



THE EVOLUTION OF SUPPORTING CHARACTERS AND THEIR ROLE IN PLOT DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Supporting characters constitute an essential structural component of literary fiction, although they have traditionally received less critical attention than protagonists. Their significance extends beyond providing background information or accompanying the central character. In many literary works, supporting characters participate actively in the development of the plot by creating conflicts, influencing decisions, transmitting information, establishing social and psychological contexts, and contributing to turning points in the narrative. The present study examines the evolution of supporting characters and their role in plot development from a literary and narratological perspective. Particular attention is given to the ways in which supporting characters may undergo psychological, moral, social, or relational transformations while simultaneously affecting the actions and development of the protagonist. The study draws upon principles of character theory and narratology and considers selected examples from English and Uzbek literary fiction. The analysis demonstrates that supporting characters should not be regarded as static secondary figures. Their development can perform important structural functions, including intensifying conflict, motivating the protagonist's choices, connecting separate narrative events, and accelerating the movement of the plot toward its resolution. Consequently, the evolution of supporting characters represents not merely a supplementary element of characterization but also an important mechanism of plot construction.

Introduction. Character is one of the fundamental elements of literary fiction because the development of narrative events is closely connected with the actions, relationships, decisions, and transformations of fictional personalities. Literary studies have traditionally concentrated on protagonists because they usually occupy the central position in the

narrative and are directly connected with the main conflict. However, the development of a literary plot cannot always be fully understood through the protagonist alone. Supporting characters frequently influence the direction of events and determine the circumstances in which the central character acts. Their presence may introduce new conflicts, reveal hidden information, create emotional tension, or motivate important decisions.

The term “supporting character” generally refers to a fictional character who occupies a secondary position in relation to the protagonist but nevertheless contributes significantly to the development of the narrative. Such characters may include family members, friends, colleagues, opponents, mentors, social representatives, or other individuals whose actions affect the protagonist or the progression of the plot. Their narrative importance should therefore not be measured only by the amount of textual space devoted to them. A character may appear relatively briefly while performing a decisive structural function.

From a narratological perspective, character and plot are closely interconnected. E. M. Forster’s distinction between “flat” and “round” characters demonstrates that fictional personalities may differ in complexity and development. A supporting character does not necessarily have to remain “flat” simply because he or she is not the protagonist. Some secondary characters possess complex motivations, undergo significant changes, and become essential to the narrative structure. Similarly, Gérard Genette’s understanding of narrative structure emphasizes the importance of relationships among events, actions, and narrative functions. Characters participate in these relationships through their actions and interactions.

The development of supporting characters is particularly important when their transformation changes their relationship with the protagonist or modifies the circumstances surrounding the central conflict. At the beginning of a narrative, a supporting character may occupy one role, whereas later events may reveal different aspects of his or her personality. A friend can become an opponent, an apparently insignificant person can become a source of decisive information, or a passive character can eventually take an action that changes the direction of the story.

The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the evolution of supporting characters and to determine how their transformations contribute to plot development. The research focuses on the relationship between character development and narrative progression rather than treating these two elements as independent components of fiction.

Methodology of research. The present research employs a qualitative literary analysis based on principles of narratology, character theory, and comparative literary analysis. The methodological framework combines close reading with structural interpretation in order to identify the functions performed by supporting characters within selected literary narratives.

Close reading is used to examine the representation of supporting characters, their relationships with protagonists, their actions, motivations, and transformations throughout the narrative. Particular attention is paid to moments when a supporting character’s action produces a significant change in the sequence of events. Such moments may include the introduction of information, the creation of conflict, the formation or destruction of relationships, and decisions that influence subsequent events.

The study is also informed by the theoretical works of E. M. Forster, Vladimir Propp, Gérard Genette, Seymour Chatman, and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. Forster’s theory is useful

for distinguishing between different degrees of character complexity, while Propp's functional approach demonstrates that narrative figures may be examined according to the functions they perform within a story. Genette and Chatman provide important theoretical perspectives on narrative organization and the relationship between story events and discourse. Rimmon-Kenan's discussion of characterization is particularly relevant to the analysis of the processes through which fictional characters are presented and developed.

Selected examples from English and Uzbek fiction are examined comparatively. The comparison does not attempt to establish complete equivalence between different literary traditions. Instead, it demonstrates how the structural role of supporting characters can be observed across different cultural and literary contexts.

Results and Discussions. The analysis demonstrates that supporting characters can influence plot development through several interconnected mechanisms. Their significance becomes especially visible when their actions create a causal relationship between separate narrative events. In this respect, supporting characters should be considered active participants in narrative construction rather than merely decorative figures surrounding the protagonist.

One of the most important functions of a supporting character is the creation or intensification of conflict. A protagonist may possess an internal problem, but the actions of another character can transform that psychological problem into an external narrative conflict. Family members, social authorities, friends, rivals, or other figures may challenge the protagonist's values and expectations. As a result, the protagonist is forced to respond, and this response generates new events. Thus, the supporting character becomes a catalyst through which the plot moves from one stage to another.

For example, in Theodore Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt*, the characters surrounding Jennie contribute significantly to the development of the narrative. Jennie's family members, Lester Kane, and other social figures influence the circumstances in which she makes decisions. Although Jennie remains the central figure, the actions and expectations of people around her shape the social and emotional conflicts that determine the progression of events. Lester, in particular, cannot be regarded simply as a character who accompanies Jennie. His decisions and social position create circumstances that directly influence Jennie's life. From the perspective of the present study, however, the important point is not merely Jennie's character development but the way relationships among characters produce narrative movement.

A similar structural principle can be observed in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Lord Henry Wotton functions as a supporting character whose influence becomes crucial to the development of Dorian's worldview. Lord Henry's ideas, conversations, and attitudes introduce an ideological force into Dorian's life. His role demonstrates that a supporting character does not necessarily have to undergo the most dramatic transformation in order to influence the plot. Instead, a character may remain relatively consistent while changing another character's perceptions and decisions. Lord Henry's influence contributes to the transformation of Dorian and, consequently, to the development of the narrative conflict.

This example reveals an important distinction between character evolution and character function. A supporting character may undergo substantial transformation, but a

supporting character may also have a strong plot function without experiencing an equally extensive personal transformation. Therefore, the evolution of supporting characters should be studied together with their relationships and narrative functions.

In Uzbek literary fiction, a similar phenomenon can be observed in Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan kunlar*. The narrative is not constructed exclusively around the central relationship between Otabek and Kumush. A wider network of characters influences the development of events and contributes to the emergence of social and familial conflicts. Characters such as Zaynab and other members of the social environment surrounding the protagonists participate in the chain of events that eventually leads the narrative toward its tragic resolution. Their actions cannot be separated from the development of the central conflict because interpersonal relationships provide the circumstances through which major plot events occur.

The evolution of a supporting character can also serve as an indicator of changes within the broader narrative environment. At the beginning of a literary work, a secondary figure may be represented through a limited set of characteristics. As the plot develops, however, new circumstances may reveal previously hidden psychological or moral dimensions. This process creates a more dynamic narrative world. The reader begins to understand that characters are not simply fixed types but individuals whose behavior may change in response to circumstances.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between supporting characters and turning points. A turning point represents a moment at which the direction of the narrative changes significantly. Supporting characters often participate directly in such moments. A revelation, betrayal, warning, decision, refusal, or unexpected action by a secondary figure may cause the protagonist to reconsider a previous decision. Consequently, a supporting character may function as a narrative trigger.

This function is particularly important in narratives based on interpersonal conflict. When a supporting character changes his or her position toward the protagonist, the relationship itself becomes a source of plot development. For instance, a character initially presented as an ally may later become an opponent. Such transformation changes the protagonist's social environment and creates new obstacles. Conversely, an apparently hostile character may later provide assistance, producing an unexpected development in the plot.

The study also demonstrates that supporting characters can function as bridges between different narrative lines. In complex novels, several subplots may exist alongside the principal storyline. A supporting character may connect these narrative lines by participating in more than one relationship or by transmitting information from one group of characters to another. This structural function allows the author to maintain coherence between different events and characters.

The relationship between supporting characters and the protagonist is especially significant in this regard. The protagonist's development is often represented through interactions with other characters. A supporting character can act as a mirror through which a protagonist's qualities become visible. Another character may reveal the protagonist's generosity, weakness, ambition, fear, loyalty, or moral uncertainty. Consequently, the

supporting character contributes to characterization even when his or her own personal development is not the primary focus.

At the same time, supporting characters may have their own trajectories. Their development can be psychological, moral, social, or relational. Psychological evolution occurs when a character's attitudes, beliefs, or emotional condition change. Moral evolution involves a transformation in the character's understanding of right and wrong or in the principles guiding his or her behavior. Social evolution may result from changes in status, relationships, or social circumstances. Relational evolution occurs when the character's relationship with the protagonist or other figures changes throughout the narrative.

These forms of evolution can have direct consequences for the plot. When a character's internal transformation produces a new action, that action can generate another narrative event. The relationship can therefore be represented as a dynamic sequence: character transformation → action → consequence → new plot development. In this structure, supporting characters become active mechanisms of narrative progression.

An important result of the analysis is that the distinction between "main" and "supporting" characters should not be interpreted as a distinction between "important" and "unimportant" characters. The protagonist may occupy the center of the narrative, but the development of the plot frequently depends upon a broader network of characters. A supporting character can have a limited narrative presence but a substantial structural impact.

This perspective also allows a more comprehensive understanding of character evolution. Character development is not always an isolated psychological process occurring inside one protagonist. It can emerge through interactions among several characters. The transformation of one character may cause the transformation of another, while changes in relationships can simultaneously alter the direction of the plot.

Conclusion. Supporting characters represent an essential but sometimes underestimated element of literary narrative. Although they occupy a secondary position in relation to the protagonist, their functions frequently extend far beyond providing background or creating a social environment. They can initiate conflicts, influence decisions, introduce information, intensify emotional tension, connect different narrative lines, and participate in crucial turning points.

The analysis of selected English and Uzbek literary examples further indicates that the importance of a supporting character should not be evaluated solely according to the amount of narrative space devoted to that character. A secondary figure may have a relatively limited presence while exerting considerable influence on the central conflict and the sequence of events. The structural significance of such characters becomes particularly clear when their actions produce turning points or alter relationships among the principal figures.

Thus, supporting characters can be regarded as dynamic components of literary structure whose development and actions help transform isolated events into a coherent narrative process. Their study offers a broader perspective on the relationship between character and plot and demonstrates that the movement of a literary narrative is frequently determined by the interaction of both central and secondary figures.

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