

On Character: out of a theoretical fallacy?

Helena Barbas
CENTRIA e DEP/FCSH Universidade Nova de Lisboa,
Av. de Berna, 26-C, 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal,
+3517933519 – hebarbas@fcs.unl.pt

Abstract: The studies on character have arrived at a dead end. Whatever the theory, character is defined by its own actions, and the meaning of action is «drama». Without the body of the actor, drama expresses itself through language. So, having in mind the dramatic theories of Robert Abirached, and the linguistic theories of Emile Benveniste, it is drafted here a proposal for a statute for the fictional character.

Keywords: Character studies; Literary theory; Narratology;

INTRODUCTION

The studies on character, in spite of the advancement proposed by structuralism and narratology, have arrived at a dead end. The nature of any fictional character invokes immediately its' «nature», and with it the problems of character representation as a vehicle for the expression of emotions belonging to the human realm. Implicitly arises the problem of verisimilitude as, in the end, every character is evaluated by naturalistic and realistic codes. So, first of all, there is a need to break away from a traditional theory of representation in what concerns character evaluation.

Character classification is an historical as well as theoretical problem. And both have its origins and implications outside the exclusive field of literature. However, whatever the theory, they have in common the fact that character is defined, first of all, by its own actions. And the meaning of action is «drama». Also, drama, without the body of the actor, expresses itself through language. So, having in mind the dramatic theories of Robert Abirached, and the linguistic theories of Emile Benveniste, it is drafted here a proposal for another kind of statute for the fictional character.

1 ON CHARACTER – STATE OF THE ART

The kitchen maid was a moral person, a permanent institution to which invariable tasks assured some kind of continuity and identity throughout the succession of passing forms into which she incarnated herself, because we never had the same for two years in a row.
Marcel Proust, *du Coté de Chez Swan* [1]

The study of character began by dividing itself between total concern with exteriority – as is the case with the classical rhetoric, which defines it as a gender or a figure; and absolute concern with its' interiority. This last position, inherited from the romantic tradition, is supported by Flaubert's provocation: «*Madame Bovary c'est moi*», and comprehends the character as a continuity of the

author, a manifestation of his respective obsessions and pathologies. Between one perspective and the other a discrepancy installs itself, which the structuralist studies intended to resolve.

The hypothesis arises of treating character as a sign, in a linguistic sense, which could be included in the combination of signs that compose a certain work.

Considering that character defines itself, first of all, by action, they no more understand it as «I», an entity, and look at it as an «attitude»: there is a change from the verb «to be» to the verb «to do». In a way, this is a return to Aristotle (*Poetics* 1448) – because «*both* [Homer and Aristophanes] *represent men in action, men actually doing things*». With Propp's essay on the Russian folktales, the classical thesis is expanded to its utmost:

What changes are the names (and, at the same time the attributes) of characters; what does not change are their actions, or their functions. [...] So, the functions of characters represent the constitutive parts of the tale, and we must isolate these first. For doing so it is necessary to define the functions. This definition needs to be the result of two concerns. In the first place the executant-character must never be considered. In most cases, it will be designated by a noun expressing the action. Afterwards, the action cannot be defined outside the situation in the course of the narrative. [2]

The character-individual – that is, a name, a body, a psychology – is overridden by the function, paradoxically absorbed and isolated from the act it executes.

Etienne Soriau explores the idea of the fabrication of the actant as linguistic material, and reduces the 31 functions Propp had detected to six. Greimas establishes the character functional predicates, which are developed from the relationship between subject and object in accordance with the three possible modes of action: «*vouloir*», «*savoir*», and «*pouvoir*»; through binary oppositions, these three categories multiply themselves into six functions/actants: subject/object; destinator/destinatory; adjuvant/opponent. So, a mobile constellation is fashioned, allowing the same function to be occupied by distinct characters, or enabling the same character to fulfil several functions – all depending on the simple fact of being listed in the first place.

In correspondence with this superficial structure [3], which he calls the anthropomorphic level of the narrative, Greimas presents another depth structure based on a system of oppositions built around sememic axis or «*isotopies*»: the semantic square.

Decurring from the use Greimas makes of semiology, there is a subdivision in three types – semantics, syntax and pragmatics – to describe the several categories of character and, as a result from his proposal, Philippe Hammon elaborates his own thesis in the article «*Pour un Statut Semiologique du Personnage*» [4].

From the terminological taxonomy sketched by Hammon the most interesting to be retained are:

- *Referential characters* – all that imply a full and fixed signification, stabilized by culture, in connection with the reality of the outer world, or with a concept, which automatically get the designation of hero, and where he includes historical characters;

- *Clutching-characters* – the author or reader delegates inside the text, with the qualities of the deictic sign;
- *Anaphora-characters* – those provided with memory;

He adds that any character can, simultaneously or alternatively, fit in any of these categories.

Jonathan Culler, the New Criticism representative, does not agree with these propositions:

Structuralists have not done much work on the conventional models of character used in different novels. They have been more concerned to develop and refine Propp's theory of the roles or functions that characters may assume. Anxious not to define the character as «participant» rather than as a «being» [5]

He also accuses Greimas of going beyond the model, and making it non-operative.

Besides all this, they all forget Propp's explicit advertency, that his *Morphology* can only be applied to Russian folktales, as well as his preliminary statement – still romantic – that he was inspired by the model of the natural sciences [6].

They all also forget – as Adriano Duarte Rodrigues remarks in the preface to the Portuguese edition – and now including Propp himself, the problematic of the absence of the narrator, placing «*the enunciation act between parenthesis*» [7]. Furthermore, to this absence we still have to add the unsolved problem of the hero category, as well as the fact that the *corpus* Propp studies has no physical author.

2 THE HERO CATEGORY

In what concerns the hero statute, the problem also arises as an outcome of Propp's thesis in which he arbitrarily defines «hero», in the beginning, as «*he-who-demands-someone*» - (the demand is an action, but is executed by somebody, an entity that demands another) – a non-specified category that duplicates itself in the «*hero-victim*» one [8].

The predicament continues, and worsens with Greimas, and is not solved by Hammond – because it arises from an aprioristic, subjective, arbitrary choice, or from the previous acceptance of the designation of the hero suggested by the narrator [9].

But there are stories in which the hero does not demark himself by a differential qualification, differential distribution, or differential autonomy (or any other of the features Hammon registers) that could permit the evident attribution of such a category without hesitations. Also, in Greimas' or Hammon's «*actantial scheme*», that is, outside the universe of the Russian Folktale, the object to be obtained by the actant is no longer tangible, but abstract – i.e., happiness, a value – also becoming subjective and arbitrary.

Apart from all this, none of the authors who have studied the concept of character consider the prospect of the construction of this category out of a cohesive and closed plot. A circumstance that applies to the most recent American polemics, as well as to Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, when he transposes the making of a character to the act of reading:

Here we speak of Sarrasine as if he existed, as if he had a future, an unconscious, and a soul. But what we are speaking of is his figure (an impersonal web of symbols manipulated under the name of Sarrasine), and not of his person (moral freedom provided with mobiles and with an excess of signification). [10]

In its turn, the above reading act is, in itself, contrived by the pre-concepts that the reader will carry from his own world into the work – as Culler explains:

Whatever their role outside de novel, our models of the braggart, the young lover, the scheming subordinate, the wise man, the villain – polyvalent models with scope for variation, to be sure – are literary constructs which facilitate the process of selecting semantic features to fill up or give content to a proper name. [11]

Taking this idea to its extreme consequences, every character reveals itself as a literary construct. And this construct is elaborated from traits considered as belonging typically to human beings which, in turn, support the semantic structures associated with a name.

Etymologically, characteristics come from «character», and «semantic» relates to sense. It means that the reading is sanctioned by the implied or implicit senses, provided by the character as an entity shaped to the image and similarity of the human. In this specific case, with the idiosyncrasies ascribed to it by culture, by the historic-social situation, by tradition, by a certain «*façon d'être*» – an issue into which Barthes refuses to delve without giving any explanations [12].

3 CHARACTER AND EMOTIONS

From here we can infer two problems. First, the depiction of character will have to be made in accordance with the specifications of human behaviour and emotions. And so, will presently have to fundament itself in the conclusions offered by scientific studies of human behaviour – in psychology above all (as it is done by B. J. Paris [13], i.e.). But psychology – as «psycho-logos», knowledge of the soul – only has access to that information through the exterior signs to which that soul resorts to manifests itself: its discourse, its actions. And here we have to return to Aristotle (Poetics, 1450a):

The representation of the action is the plot of the tragedy; for the ordered arrangement of the incidents is what I mean by plot. Character, on the other hand, is that which enables us to define the nature of the participants, and thought comes out in what they say when they are proving a point or expressing an opinion.

Character is «*that which enables us to define the nature of the participants*». So, it is delineated subjectively, according to its actions, which allow us to attribute certain qualities whose referents, as readers, we are going to fetch from the social world.

This was the strategy adopted by Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and in it resides the source of the typology referred by Culler. It is easy to attribute a temperament – a personality – to a character when the codes are evident, or written; when there is a dictionary that not only regulates its expression in detail, but also helps to interpret the signs of that expression, giving straight away

all the possible readings – as it happens around the XVII century, i.e., with the *Iconology* of Cesare Rippa.

From here on, we have the problem of representation, together with the issue of verisimilitude because, in a way, every character begins by belonging to the spheres of realism and naturalism.

Once the theorists centre themselves in the idea of action/function, the concept of character no longer refers only to the human figure, and starts to embrace all the narrative elements susceptible of acting in any way, or of being individualized in any way – replacing, or accumulating in itself the concept behind the rhetoric figure of «personification» – a variant of allegory (the introduction of concrete things, as well as of abstract and collective notions, speaking and acting as people) [14]. Occasionally this can have a perverse result, as it turns out in a short story by a Portuguese author in the fringes of surrealism – Mário-Henrique Leiria – where the actant, a cake among other human characters, acquires the statute of hero [15]. In its turn, the idea of function starts to be applied indiscriminately to all and every narrative, being delimited by that same narrative. There is no function outside the plot of a work, and this makes it difficult to accept the existence of a character pertaining to several intrigues.

4 CHARACTER VERSUS PERSON

Returning to Culler and the structuralists, it is crucial to emphasize the anxiety in extricating the notion of character from that of person.

This problem is the core of a polemic between Martin Price [16] and Randow Wilson [17], published in *Critical Inquiry*, in the late seventies. Both go through all the Anglo-Saxon tradition of literary theory on the subject (from Henry James to Northop Frye, via Arnold Bennet and Virginia Wolf, quoting Auerbach and the more recent Ian Watt, Wayne Booth, Barbara Hardy, Patrick Swinden and W. J. Harvey, among others), awakening old problems, and arriving only to a consensus: the distinction between character and person is absolute.

To Wilson, character exists in function of a context vaster than the one in which it shows up, although he considers that fiction itself has objective properties that allow character to be changed into content and technique. He also says that the significance of the character is based on the structure of characterization, which is elaborated from categories constitutive of the experience (that is, human experience), as feelings and thoughts; that it can also incorporate and personificate the values underlying its actions – in this case, once the values are identified, the actions become explainable. Wilson would wish that a theory of character could explain all instances (symbolic, allegoric and naturalist) in all narrative forms besides the novel. For this theory he suggests Cervantes' *Dom Quixote* as a starting point (as do Scholes and Kellogg [18]).

It is the title that Price gave to his article – «People of the Book» – that first inspired Wilson's charge, an attack that grows and continues due to the appraisal Price makes of Forster's novel *A Passage to India*:

It strikes me that, in the absence of an accepted theory of character, literary scholarship has ordinarily assumed that characters «reflect», or represent, a public reality accessible on its own terms outside of literature and that the most valid approach (if not the only one) to character must be an empirical-descriptive method, much as I might follow in giving a «characterization» of my neighbour. It has been taken for granted, I submit, that a mere enumeration of details should lead somewhere. [19]

Invoking the necessity to break away from a theory of representation, Martin Price [20] states that characters are as people, providing information that the reader interprets due to his direct contact with them. And so, the reader has to have the real world as referent so that they can be legible to him. Defending synchrony, and reiterating his idea that the novel has to do with real life, he says:

The point I would make is that the literary character, like Cézanne's patch of blue, is at once part of an artificial construction, which has its place in the design of the surface, and also a representation, which refers to, evokes, or draws import from the world outside the frame. [21]

Then, proposing a false agreement with his opponent, he explains:

For me, Wilson's most important statement is this: «*The distinction between characters and persons is an absolute one. Characters are no more like persons than, to use Degas' summation of a similar distinction in art, the air of the old masters is like the air we breathe*». But isn't the air of the old masters the air that Tician's *Bacchus and Ariadne* breathe or that Rembrandt breathes in his self portraits? And is the distinction between Rembrandt the painter and Rembrandt the subject an absolute one? [22]

Agreeing both that character and person are different, they continue to perceive character as existing and belonging to a certain form of narrative – in this case, the novel. However, in his last replica, Wilson jumps to the problem of conscience and, although he calls it «*fictional conscience*», he knows that he is getting dangerously close to the frontiers of psychology and philosophy. Meanwhile, appropriating himself of the theoretical paradigm of the Aristotelian final causes, and considering characters as entities originated by a cause (efficient, material, formal or final), he outlines a scheme based on the modes in which characters are approached:

Most of what has been written on the subject of character, whether in recent years or in the distant past, can be seen to come under one of four possible headings. I do not think of these classifications as being mutually exclusive, although the emphasis upon one aspect of the problem of character probably tends to pull one towards a definite position.

Briefly, these positions are: (1) that characters are products of the author's mind – memories, encapsulations of his experience or else (one might say) split-off slivers of his mind or self; (2) that characters are functions of the text in which they appear – embodiments of theme and idea – to be considered much as tokens, pieces, or counters in a game; (3) that characters are entirely artificial, constructs to be analysed in terms of the compositional techniques that have gone into their making; (4) that characters are, for the purposes of critical reading, to be considered as if they were actual persons, and the emphasis in

criticism – its sole business, in fact – to discuss the response they engender in an intelligent reader. [23]

But Rawdon Wilson repeats that character is not a predicament exclusive to the novel, and that to think that its study can be circumscribed only to that form is to fall into what he calls «*the Romanesque presumption fallacy*». The matter with character, he says: «*Is an historical as well as a theoretical problem, and both its origins and the full range of its implications lie outside the novel*». [24]

5 DRAFT OF A CHARACTER TAXONOMY

Curiously enough, it is a study about theatrical character, in particular the first chapters of the book *La crise du personnage dans le Théâtre Moderne*, [25] written by Robert Abirached, which seems to best reassess the problems raised by literary characters.

Considering that, whatever the theory, any character is defined first of all by its own actions, and that the meaning of action is drama, Abirached says that a careful study of the theatrical character could be advantageously applied to all other forms of narrative.

Starting with the etymological interpretation of the words *persona* – the mask offering itself as sign of a reality dissimilar from everyday life; *character* – as engraving an insignia, the instrument, and the engraving itself; *typus* – the idea of mark, the mould and also the model; Abirached associates them as significant of an image: «*An image, yes. The mask because it makes allusion, in first or last instance, to a figure that has been withdrawn and whose stamp remains there inscribed.*» [26]

The image works as a measure towards the reality it represents – in order for man to dominate it, or to be able to look at it directly as it is. Under these circumstances all representations – as re-presentifications – correspond to an absence, to an inadequacy:

What it shows is never adequate to its model, and this same inadequacy enlivens the understanding of the signified reality. Then, it will be necessary to conclude that the distance towards the world is constitutive of the theatrical character, even if it may vary with aesthetics which evolution goes along with cultural transformations, and with the audience's collective sensibility. [27]

Removing the adjective «*theatrical*» from the noun character, and replacing the term «*audience*» by the word «*readers*», it is possible to reassign this idea to the orb of other literary forms – even if the author believes in differences between theatre and narrative, being the actor's presence the main one.

But, returning to the notion of inadequacy, and considering the previously referred distance – between the image and its model – we can reencounter the concept of *sym-bólon* and the belief that the image reveals itself as the material counterpart which allows a glimpse of the essence (very close to the platonic concept of «*mythos*»).

Inscribed between the ideal and material spheres, the character as an image becomes subject to the realm of verisimilitudes, and so its anchorage to life, in the real world, is maintained and confirmed; and any naturalistic demands are as well justified. Mainly so because, if mimesis «cannot make a copy of reality» (the word «real» meaning here the platonic archetype), it cannot either «erase its traces in the representation it elaborates» [28].

Therefore, character is defined relatively to two contexts, two codes that complete and illuminate [29] each other without reciprocal annulation. And so it is drafted the possibility of a statute for character which, in accordance to Abirached, could only be clarified as follows:

A group of relationships (between the image and the world, language and the word, representation and significance), simultaneously constants and, in what regards its application, susceptible of functioning in accordance with the most variegated modes, in consonance with the historical, ideological and aesthetical variations that they help to generate. In other words, since our first approach, character seemed to us an open concept [...] if it appeals to the efraction of an infinity of interpreters, is pre-existent to them, and subsists beyond them. [30]

6 CHARACTER AND / AS ACTION

From all that has been said we can arrive at a first and obvious conclusion that there is not a ready and finished definition of character from which we can operate. But we can also reach a second notion, which might be used as a less swampy methodological approach, more restricted to the literary field. That is: first of all, and in any circumstance, being comprehended as an agent, actant, linguistic sign, etc., character is always defined by an action – by its own action. Action is drama, the movement of a body (matter) in space and time. Consequently, every action presupposes the existence of a body that executes it. In its minor form, action presents itself as a gesture; in a vaster form it can broaden itself into biography, or collectively to history.

Secondly, this action, born from a specific body acting in space and time, is executed in the material world, in the so called aristotelic «real»; and, as this same world becomes subject to time: it starts, develops and ends. It is irrecoverable and unrepeatable. It can only attain any permanency if it is enunciated – told, painted, filmed, registered under any media. Out of its space and time, the action can only be reinstated through the mediation of a discourse.

In case of literature, the character's action is recorded in written or oral language – being restored, reiterated by speech. And this discourse is understood by the modern linguistic theories of the elocutionary act [31] as an action in itself. It is not this linguistic feature that matters most here, but another one: the fact that the linguistic category used to utter the action is the verb. As Emile Benveniste states: «*the verb is, with the pronoun, the only class of words subject to the category of person.*» [32]. Without proceeding into the exploration of this idea in what concerns the narrative levels in themselves – the discourse «*temps*», «*modes*», «*voix*» as elaborated by Todorov and Genette – it seems promising to use it to substantiate the problematic of distinguishing person from character.

Returning to Benveniste, we find that all verbs – all actions – are referred to a person:

In all languages with verb the conjugation forms are classified in accordance with its reference to the person, being this exactly constituted by the enumeration of persons; three forms of conjugation can be devised: singular, plural, and eventually the dual. This classification is clearly inherited from the Greek grammar, where the conjugated verbal forms constitute «*personae*», «*figurations*», which actualise the verbal notion. [33]

7 CHARACTER AND / AS LANGUAGE

Although Benveniste declares that there are languages where the expression of the person is susceptible of being omitted from the verb, he also says that the examples are «extremely rare», and concludes:

In its totality, it seems that there is no known language with verb where the distinctions between persons are not, in one way or another, marked in verbal forms. We can so conclude that the category of person is unique to the fundamental and necessary notions of verb. [34]

Coupled with *persona* – the mask that etymologically originates the word *person* [35] – the notion is marked in the verb, the indicative of an action. Hence, character, even if always distinct from the human being, can acquire subjectivity and a personality identical and parallel to the humans, because both (character and person) are constructed through language, and both remain dependent on the grammatical category of the verb.

And now we can go back to Aristotle (*Poetics*, 1450a) - again:

The representation of the action is the plot [...]; for the ordered arrangement of the incidents is what I mean by plot. Character, on the other hand, is that which enables us to define the nature of the participants, and thought comes out in what they say when they are proving a point or expressing an opinion.

The plot is a compilation of actions; the narrator is the one who acts in the instant (same as the actor) re-enacting an action, but only through discourse; character is the one who assumes the category of person in the verbs of such a discourse; the «hero», or protagonist (from *proto-ágon*), is the one who speaks first, or about whom the others speak the most.

Therefore, all the perspectives above presented are correct, and incorrect.

Faced as a linguistic sign, character is defined by an action (in a discourse) and can no more be understood as «I»/a person; but action implies the notion of an «I» who acts. The first structuralist fallacy about character comes with the change from the verb «to be» to the verb «to do» (it is always a being that does something); then, even in Propp, the functions – the constitutive parts of a tale – are narrated actions.

Souriau defends the fabrication of character as linguistic material (a discourse); in Greimas the functional predicates are established from a relation between subject/object (a being that acts over something); in Hammon, even in posterior studies [36], the character is defined by action

(«faire»); Culler refers the character as a participant (the one that acts «with»), a literary construct (a discourse) elaborated with basis on human characteristics; in Barthes, character is the one about whom someone else speaks.

Recovered in language, character always remains subject to an enunciation or a subjective reading – now determined by the verbal tense and the mark of person imposed by the narrator: the action or gesture that essentially constitutes the character can gain significances that go beyond the verb that describes it.

Assuming that the character only exists from (and inside) a discourse – even if not exclusively a narrative one – it may be possible to endeavour to categorize it in accordance with the specifications that Benveniste discerns as an expression of the verbal person.

Consequently, inside any enunciate, character can be classified in accordance with two constant correlations that, in Benveniste scrutiny, express the verbal person. First, he says that: «*a linguistic theory of the verbal person can only be constructed based on the oppositions that differentiate the persons; and that theory is entirely condensed in the structure of those oppositions.*» [37] – which he synthesizes in the end of his article:

1. The personality correlation that opposes the persons «I»/«you» to the non-person «he»/«her»/«it»;
2. The subjectivity correlation, inside the above, and opposing «I» to «you».

The most common distinction between singular and plural must be, if not replaced, at least interpreted in accordance with the order of the person, as a distinction between a strict person (singular) and a vast person (plural). Only the third person, being a non-person, admits a true plural. [38]

Reassigning the idea of verbal person to the notion of character, the following categorization can be discerned:

1. **Strict Character** - singular, defined by the pronouns «I», «you», «he»/«she»/«it». These persons, says Benveniste:

are not homogeneous. That is, in «I» and «you» there is simultaneously an implied person and a discourse about that person. «I» designates the one that speaks and, at the same time, implies a discourse about the «I»: saying «I», I can only speak about myself. [39]

In what pertains to the Kantian person, this denotes that all discourse about oneself is a narrative, and this converts every person into a character [40]. At this stage the issue of the narrator can be summoned, though it could also be inscribed in the category that follows.

- 1.1. **Character, person, subject** – is the one that uses the pronoun «I», and institutes «you» as a person, (evident in lyric poetry, monologs and diaries). In what regards the concept of character, this use of «I» implies that it has acquired the «highest» subjectivity, it has got as close as possible to the human linguistic condition.

On the subject of the second person Benveniste affirms:

«you» is necessarily designated by «I», and cannot be thought in any situation instituted exteriorly from «I»; and, at the same time, «I» enunciates something as a predicate of «you». [...]

So we can define «you» as the non-subjective person, in front of the subjective-person that «I» represents; and these two persons – included in a correlation of subjectivity – oppose themselves to the non-person that «he»/«she»/«it» represent; otherwise, between «I»/«you», and «he»/«she»/«it», a correlation of personality is established.[41].

From this point a second option arises:

- 1.2. **Character, person, non-subject** – the one who is instituted by the «I», and defined by the «you» (the interlocutor that makes possible the dialog situation).

Benveniste then classifies the third person:

In what concerns the third person, a predicate can only be well enunciate outside the relation «I - you»; so, this form is excluded from the specific relation between «I - you» – the third person implies a discourse about someone or something, but does not refer itself to a specific person [...] the third person is a non-person. [42]

To this may correspond:

- 1.3. **Character, non-person, non-subject** – defined by «he»/«her»/«it»;

It is still possible to consider the notion of collective character:

2. **Vast character** – plural, defined by the pronoun «we», which can be inclusive («I» + «You») as well as exclusive («I» + «he/she/it»).

8 CONCLUSION

Concerning the concept of character, and attempting to condense all the problematic exposed, it is clear that the rhetorical definition is obsolete; the romantic legacy much too subjective, and the structuralist studies have failed their purposes: the change from character as an entity to character as an attitude has separated the action from the actant; there is no designation for the category of hero; the enunciation act has been put aside. All these theoretical errands have been allotted to the reader and to the act of reading.

For certain we have the belief that characters are always different from persons – whether in the usual sense of human beings, or in the grammatical sense – although through the use of discourse human beings are transformed into characters in its enunciation. However, the person has a psyche – a self, a soul – an interiority that manifests itself using movement in space and time, through actions, gestures, and a discourse.

In the sphere of characters, these achieve several levels of proximity towards the human being, which are reached through the modes in which subjectivity and personality – or its absence – are marked in its discourse. Subsequently, character stands for actions, gestures, and a discourse

aspiring to insinuate a soul, interiority, an absent conscience. These deeds attributed to characters could be understood as a more sophisticated version of Ripa's Catalogue of external signs of a non-existent soul.

So, as a link between person and character there is action, functioning as a «*sim-bólon*», supplying it, by absence, with what it has not, making it an image of the person-archetype. This action can be movement, gesture, discourse, language as an act, arriving to its highest status when character is given the use of the verb, and of the pronoun «I». As soon as character acquires the statute of person («character-person-non-subject»), and subjectivity («character-person-subject»), its description, behaviour, emotions, can be analysed in accordance to a double context – interior to the work where they belong, and then exterior to that work. In the first case, linguistic, structuralist and narratological methodologies can be used; in the latter, all human sciences, including philosophy, can be called in to interpret and read it.

In this perspective, we also have two kinds of reading: the «professional» one, working with the literary and theoretical instruments available; and then the non-specialized one – because we should never disregard the fact that literature is an art – aiming at an aesthetical pleasure. Here, reading can reveal itself as a conflict of subjectivities – and personalities – a confrontation between two worlds, imaginary and real, in texts or in real life, but it definitely belongs to a private and individual realm.

The final proposal herewith included is that this reflection prompted by Jonathan Culler's *Poetics*, by Martin Rice and Wilson Rawdon articles, can be expanded and applied to other kind of literary *personae*, corrected and adapted in order to contribute to a more operational methodology in what concerns this fascinating concept.

H.B.

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- [2] Propp, Vladimir, *Morfologia do Conto* (pref. Adriano Duarte Rodrigues; trad. Jaime Ferreira e Victor Oliveira) (Lisboa: Vega), 1983 (2ª.): «*O que muda são os nomes (e ao mesmo tempo os atributos) das personagens; o que não muda são as suas acções, ou as suas funções. [...] As funções das personagens representam, pois, as partes constitutivas do conto, e são elas que devemos isolar primeiro. Para isso é necessário definir as funções. Esta definição deve ser o resultado de duas preocupações. Primeiramente, nunca deve ter em conta a personagem-executante. Na maior parte dos casos, será designada por um substantivo exprimindo a acção. Em seguida, a acção não pode ser definida fora da sua situação no decorrer da narrativa.*» p.58-59;
- [3] Greimas, E. A., *Sémantique Structurale*, (Paris: Larousse), 1996, p.173-76;
- [4] Hammon, Philipe, «Para um Estatuto Semiológico da Personagem», *Categorias da Narrativa* (Lisboa: Arcádia), 1979;
- [5] Culler, Jonathan, *Structuralist Poetics*, (New York: Cornell University Press), 1982, pp.232;
- [6] Propp, Vladimir: «*Em botânica, a morfologia compreende o estudo das partes constitutivas de uma planta, da sua relação entre si e com o conjunto;*» pp.33; and: «*o estudo das formas e o estabelecimento das leis que regem a estrutura é, no entanto, possível com tanta precisão como na morfologia das formações orgânicas. // Se esta afirmação não se pode aplicar ao conto no seu conjunto, em toda a extensão do termo, pode, no entanto, ser aplicada ao que se costuma chamar os contos maravilhosos, os contos “no sentido exacto da palavra”. É a estes últimos que esta obra se consagra.*», *Op. Cit.*, pp.34;
- [7] Duarte Rodrigues, Adriano (prefácio), *Ibid.* pp.30;
- [8] Propp, Vladimir, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 78;
- [9] As an example, we have the «Fall of the House of Usher», by E. A. Poe. The qualifications of the protagonists – the narrator, or Roderick Usher – are equilibrated and equivalent: if the reader chooses one as hero, the other becomes immediately an anti-hero, or a hero-victim.
- [10] Barthes, Roland, *S/Z* (trad. Maria de Santa Cruz e Ana Mafalda Leite) (Lisboa: Edições 70), 1980, pp.75; also, in Culler, Jonathan, *Structuralist Poetics*: «*The Proper name enables the reader to postulate this existence*», pp. 237;
- [11] Culler, Jonathan: «*Whatever their role outside de novel, our models of the braggart, the young lover, the scheming subordinate, the wise man, the villain - polyvalent models with scope for variation, to be sure - are literary constructs which facilitate the process of selecting semantic features to fill up or give content to a proper name*», *Op. Cit.*, pp.238;
- [12] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, pp.22-23;
- [13] Paris, Bernard J., *Imagined Human Beings – a Psychological approach to character and Conflict in Literature*, (New York: N.Y. University Press), 1997;
- [14] Lausberg, *Elementos de Retórica Literária*, (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian), 1979, pp.251.
- [15] Leiria, Mário-Henrique, «Gulodice», *Contos do Gin-Tonic*, (Lisboa: Estampa), 1973, pp.107-9;
- [16] Price, Martin, «People of the Book: Character in Forster's A Passage to India», *Critical Inquiry*, vol.1, n.º 3 (March 1975), pp. 605-22; and «The Logic of Intensity: More on Character», *Critical Inquiry*, vol.2, n.º 2 (Winter 1975), pp. 369-79;
- [17] Wilson, Rawdon, «On Character: A Reply to Martin Price», *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 2, n.º 1 (Autumn 1975), pp.191-98; and «The Bright Chimera: Character as a Literary Term», *Critical Inquiry*, vol.5, n.º.4 (Summer 1979), pp. 725-49;
- [18] Scholes, Robert and Kellog Robert, *The Nature of Narrative*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 1976 (2ª);
- [19] Wilson, Rawdon, «On Character: A Reply to Martin Price», pp.192;
- [20] See also Price, Martin, *Forms of Life – Character and Moral Imagination on the novel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 1983;
- [21] Price, Martin, «The Logic of Intensity: More on character», pp. 372;
- [22] *Ibid.* pp. 371;
- [23] Wilson, Rawdon «The Bright Chimera: Character as a Literary Term», pp.730;
- [24] *Ibid.* pp. 738;
- [25] Abirached, Robert, *La Crise du Personnage dans le Théâtre Moderne*, (Paris: Gallimard), 1994 (1ª. 1978).
- [26] Abirached, Robert: «*Image, oui, le masque, parce qu'il fait allusion, en première ou dernière instance, à une figure retirée dont il a gardé l'empreinte.*», *Ibid.* pp.20;
- [27] Abirached, Robert: «*Ce qu'elle donne à voir n'est jamais adéquat à son modèle, et cette inadéquation même avive la compréhension de la réalité signifiée. Il faut donc en conclure que la distance au monde est constitutive du personnage théâtral, bien qu'elle puisse varier selon les esthétiques, dont l'évolution va de pair avec les transformations de la culture et de la sensibilité collective des spectateurs.*», *Ibid.* pp.21;
- [28] Abirached, Robert: «*la mimésis [...] puisqu'elle ne peut tirer de copie du réel ni en effacer la trace dans la représentation qu'elle élabore.*», *Ibid.* pp. 23;
- [29] Abirached, Robert: «*Ainsi défini en regard du réel, dont ir reçoit la gravure dans les conditions que nous avons dites, le personnage l'est aussi exactement en regard de l'imaginaire, dont il porte le poinçon emblématique en guise de garantie parallèle. Il faut le regarder dans ce miroir jumeau du précédent, l'un et l'autre se faisant face et se renvoyant leurs reflects dans un échange indistinct pour former une figure unique et mouvante: on aura compris*

- que, si l'analyse commande de les examiner successivement, elle n'en affirme pas moins la simultanéité de leur émergence.», Ibid. pp. 39;
- [30] Abirached, Robert: «il n'est définissable que comme un ensemble de rapports (entre l'image et le monde, le langage e la parole, la representation et le sens) à la fois constants et, quant à leur application, susceptibles de fonctionner selon les modes les plus variés, en consonnance avec les variations de l'histoire, de l'idéologie et des esthétiques qu'elles contribuent à engendrer. En d'autres mots, dès notre première approche, le personnage nous a apparu ouvert, pour reprendre une formule de Jean Vilar; s'il appelle l'effraction d'une infinité d'interprètes, il leur préexiste et leur subsiste». And he confirms: «Mais, nous l'avons vu aussi, cette ouverture lui donne accès aux deux espaces du réel et de l'imaginaire, si bien que, lorsqu'on essaie de l'appréhender plus précisément, on s'aperçoit qu'il porte des traces de cette double appartenance, sinon de ce double enracinement, comme d'indispensables garants de son efficacité;»Ibid. pp.28-29;
- [31] See Austin, J. L., *How to do things with words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1962, pp. 94-5;
- [32] Benveniste, Emile «Estrutura das Relações de Pessoa no Verbo», *O Homem na Linguagem*, (Lisboa: Vega) s/d, «O verbo é, com o pronome, a única classe de palavras sujeita à categoria de pessoa.» pp.17;
- [33] Benveniste, Emile: «Em todas as línguas com verbo se classificam as formas da conjugação segundo na sua referência à pessoa, sendo aquela constituída propriamente pela enumeração das pessoas; podem distinguir-se três conjugações: no singular, no plural e, eventualmente, no dual. Esta classificação é nitidamente herdada da gramática grega, onde as formas verbais conjugadas constituem «personae», «figurações», que realizam a noção verbal».Ibid. pp.17;
- [34] Benveniste, Emile: «Na totalidade, parece que não se conhece nenhuma língua dotada de verbo onde as distinções de pessoa não sejam marcadas de uma maneira ou de outra nas formas verbais. Podemos pois concluir que a categoria de pessoa é própria das noções fundamentais e necessárias do verbo.»Ibid. pp.19;
- [35] See Elliot, C. Robert, *The Literary Persona* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press), 1982; and Gibson, Walker, *Persona – A Style Study for Readers and Writers* (New York: Random House), 1969;
- [36] Reis, Carlos: *O Conhecimento da Literatura - Introdução aos Estudos Literários* (Coimbra: Almedina), 1995: «Uma personagem é, pois, o suporte das redundâncias e das transformações semânticas da narrativa, é constituída pela soma das informações facultadas sobre o que ela é e sobre o que ela faz”.», pp. 360;
- [37] Benveniste, Emile «só se pode constituir uma teoria linguística da pessoa verbal com base nas oposições que diferenciam as pessoas; e essa teoria fica inteiramente condensada nas estrutura dessas oposições.», Op. Cit. pp.19;
- [38] Benveniste, Emile:
 «1. A correlação de personalidade que opõe as pessoas eu/tu à não pessoa ele;
 2. A correlação de subjectividade, interior à precedente, e opondo eu a tu.
 A distinção vulgar entre singular e plural deve ser, se não substituída, pelo menos interpretada segundo a ordem da pessoa, como uma distinção, entre pessoa estrita (singular) e pessoa ampla (plural). Só a terceira pessoa, sendo não-pessoa, admite um verdadeiro plural.», Ibid. pp. 20; e: «...não são homogêneas. Ou seja, em «eu» e «tu» há «simultaneamente uma pessoa implicada e um discurso sobre essa pessoa». 'Eu' designa aquele que fala e implica ao mesmo tempo um enunciado à conta do «eu»: dizendo «eu» eu não posso não falar de mim.», Ibid. pp. 20;
- [40] See Weinstein, Arnold, *Fictions of the Self, 1550-1800*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1981; and also Robert, Marthe, *Roman des Origines et Origines du Roman* (Paris: Gallimard), 1978;
- [41] Benveniste, Emile: «...«tu» é necessariamente designado por «eu», e não pode ser pensado fora de uma situação colocada a partir de «eu»; e, ao mesmo tempo, «eu» enuncia algo como predicado de tu.». And also: «Podemos pois definir o «tu» como a «pessoa não subjectiva», perante a «pessoa subjectiva» que «eu» representa; e estas duas pessoas - incluídas numa correlação de subjectividade - opõem-se à não-pessoa que é o ele; entre eu-tu e ele, estabelece-se porém uma correlação de personalidade.», Ibid. pp. 20;
- [42] Benveniste, Emile: «Mas quanto à terceira pessoa, um predicado só é bem enunciado fora do «eu-tu»; esta forma é, assim, excluída da relação específica de «eu-tu» - «a terceira pessoa comporta uma implicação de enunciado sobre alguém ou alguma coisa, mas não se refere a uma pessoa específica [...] a terceira pessoa é uma não-pessoa.», Ibid. pp.20;