

**MEANS OF REVEALING THE CHARACTER IN THE SHORT STORY BY CATHERINE MANSFIELD
“MISS BRILL”**

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Abstract. The knowledge of instruments of interpretation in general and ways of character description in particular is a necessary but insufficient condition for understanding the image of the characters and the idea of the literary work. It requires a more constructive and careful approach to the methods of characterization in terms of the functions they perform. On the example of the work by famous British writer Catherine Mansfield “Miss Brill” the authors illustrate the relationship between the characteristics of heroes and the means of their characterization with other components of interpretation, consider the role of stylistic devices in characterizing heroes, the protagonist in particular, and determine the role and functions in their characterization. The complex methodology of this study combined the following methods and types of text analysis: a textual analytical method of philological reading (in other words, a slow, thoughtful reading) of a literary work; contextual and semantic types of analysis of lexical material; linguistic analysis; comparative-contrastive method; hermeneutic method, which allows to objectively interpret the literary works. The leading research method in the study is the method of linguistic poetic analysis. The authors conclude that being the cornerstone, although not the only part of the text interpretation, character presentation can yield valuable clues to both understanding the real nature of the protagonist and evaluating the message of the whole literary work as its final destination. Based on the results of the study the authors identify the key points that serve as guidelines for interpreting the text, and present an example of analyzing a particular literary work.

Key words: text interpretation, Catherine Mansfield, “Miss Brill”, means of revealing the character, protagonist.

1. Introduction. The story “Miss Brill” by Catherine Mansfield [1] is an illustrative example of imagery, symbolism, stylistic excellence and style that is wholly her own. It all skillfully contributes to the revelation of the protagonist down to the finest detail, enables the reader to observe the situation from within and without, plunge into the inner world of the character and grasp the overall message of the literary work.

2 Methods. The complex methodology of this study combined the following methods and types of text analysis: a textual analytical method of philological reading (in other words, a slow, thoughtful reading) of a literary work; contextual and semantic types of analysis of lexical material; linguistic analysis; comparative-contrastive method; hermeneutic method, which allows to objectively interpret the literary works. The leading research method in the study is the method of linguistic poetic analysis. As a concrete technique in the work the thematic stratification of the text with subsequent analysis of the selected thematic layer at all levels of the language was used.

3 Results And Discussion. The focus of the story is a single woman, a teacher by profession, who goes to Public Gardens (Jardins Publiques) every weekend and indulges in her immaculate dreams about the romantic flawless world she created for herself. One day she finally comes to her senses, when she happens to eavesdrop on the conversation of a couple in love, who call her ‘fried whiting’ and it becomes an eye opener for her and makes her imaginary world come crashing down. First and foremost, it should be noted that the title of the story ‘Miss Brill’ is more than suggestive: for one thing, it indicates the woman’s marital status, which gives the reader a slight hint that it could be the focus of the story; for another, through antonomasia the character’s name undoubtedly evokes associations with the word ‘brilliant’ and this is confirmed by the narration and description given at the beginning as well as the character’s self-perception – her lifestyle smacked of luxury, refinement and elegance. It can also make the reader think of ‘the brill’ – “a European fish with a thin flat body” [2] which is true up to a point too, as it reflected bleak, lackluster life the protagonist lived in reality. Thus, this ambiguous interpretation definitely grasps the reader’s attention and it is only after reading that the title begins to speak volumes to us – it uncovers the dramatic discrepancy between the character’s self-perception and the impression she made on other people.

Evaluating the protagonist through perspective of round and dynamic characters, it is safe to say that Miss Brill is a round character. According to the definition of the authors of “Fields of Vision” [3], ‘round characters, like real people, have complex, multi-dimensional personalities. They show emotional and intellectual depth and are capable of growing and changing’. Indeed, the heroine has a subtle sensitive nature, she is receptive to the environment she lives in and creates the true-to-life image of a lonely woman. However, according to some linguists, Yasakova Y.B. [4] among them, if the character is ‘characterized by one or two traits’ he or she is flat/simple. Obviously, Miss Brill makes the impression of a lonely unhappy woman and doesn’t betray other features as long as her emotional state is the author’s first consideration. Yet, we have every reason to believe that the protagonist is round, since the author provides a realistic image of a woman with her multi-faceted and subtle nature.

Regarding the character from the viewpoint of dynamic/static aspect, Miss Brill is evidently dynamic: the situation teaches her a bitter lesson and she finally comes down to earth and changes her mind. The reader witnesses the stark difference in her emotional state, as at the beginning she is satisfied with herself and at the end of the story she has to face up to it and reconsider her views, so she grows shocked and depressed. It becomes apparent that her life will never be the same.

As far as the character presentation is concerned, the protagonist is revealed indirectly through: a) psychological portrayal and analysis of motives, since the author indulges into the description of her emotional state and is so quick to point out the nuances that the reader burrows into the character and perceives the situation through her eyes:

Ex. "... Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur."

"Yes, she really felt like that about it."

"It was disappointing, for Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation."

b) through action, which is actually none the least important means of characterization, as the author narrates and describes the events and wants the reader to invest mental effort and judge the situation. It also lends the story a touch of surprise and unexpectedness, as the beginning and the end of the story stand in stark relief:

ex. But today she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room-her room like a cupboard- and sat down on the red eiderdown.

c) through the naming of characters. As it has been mentioned above, the name of the character can be revealing and may uncover the real nature of the personality.

Apart from means of characterization, it's unassailable that stylistic devices and expressive means make a significant contribution to the revelation of the character.

The overall impression Miss Brill makes is that she is extremely lonely:

Ex. She had become really quite expert ... at sitting in other people's lives just for a minute while they talked round her.

The case of metaphor inspires the idea that the woman wanted to fill in the gap in her life being interested in lives of other people.

Enumeration and simile in the above mentioned sentence 'But today she passed the baker's by..' helps to achieve the same effect of hopelessness and despair.

The parallel construction in the sentence

'It explained why she made such a point of starting from home at just the same time every week - so as not to be late for the performance - and it also explained why she had quite a queer, shy feeling' makes it clear that her weekends were monotonous, predictable and cheerless.

'She had got quite used to the frail head on the cotton pillow, the hollowed eyes, the open mouth and the high pinched nose. If he'd been dead she mightn't have noticed for weeks; she wouldn't have minded.'

Enumeration, epithets in the first sentence and hyperbole in the second sentence suggest the idea that life was too hard on the woman and she dragged a terrible existence trying to earn her living and stay afloat.

For all the hardships and downfalls in her life, Miss Brill has a very imaginative, romantic and sensitive nature:

'They were beautifully dressed; they were in love. The hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht.'

The metaphor intimates Miss Brill had an artistic taste and was fond of literature. Her bright inner world was evidently larger and didn't fit the dull reality she lived in.

'He (the conductor) scraped with his foot and flapped his arms like a rooster about to crow ..'

The simile makes us believe Miss Brill's inner world was full of magic, fairy-like associations, harmony and peace of mind. The following example of metaphor substantiates the same idea:

Ex. 'Now there came a little 'flutey' bit-very pretty!- a little chain of bright drops.

By the way, the reiteration of the word 'little' and 'tiny' as in 'little eyes', 'little rogue', 'dear little thing', 'little children', 'little French dolls', 'tiny paw', 'little dog, 'tiny staggerer' that reflect Miss Brill's perception, explicate the protagonist's tender, feminine nature, her aspiration for having a close-knit family and children.

The combination of simile and detached construction 'The old people sat on the bench, still as statues' and simile and epiphora 'It was like a play. It was exactly like a play' speak of refinement, education, versatile and cultured nature of the character.

At the same time, Miss Brill's flamboyant inner world is no hindrance to her good looks. She is apparently well-groomed, and the fur she wears and personifies is a testament to it:

'Little rogue biting its tail just by her left ear'

As the story progresses the reader realizes that Miss Brill is knowledgeable in fashion, she is vogue-oriented, like many women are:

'...little boys with big white silk bows under their chins, little girls, little French dolls, dressed up in velvet and lace.'

Anaphora, antithesis and metonymy that the sentence combines in one characterize Miss Brill as an extraverted person, attentive to details in either appearance or character of other people. A wide range of epithets, such as 'funny',

'odd', 'silent', 'stiff', 'dignified' to name a few inspire the idea that the character invested all her attention into other people and partly confirms the idea of loneliness mentioned above. The following examples of a detached construction and metonymy add to this message:

'...a fine old man in a velvet coat, his hands clasped over a huge carved walking-stick...'

'And now an ermine toque and a gentleman in grey met just in front of her.'

By the way, at times Miss Brill sounds quite judgmental of other women and tends to criticize their appearance and behavior, which is so womanlike:

'And he'd been so patient. He'd suggested everything... No, nothing would please her'

'Now everything, her hair, her face, even her eyes was the same colour as the shabby ermine...'

The enumeration and epithet bring forth the derogatory attitude of Miss Brill to other women and stress the idea how unhappy she must have been.

However, despite Miss Brill's solitude she comes across as a very optimistic and positive personality, trying to put on a brave front and suppress her anxiety, emptiness and despair:

'And when she breathed, something light and sad – no, not sad, exactly – something gentle seemed to move in her bosom.'

'And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill – a something, what was it? – not sadness – no, not sadness – a something that made you want to sing.'

The insistent mention of sadness confirms the reader in his belief that Miss Brill tried to drive negative thoughts away from her and subdue depressive feelings. The idea that she was well aware of her misery can be rendered through the epithets:

'...it also explained why she had quite a queer, shy feeling at telling her English pupils how she spent her Sunday afternoons.'

4 Summary. Generally the story gives the reader the sketch of a regular woman, hungry for love, but trying to settle for what she has and making the best of a bad job. The reader cannot but discern the harsh reality Miss Brill was immersed in and the bright imaginary world she created for herself were supposed to give way to discord and cause disappointment and confusion.

5 Conclusions. Formalist approach to the study of literature traditionally focuses on plot and narrative structure, methods informed by psychoanalysis shift the center of attention to the text's characters. A psychological approach is, however, merely one way of evaluating characters; it is also possible to analyze character presentation in the context of narratological structures. Generally speaking, characters in a text can be rendered either as types or as individuals. A typified character in literature is dominated by one specific trait and is referred to as a flat character. The term round character usually denotes a persona with more complex and differentiated features. [6].

Thus being the cornerstone, although not the only part of the text interpretation, character presentation can yield valuable clues to both understanding the real nature of the protagonist and evaluating the message of the whole literary work as its final destination.

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