

Characterisation

- Characters:
 - ≠ persons
 - = textual creations

Characterisation

- = the process of creating characters
- It changes:
 - In time
 - According to the genre of the literary work
 - According to the storytelling strategies of the writer

(Direct) telling VS (Indirect) showing

- Direct presentation / direct telling:
 - The narrator intervenes in the story to give information
- Indirect presentation / indirect showing:
 - The reader has to elaborate his/her representation of character through implicit indications
- !! The two can be combined!!

Modes of characterisation

- Names and titles (onomastics)
- External appearance
- Actions and movements
- Speech and thought
- Environment

Names and titles (1)

Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My
sin, my soul. **Lo-lee-ta**: the tip of the
tongue taking a trip of three steps to tap,
at three, on the teeth. **Lo. Lee. Ta**

Names and titles (2)

- Last Sunday a young hiker, stranded by an injury, was found dead at a remote camp in the Alaskan interior. No one is yet certain who he was. But his diary and two notes found at the camp tell a wrenching story of his desperate and progressively futile efforts to survive.

- The diary indicates that **the man**, believed to be an American in his late 20s or early 30s, might have been injured in a fall and that he was then stranded at the camp for more than three months. It tells how he tried to save himself by hunting game and eating wild plants while nonetheless getting weaker.

- One of his two notes is a plea for help, addressed to anyone who might come upon the camp while **the hiker** searched the area for food. The second note bids the world goodbye...

- An autopsy at the state coroner's office in Fairbanks this week found that **the man** had died of starvation, probably in late July. The authorities discovered among **the man's possessions a name that they believe is his**. But they have so far been **unable to confirm his identity** and, until they do, have **declined to disclose the name**.

The New York Times, September 13, 1992 / John KRACAUER, *Into the Wild*, 1996

Physical appearance (1): direct telling

He [Tom Buchanan] had changed since his New Haven years. Now he was a **sturdy** straw-haired man of thirty, with a rather **hard** mouth and a **supercilious** manner. Two shining **arrogant** eyes had established **dominance** over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning **aggressively** forward. Not even the **effeminate** swank of his riding clothes would hide the enormous **power** of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a **cruel** body.

Physical appearance (2): indirect showing

- Mr Joel Cairo was a **small-boned**, **dark** man of **medium height**. His hair was black and very **glossy**. His features were **Levantine**. A square-cut **ruby**, its sides paralleled by four baguette **diamonds**, gleamed against the **deep green** of his cravat. His **black coat**, cut tight to **narrow shoulders**, flared a little over slightly **plump hips**. His trousers fitted his **round legs** more snugly than was the current fashion. The uppers of his patent-leather shoes were hidden by **fawn spats**. He held a **black derby hat** in **a chamois-gloved hand** and came towards Spade with short, mincing, bobbing steps. The **fragrance** of **chypre** came with him.

Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930)

Actions

- (1) He came towards Spade **with short, mincing, bobbing steps.**
- (2) **Turning me around** by one arm, **he moved a broad flat hand** along the front vista, including in its **sweep** a sunken Italian garden [...]. Then there was a **boom** as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind **died out** about the room.

Speech

- Once a bitch always a bitch, **what I say. I says** you're lucky if her playing out of school is all that worries you. **I says** she ought to be down there in that kitchen right now, instead of up there in her room, gobbing paint on her face and waiting for six niggers that cant even stand up out of a chair unless they've got a pan full of bread and meat to balance them, to fix breakfast for her.

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 1929