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Q) Functions of Characters in Novel

Ans.- What does characterization do for a story? In a nutshell, it allows us to empathize with the protagonist and secondary characters, and thus feel that what is happening to these people in the story is vicariously happening to us; and it also gives us a sense of verisimilitude, or the semblance of living reality. An important part of characterization is dialogue, for it is both spoken and inward dialogue that afford us the opportunity to see into the characters' hearts and examine their motivations. In the best of stories, it is actually characterization that moves the story along, because a compelling character in a difficult situation creates his or her own plot.

In fictional literature, authors use many different types of characters to tell their stories. Different types of characters fulfill different roles in the narrative process, and with a little bit of analysis, we can usually detect some or all of the types below.

- Major or central characters are vital to the development and resolution of the conflict. In other words, the plot and resolution of conflict revolves around these characters
- Minor characters serve to complement the major characters and help move the plot events forward.

Dynamic - A dynamic character is a person who **changes over time**, usually as a result of resolving a central conflict or facing a major crisis. Most dynamic characters tend to be central rather than peripheral characters, because resolving the conflict is the major role of central characters.

- Static - A static character is someone who **does not change over time**; his or her personality does not transform or evolve.
- Round - A rounded character is anyone who has a **complex personality**; he or she is often portrayed as a conflicted and contradictory person.
- Flat - A flat character is the opposite of a round character. This literary personality is notable for **one kind of personality trait or characteristic**.
- Stock - Stock characters are those types of characters who have become **conventional or stereotypical** through *repeated use* in particular types of stories. Stock characters are instantly recognizable to readers or audience members (e.g. the femme fatale, the cynical but moral private eye, the mad scientist, the geeky boy with glasses, and the faithful sidekick). Stock characters are normally one-dimensional flat characters, but sometimes stock personalities are deeply conflicted, rounded characters (e.g. the "Hamlet" type).



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- Protagonist - The protagonist is the central person in a story, and is often referred to as the story's main character. He or she (or they) is faced with a conflict that must be resolved. The protagonist may not always be admirable (e.g. an anti-hero); nevertheless s/he must command involvement on the part of the reader, or better yet, empathy.
- Antagonist - The antagonist is the character(s) (or situation) that represents the opposition against which the protagonist must contend. In other words, the antagonist is an obstacle that the protagonist must overcome.
- Anti-Hero - A major character, usually the protagonist, who lacks conventional nobility of mind, and who struggles for values not deemed universally admirable. Duddy, in Mordecai Richler's The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, is a classic anti-hero. He's vulgar, manipulative and self-centered. Nevertheless, Duddy is the center of the story, and we are drawn to the challenges he must overcome and the goals he seeks to achieve.
- Foil - A foil is any character (usually the antagonist or an important supporting character) whose personal qualities contrast with another character (usually the protagonist). By providing this contrast, we get to know more about the other character.
- Symbolic - A symbolic character is any major or minor character whose very existence represents some major idea or aspect of society. For example, in *Lord of the Flies*, Piggy is a symbol of both the rationality and physical weakness of modern civilization; Jack, on the other hand, symbolizes the violent tendencies (the Id) that William Golding believes is within human nature.
- Direct presentation (or characterization) - This refers to what the speaker or narrator **directly says or thinks about a character**. In other words, in a direct characterization, the reader is **told** what the character is like. When Dickens describes Scrooge like this: "I present him to you: Ebenezer Scrooge....the most tightfisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!" - this is very direct characterization!
- Indirect presentation (or characterization) - This refers to what the *character* says or does. The reader then **infers** what the character is all about. This mimics how we understand people in the real world, since we can't "get inside their heads". In other words, in an indirect characterization, it's *the reader* who is obliged to figure out what the character is like. And sometimes the reader will get it wrong.



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Laurence Sterne: The Novelist

Born in Ireland in 1713, Laurence Sterne was a clergyman and novelist; he is best known for his inventive and humorous work *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. Though popular during his lifetime, Sterne became even more celebrated in the 20th century, when modernist and postmodernist writers rediscovered him as an innovator in textual and narrative forms.

Early life

Sterne was born to a British military officer stationed in County Tipperary. Following his father's postings, Sterne's family moved briefly to Yorkshire before returning to Ireland, where they lived largely in poverty and moved frequently throughout the rest of Sterne's youth. When the elder Sterne was dispatched to Jamaica, where he would die in 1731, he placed his son with a wealthy uncle who supported the boy's education.

Sterne attended Jesus College, Cambridge, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Richard Sterne, who had been Master of the College. After being ordained as an Anglican priest, Sterne took up the vicarship of Sutton-on-the-Forest, where he married Elizabeth Lumley; the couple would live there for the next 20 years.

Politics and Early Writings

Through his paternal family line, Sterne was connected to several powerful clergymen. His uncle, Archdeacon Jacques Sterne, encouraged Sterne to contribute to Whig political journals, and consequently he wrote several articles supporting Sir Robert Walpole. However, when Sterne's political fervency failed to match his uncle's, prompting him to abandon the role of political controversialist, Jacques Sterne cut ties with his nephew and refused to support his career. Nevertheless, Sterne continued writing.

His first long work, a sharp satire of the spiritual courts entitled *A Political Romance*, made him as many enemies as allies. Though the work was not widely distributed, and indeed was burned at the request of those targeted by its Swiftian-style criticism, it represented Sterne's first foray into the kind of humorous satire for which he would become famous. At age 46, Sterne stepped back from managing his parishes and turned his full attention to writing.

Writing *Tristram Shandy*

Sterne began what would become his best-known work, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, at a moment of personal crisis. He and his wife were both ill with consumption, and, in the same year that the first volumes of Sterne's long comic novel appeared, his mother and uncle Jacques died. The blend of sentiment, humour and philosophical exploration that characterises Sterne's works matured during this difficult period. *Tristram Shandy* was an enormous success, and Sterne became, for the first time in his life, a famous literary figure in London. Still suffering from tuberculosis, Sterne left England for the Continent, where his travels influenced his second major work, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768).



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Parson Yorick, Sterne's alter ego

Sterne's narrator in *A Sentimental Journey* is Parson Yorick, a sensitive but also comic figure who first appeared in *Tristram Shandy* and who became Sterne's fictive alter ego. In *A Sentimental Journey*, Parson Yorick wears a 'little picture of Eliza around his neck', and in the last year of his life Sterne would write the autobiographical *Journal to Eliza* under the pseudonym Yorick. Eliza was Eliza Draper, the wife of an East India Company official, and the literary and emotional muse of Sterne's final years. After Draper returned to India, the two continued to exchange letters, some of which Draper allowed to be published after Sterne's death in the volume *Letters from Yorick to Eliza*.

In 1768, Sterne's health declined rapidly and he died in London at the age of 54.