

Austen (4)

FICTIONAL CHARACTER

- 4.1 The status of characters as types, symbols, individuals, group representatives, minds, or textual effects, is a matter for investigation.
- 4.2 Our cognitive capacity to mentally represent the beliefs, intentions, and feelings of others (called *theory of mind* or *metarepresentation* by cognitive scientists) is the stuff of character.
- 4.3 To understand how character works in a fiction, one must analyze how the character is produced by specific aspects of the materials of the fiction (medium, genre, discourse, *sjuzet*, *fabula*).
- 4.4 In the shaping of a narrative fiction, not all characters are equal. The *character-system*, or distribution of narrative attention, makes some characters *major* and some *minor*. The character-system is also part of fiction's materials.

FLAT AND ROUND

We may divide characters into flat and round...[Flat characters] are constructed round a single idea or quality; when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round....The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round.

E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (1927; London: Edward Arnold, 1974), 46–47, 54.

The implied person behind any character is never directly reflected in the literary text but only partially inflected: each individual portrait has a radically contingent position within the story as a whole; our sense of the human figure (*as implied person*) is inseparable from the space that he or she occupies within the narrative totality.

Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 13.

WHY ARE THERE SOLDIERS AT MERYTON?

With the renewal of war [in 1803], the Volunteers drilled Sunday after Sunday...“Volunteers” is, in any case, a misnomer. Officers came forward a great deal more readily than the miscellaneous, ill-disciplined, incurably anti-militaristic rank-and-file, who were losing their only day of rest. Pains were taken, also, to keep arms out of the hands of the disaffected....

The sons of the squire, the attorney, and the manufacturer, enjoyed dressing up on horseback and attending Volunteer balls. A common understanding grew up between aristocracy and middle class, forming that *esprit de corps* which was later to carry the day on the field of Peterloo [i.e., the Peterloo Massacre, 1819]; while at the balls their sisters selected husbands who facilitated that cross-fertilisation of landed and commercial wealth which distinguished the English Industrial Revolution....

[Footnote:] For a contemporary record of the reconciliation between land and commerce in the Volunteers, see T. A. Ward's Sheffield diary, *Peeps into the Past, passim*. And Jane Austen.

E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; New York: Vintage, 1966), 456, 457n1.