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## **CHARACTERIZATION IN *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE***

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### **Abstract**

*This study is an analysis of the characterizations in *The Merchant of Venice* by the playwright, William Shakespeare. The research was designed to answer the following research questions: (1) How are the cast in *The Merchant of Venice* portrayed or characterized by the playwright? (2) What are the messages from the characterizations in *The Merchant of Venice*? The source of the data was the novel *The Merchant of Venice*, a historical play written by William Shakespeare which has been performed for several centuries. The research instrument was the whole short story which was read and analyzed to gather the data needed with the help of references related to the main actors and to their characterizations. The data was analyzed to get a result which was written up. This play represents the nature and attitudes of people in Western Europe in the 16th century. The play shows that the characters in a play, and in a novel, too, should be drawn in such ways that they look like real people in the way they interact with and behave towards others. This is why Shakespeare's themes are universally appreciated.*

**Keywords:** *analysis, characterization, literature, playwright, Merchant of Venice.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Definition of Literature**

One of the many arts that can be enjoyed by people in their daily life is literature. Literature, too, can be used by students to relate what they have learned about to their real life situations. In fact, many people do not understand that literature can be applied in their daily lives.

Accordingly, literature should not be confined to just stimulating imaginative creativity but should be appreciated for its moral function. This function can dominate a literary work and is an element that will attract people to read it.

Nowadays, many people around the world learn about literature. According to Bannet and Royle (2004) in "Literature, Criticism and Theory" and to Wellek and Warren (1977, p. 139) in their book, "Theory of Literature", literature is an art that is a product of creativity. In other words, literature is an artistic creation expressed by means of "beautiful language" where there is a highly selective use of language that can move the reader, listener or watcher emotionally so that their souls will be moved due to its beauty of form, its content and/or its message. They also stated that the main feature of their intrinsic approach is based on the texts of literary works themselves from interpretations and analyses of them, refer Wellek and Warren (1956, p. 15; 1977, p. 139). Besides, speaking and writing being tools of communication for everyone, when people communicate with each other, their communications can be a form of literature. Thus, when people talk or write about something to express their ideas and thoughts, actually they are creating literature. Imam Ja'far Alsidq (2015), a Muslim Scholar and Philosopher has said that "literature is the garment which one puts on so that what he says or writes may appear more attractive".

Following the forgoing analysis, the writer decided to do an analysis of characterization in *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare (Turner, 1990). Accordingly, exploring the analysis of characterization in *The Merchant of Venice* would bring the readers' attention to the philosophy of the author (his moral teachings). These moral teachings may enable the reader or watcher to have a better understanding of interactions between people so that they can make better predictions about the behavior of people.

This study also uses a new qualitative method of content analysis by which the findings can be described theoretically.

To investigate the possible relations between the moral messages and the characterization, a research study was designed and the following research questions were formulated:

1. How are the members of the cast in *The Merchant of Venice* portrayed by Shakespeare?
2. What are the messages in the characterizations of the actors in *The Merchant of Venice*?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is basically a creation. It is not merely an imitation. Literature is the shape and the result of a work of creativity; it is essentially a medium which utilizes language to reveal facets of human life. Therefore, a literary work generally deals with issues surrounding the lives of people and the encouragement of people to express their ideas and thoughts. According to Chesterton (2015), "literature is a luxury, fiction is a necessity".

Moleong (2002) says literature is the knowledge which is learned by people and is used to reflect and express experience. Another opinion says that literature is one

of the great creative and universal means of communicating the emotional, spiritual, or intellectual concerns of mankind (The Encyclopedia of Americana, 1985, p. 559). It seems that everything that people do in communicating can be called literature. To communicate with each other by any means, such as by letter, speaking directly, by phone or even something someone wrote or said, no matter what its content, no matter how small, could be called literature. In life, whether on purpose or not on purpose, everyone is involved with literature. To sum up, elements of character, plots and themes can make readers focus their minds and at the same time make characters more understandable.

### **ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERIZATION**

Roberts and Jacobs (1995, p. 53) have said that character is a verbal or written description or commentary of a person through their actions, speech and behavior. Abrams (2009, p. 32) has asserted that the character of a person portrayed in a narrative work is characterized by giving them certain moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities which can be determined from what the person says and does throughout the story.

The characterization of the main actor(s) may carry an author's intentions such as conveying moral messages, values, cultural backgrounds, shared values and so on. This also means that the main actors have more than just a leading role. The characterization of the other actors is usually portrayed only in complementary detail.

### **Drama**

There are various definitions of drama from different experts. Aristotle (2015) said that "drama is an imitation of human actions". Moulton (1915) also said that "drama is life presented in action". Another expert, Dietrich (2004) has stated that "a drama is a conflict about humans in the form of a dialogue which is presented using conversations and actions on a stage in front of an audience". Therefore, drama is a unique tool to explore and express human feelings. It is an essential form of behavior in all cultures; it is a fundamental human activity.

Drama is also a literary composition involving conflict, action, crisis and atmosphere designed to be acted by players on a stage before an audience. This definition may be applied to motion picture drama as well as to the traditional stage". With the advent of newer technologies, scripts written for non-stage media have been added to this form. The War of the Worlds on radio in 1938 (Welles, 1938) was at the advent of literature written for radio broadcasting and innumerable other novels and dramas have been adapted or written for radio, film and/or television. The 1938 radio drama "The War of the Worlds" was in fact the first radio adaptation of H. G. Wells' 1898 novel "The War of The Worlds". Conversely, much television, film, and radio literature has now been adapted for printed or electronic media.

### **The Main Characters in the Story**

The four main characters of *The Merchant of Venice* are Antonio, Bassanio, Portia and Shylock. The roles of protagonists are played by the first three, with Portia playing the heroine's role. Shylock takes the antagonist's role.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Kohlbacher (2005) says that qualitative content analysis is a method that implements a system which follows a theory-guided approach to text analysis by using a category system. In other words to conduct qualitative research analysis the writer has to follow certain steps and instructions to differentiate what is being analyzed based on this theory.

### **Instrument**

The writer acted directly as the data collector; she used a documentation method as the research instrument and read the whole short play to gather the data needed with the help of references from other sources related to the main members of the cast and their characterizations. The procedures of data analysis were used to analyze all of the selected data to formulate the results of this research which were written up with explanations and descriptions.

### **RESULTS**

The playwright should present a clear portrayal to the audience as to the role and character of each member of the cast so that they can clearly imagine what type of character each person in the cast is. In other words, the audience should be able to distinguish each actor according to the role and character that that actor performs. The force of the feelings in the audience towards each actor will determine their understanding or appreciation of the play, as they can then see clearly who the leading figures are and what they are moved to do. In *The Merchant of Venice* the characteristics of each member of the cast are personified by the actors. For instance, Portia is portrayed as a noble lady and a wife who is wise and firm in her attitudes, she is also generous and capable of making quick decisions.

### **Characterization as Portrayed by the Playwright**

As sketched above, the playwright presents a clear picture to the audience of the roles of each actor so that they, the audience, can cast their imagination on the type of character of each of them. In other words, the audience is able to distinguish each actor according to the characterization of the role that they perform. The feelings of the audience toward the actors will determine their understanding and appreciation of the play, because they can clearly see who the leading figures are and how they move towards resolving the conflict between them. Thus the audience will become sympathetic with some figures and with other characters that support them. They can clearly show their sympathy, their love or their hatred for the characters performed by the actors. The dialogue places the actors in vivid interaction; one with another in addition to the actions by which the plot evolves. It is the actors who show their passion and make their motives and their feelings clear

through the dialogue that maintains their characterization as created by the playwright.

### **The Messages in the Characterizations of *The Merchant of Venice***

*The Merchant of Venice* presents the readers and the audience with some facts from this worldly life, in particular, that there are always two kinds of people, good people and bad people. Thus, in *The Merchant of Venice* these characteristics are personified by each of the actors. Portia is portrayed as a noble lady, a wife who is firm in her attitudes; she is generous and capable of making quick decisions. Antonio is a character whose fortunes form the base for his actions. Bassanio is shown as a person with no great thoughts to offer. He does not perform any bold deeds by comparison with Portia's brilliant and daring impersonation of a lawyer. Shylock is a money-hungry person who lends money to those in desperate need at an exorbitant interest rate.

Portia has three important roles in the play, as a noble lady, as a kind-hearted wife, and as an intelligent lawyer and these roles where she shows that she can solve a great deal of difficulty for herself and for others indicate she is the heroine; Portia is the true heroine of the play. These characterizations by Shakespeare in his play *The Merchant of Venice* are truly very brilliant. It shows that he really knew how characterization of actors in a play should be done so that they are like real people in the way that they interact with and behave towards each other. This is what creates the theme, the reality, the life in Shakespeare's plays which are universally appreciated. These themes can happen anytime, anywhere and in many situations around the world.

### **CONCLUSION**

Drama and literature are dependent on each other. Literature is strongly influenced by culture, so that all matters contained in a culture will be reflected in their literature. Moulton (ibid) has said that literature (language) is the system that regulates human interaction in society and language (literature) is the system that serves as a means for courses of interaction. So, this means that first there is the existence of culture, and then comes literature. Literature is a term used to describe written or spoken material. Broadly speaking, "literature" is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction.

There are five main genre of literature: Poetry, Drama, Prose, Nonfiction, and Media. Poetry is often considered the oldest form of literature. Prose can be defined as any kind of written text that isn't poetry (which means drama, as discussed below, is technically a type of prose). Any text meant to be performed rather than read can be considered drama (unless, of course, it's a poem meant to be performed,). Non-fiction is a vast category that is a type of prose and includes many different sub-genres. Non-fiction can be creative, such as in a personal essay, or factual, such as in a scientific paper. Sometimes the purpose of non-fiction is to tell a story (e.g. an

autobiography), but most of the time the purpose is to pass on information and to educate the reader about certain facts, ideas, and/or issues.

The newest type of literature that has been defined as a distinct genre is media. This categorization was created to encompass the many new and important kinds of texts in our society today, such as movies and films, websites, commercials, billboards, and radio programs. Any work with words that don't exist primarily to be a written or spoken text (i.e. like poems, drama, prose or nonfiction) can probably be considered as media, particularly if it relies on recently developed technologies.

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