

## Austen (4)

## 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.

## MINOR AND MAJOR

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.

## FICTIONAL CHARACTER: PRINCIPLES

A character is the effect that occurs when a figure is presented with distinctive, mostly human characteristics. (Bal, *Narratology*, 104)

- 4.1 To understand how character works in a narrative, one must analyze how the character is produced by specific aspects of the narrative (medium, genre, discourse, *sjuzet*, *fabula*).
- 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 The status of fictional characters as types, symbols, individuals, group representatives, minds, or textual effects, is a matter for investigation.
- 4.4 In the shaping of a narrative, 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 the narrative materials.

## SOME MEANINGS OF “CHARACTER”

- 1. A distinctive mark impressed, engraved, or otherwise made on a surface (1350)
- 3a. A member of a set of symbols used in writing or printing to represent linguistic elements (1490)
- 4b. A particular person’s style of handwriting (1569)
- 8a. The aggregate of the distinctive features of something (1577)
- 9a. The sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual or a people, viewed as a homogeneous whole (1600)
- 11. Recognized official rank or position (1629)
- 12a. A description, delineation, or detailed report of a person’s qualities (1645)
- 12b(a). A testimonial, especially one given by a previous employer (1693)
- 13. Reputation, general estimation of qualities (1649)
- 14. A person portrayed in a work of fiction, a drama, a film, a comic strip, etc. (1664)

*OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. “[character](#), *n.*”

The novel is not just one kind of fictional narrative among others; it is the kind in which and through which fictionality became manifest, explicit, widely understood, and accepted.

What distinguished the new writers [eighteenth-century English novelists] from libelers was the insistence that the human referent of the text was a generalization about and not an extratextual, embodied instance of a “species.”

Catherine Gallagher, “[The Rise of Fictionality](#),” in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006), 1:337, 1:342.