometimes a single occurrence of a predicate may be even more significant for what the character stands for. As an example, for Nana, a character from the short story *Rem* written by Mircea Cărtărescu, the revealing predicates are *to narrate, to tell, to meet with, to dream, to play*. For Vali, another character from the same text, the defining predicates are *to listen, to interpret, to get together with*. I keep the affirmative form without losing sight of their negative one, which is equally important. Therefore, the initial meaning of the character is given by developing the semantic plan of these predicates, divided into opposing semiotic traits. All of these predicates are part of a more general semantic field that I will generically name *need*. Hence, I will obtain *the need to narrate, the need to listen, the need for sexuality, the need to be with the other, the need to dream etc.*, with their pairs, *need not to narrate, need not to listen, need for solitude etc.*

To this pattern, reproaches could be made upon adopting a perspective which would lead to assimilating the character, textual and imaginative structure, to the real person, the only one who is defined by a set of daily needs imposed by everyday reality (needs which are, in psychology, classified in a pyramid by the American, Abraham Maslow). In other words, there is a comeback to the era before structuralism, when the character was considered a being that possessed psychology, affectivity, intelligence. What I am taking into account, though, is the text itself as a fundamental part for building the image of the character. The narrative speech contains these predicates, linguistic units, justified, construed into smaller particles that guide the reader's course of action and which may be assigned to someone, the character itself. Undoubtedly, I could have chosen other textual elements as reference points, like space and time units or deictic arguments, all of them leading to the same reality to describe and interpret, the

character. My option for the predicates is also justified by their capacity to enclose or to contain them virtually in their semantic field.

Another critique to the model could refer to encompassing these predicates under the generic term of *need*, which would maintain the same confusion between the character and the real person. I have chosen this term, which is only supposed to be seen as an abstract notion, a general category, bearing in mind the need of a clear, intelligible classification.

As soon as these *needs* are identified, the description comes next, containing the following steps:

- a) Establishing the subject, possibly the object, which relates to that need (surname, name, nicknames, pronominal forms etc.);
- b) The analysis of the linguistic context;
- c) Granting the need or not.

For the moment of the interpretation, I will keep sight of the results (makeovers, reinterpretations, surpassing the initially assigned existential universe etc.) that belong to a new linguistic context, bearing new meanings. If a) and b) are about what we can name **signifier**, c) and the next moment, *the interpretation*, are about the **signified**.

We are here briefly looking at the elements that will be kept track of on each level of the analysis:

- a) The identified need has to be able to be linked to *something*. At the speech level, this is called a certain way or a name. I will keep sight of surnames, names, nicknames, the noun expressing a being, the personal, demonstrative or negative pronoun or the form of the verb;
- b) Through linguistic context I understand the linguistic contiguity of the predicate and the name, meaning the syntagmatic links surrounding this identified nucleus. Which are the limits of the context and how do we establish when a context finishes another one starts? The context (or the sequence or the ensemble more or less coherent) could enclose a phrase, a more stretched text fragment or a macrostructure, depending on the way the events are organised in the story. The limit of the context is the same with the expansion limit of the selected predicate. At this level of analysis, the information related to the

narrator, focus, type of narration, space and time settings, deictic arguments, figures of speech, stylistic methods, values of modes and tenses, stylistic records, distinctive patterns of the speech will be relevant. An important point at this level of analysis will be the confrontation between the *contexts*, having gained depth during interpretation, with the purpose of discovering the possible modifications suffered by the text and by the character.

- c) At the next level, I will stress the way that demand is developing, its implications throughout defining the character, the ensemble of subsequent, finished or unfinished actions it encloses.

If the suggested pattern takes a hold of the character it means that it should stay true for all kinds of text containing this category, meaning also for drama, advertising or other texts. May we assume this to be true, as these needs can be updated and valued.

B. THE INTERPRETATION

The last level of analysis is about determining the results or the consequences of the need. *What happened? How is the character now? Which is the fictional universe in which it is placed after either fulfilling the need or not?* These are a few of the questions I will try to answer by describing this level, at which I am following the interpretation, the action of giving meaning. This is based on three moments:

- a) Establishing the list of character traits, using the above mentioned model; classifying the characters by the number of described demand (main, supporting, episodic etc.), by the nature of their need (for instance, complete characters and incomplete characters or typical characters and atypical characters etc.) and by the results of the needs (local characters or those expanding their borders as examples);
- b) Relating some traits to the ensemble in order to notice the evolution or makeover of the character;
- c) Bringing together the contexts: verbal, of the author and of the reader's (the historical context of the author is related to the created

text which, in turn, is submitted to the texts of the critics).

In this way, the character is portrayed both as the one initiating the satisfying of a demand, following the changes according to fulfilling it or not, as well as the resulted image of another demand, defining another character or characters in the text. The interpretations are based on this layout of the character, designed either by own will (or that is what the text makes us believe), or by the complicity of other characters.

3. TYPES OF NEEDS

I. According to their form, depending on the instance they are accompanying, the needs are classified in: a) need of the agent, b) need of the text.

If T is a narrative text, then T is made of:

- a) A following of events developing actions (Sac.), which are grouped depending on a need linked to an agent (Dag.) (*the need to look at, the need of a project, the need of another etc.*) and
 - b) The fragments connecting these sequences and that do not represent actions (Snac.), which I will call *needs of the text* (Dt.) (*the need for coherence, for an affect over the receiver, of submitting to certain literary conventions etc.*).
- $$T = (\text{Sac.})_1/\text{Dag.} + (\text{Snac.})_1/\text{Dt.} + (\text{Sac.})_2/\text{Dag.} + (\text{Snac.})_1/\text{Dt.} + \dots + \text{Nt.}/\text{Dag.}$$

The alternations and the share of these sequences in the text depend on the aesthetic reasons and the author's talent. I believe that a character is defined by bringing up the two categories of needs, Dt. and Dag., at the text level, through sequences like Sac. and Snac. Only in this way, the accounts of the character and its immediate and mediated features will be shaped. If the immediate attributes are recognisable at a word or phrase level, the mediated characteristics are placed on an in-between phrase level, being assigned to the Sac. levels. The Snac. type of sequences can be shaped both at word or phrase level, as well as in-between phrases; therefore, the attributes of the character will be, at this point, mediated or immediate. The perspective over the character (Ch.) is different according to the two identified demands: from the Dag. point

of view it will play the role of the subject (S, *who is going the action*), while from the Dt. point of view it will be an indirect object (OI, *about who is said to be doing the action, to whom the action is attributed to*).

If T is communicating [Cf. = S] and [Ch. = OI], then, about the character, T is saying that:

- a) in Sac./Dag. "Ch. is doing A, B, C...", (Ch. = character, A, B, C = actions), so Ch. *will have* immediate and mediated features and
- b) in Snac./Dt. "X, Y, Z... are being done / attributed to" (X, Y, Z = feelings, thoughts, ideology etc.), so the character *will be given* mediated and immediate features.

A character is good, brave, fair, honest, reflexive only as long as the speech is creating contexts for the character to act as such. *Connecting the attributes based on the conscience of a receiver, both on a singular level and as well as interacting with the ensemble forms the image of the character.* As an example, for the characters of the novel *Orbitor* by Mircea Cărtărescu, relevant are the demands mentioned below, which delivered either to the text or the agent will determine the building up of each figure and of the whole structure.

II. According to their content, the needs are divided in:

A. Simple needs which correspond to a large sense of identity:

1. The need for identity;
2. The need for belonging/memory;
3. The need for sexuality;
4. The need for another;
5. The need to own;
6. The need to act (to see, to talk, to achieve etc.);
7. The need for rejection/acceptance.

By positively or negatively materializing these demands/needs, the general features, common to more characters are enforced:

- a) The name or the absence of a name;
- b) Origin or the lack of it;
- c) Corporality or no corporality (for instance, physical features);
- d) Age (space, time, nation/community in which it is placed) historical or non-historical;
- e) Material worries or the lack of such priorities;
- f) Activity or inactivity;

- g) Beliefs and psychological, ethic, intellectual interests or their absence;
- h) Affiliation to an institution or independence;
- i) Adaptability to certain laws, from identifying with the official system to total rejection.

B. With the purpose of differentiating the characters, marking *their identity project*, limitedly said, **the supra-needs** or **the complex needs** are:

1. The need to realize a project (to communicate, to narrate, to write, to love, to get rich etc.);
2. The need for understanding;
3. The need for imagination, to dream, for solitude;
4. The need of beliefs/ideological system;
5. The need of a semiotic system;
5. The need to look for (something or someone)/ to project;
7. The need for synthesis/ *negating negation*.

The individualizing features, specific for a character, depending on its role, are determined by the *supra- needs*:

- a) Owning a project/ theory/ ideology;
- b) Imagining the ways or methods to realize the project;
- c) The ability to realize the project;
- d) The possibility to obtain results.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The two categories of needs, the *simple* and the *supra-needs*, are inter-conditioned within a dynamic of defining the character, each time describing its image in a particular, unique way. As an example, for Nana, the narrator-character of *Rem*, satisfying *the need for an identity project*, embodied in *telling the past*, follows a *simple need*, *the need for sexuality*, which in turn succeeds another *simple need*, *the need for another* and for *communication*. In the economy of the story, the eroticism is preceded by conversations on literary themes and is followed by identity projects. The act of telling is conditioned for Nana by obtaining a *body for narrating*, procedure possible by nullifying the other body, the *body to tell*, object of different descriptions of the narrator or of her lover, Vali. In fact, Vali, as the one whom the telling is addressed to, will rewrite the woman's body in a poetic, metaphoric register, through a process of depersonalization of the other narrator,

more exactly moving from the physical body, with peculiar mixes of masculinity and femininity, to the over dimensioned body, viewed spatially as a map or island. The creative acts, detaching themselves and coming back to one's body, are here effects of taking part in the act to telling and of the development of the character's interest from a *simple need* to a *supra- need*, from the *need for another* to the *need for reconfiguring one's identity*. Duality as going from *one identity* to an *identity project*, meaning stressing the supra-need instead of the simple need, will always be present in Cărtărescu's works. Obviously, not all the characters have the same needs and we couldn't even credit a character with all the need that can be identified. The main characters will be defined according to the amplitude of their needs at the speech level, being opposite to others, supporting ones, which are key to only a few needs, developed within a reduced narrative space. Assigning the needs and the act of them taking place is relevant for the way the text is organized, contributing to its development. On one side, the same need of a character can be brought up again in different speech sequences, marking this way apparently repetitive actions; placed throughout varied moments of the speech though, they may either accentuate an already given feature of the character or highlight a new one, or generate a *narrative bubble*, which will afterwards be developed in such a way so that the other needs of the beings populating that fictional world will determine the crystallization of the fictive faces and universes. On the other side, the same need may be assigned to a series of characters in order to underline the differences or the similarities between them. Concerning the connection between the need and the sequence, one may notice that a sequence may coincide or not with the development of a single need.

References

1. Adam, Jean-Michel (2008) *Linguistica textuală. Introducere în analiza textuală a discursurilor*. Translation by Corina Iftimia. Preface by Rodica Nagz. Iași: Institutul European.
2. Barthes, Roland, Wolfgang Kayser, Wayne C. Booth, Philippe Hamon (1977) *Poétique du récit*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Endnotes

1. Adam, 2008, at text level, identifies linking and segmentation procedures that have to do with the following essential units: sentences, phrases, periods or sequences, paragraphs or verses, text plan. From the point of view of the text length, the sequence, entity with internal hierarchical organization, is placed between paragraph and phrase. "The sequences are complex text units, made of a limited number of statement-sentences packages: macro-sentences are a type of periods which have the main priority of being units linked to other macro-sentences, occupying well defined positions within the entirety of the sequence. Each macro-sentence receives a meaning with regards to the others, in the complex hierarchical unit of the sequence." (Adam 2008: 244). Therefore, the linguist establishes a hierarchical structure for this sequence: from sentences, to macro-sentences, meaning an ensemble of sentences. Macro-sentences are differentiated by the type of preformatted arrangements of sentences: *narrative, argumentative, explicative, dialogic, descriptive*. I am identifying the sequence by valuing certain concepts from the biological field: nucleus, organizing around the nucleus, limit of sequence (membrane). The accent falls in my model on the semantic organization, which must precede the syntactic one. In other words, the same need, let us say the *need for understanding*, may be familiar with all types of arrangements. Cf. Barthes, 1977, too, who is linking the narrative sequences to a model of becoming: "l'origine d'une séquence n'est pas l'observation de la réalité, mais la nécessité de varier et de dépasser la première *forme* qui se soit offerte à l'homme, à savoir la répétition: une séquence est essentiellement un tout au sein du quel rien ne se répète; [...] les hommes réinjectent sans cesse dans le récit ce qu'ils ont connu, ce qu'ils ont vécu." (Barthes 1977: 52).