

## FORSTERIAN MODEL OF CHARACTERIZATION AND NON-HUMAN CHARACTERS IN NARRATIVE FICTION: IRIS MURDOCH'S MISTER MARS AND FRANZ KAFKA'S GREGOR SAMSA

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### Abstract

In *Aspects of the Novel*, Edward Morgan Forster introduces the critical concepts of flat and round to describe the nature of different types of fictional characters. According to Forster's theoretical categorization, flat characters are constructed and exist in their fictional realm around a single feature or quality. As this is the key criterion, Forster argues that flat characters can easily be recognized and remembered by the reader. Flat characters remain mostly the same through circumstances. In other words, flat characters never surprise the reader. Contrary to the nature of flat characters, round characters operate in an opposite direction to their counterparts. Round characters never remain the same throughout events, and it is not easy to recognize them since they do not exist under the dominance of a single trait. In addition to these, round characters are those who surprise the reader. Although Forster's categorisation of fictional characters has functioned well in most of the cases, some characters are not easily analysed under this formula. Franz Kafka's Gregor Samsa, for example, seems neither a round nor a flat character. Throughout his story, he remains the same. At the same time, he surprises the reader, which is not expected from him since he is mostly the same character in the text. Samsa's turning into an insect further complicates the definition of his roundness or flatness. Another example is Iris Murdoch's Mister Mars. Mister Mars is an animal. But at the same time he is a movie star, a celebrity. He has a pivotal role for the protagonist of the text. Therefore, the aim of this study is first to introduce the theoretical background of the nature of fictional characters and then to display some difficulties present particularly in Forster's classification through the characterisation of two non-human examples.

**Keywords:** Fictional characters, flat, round, human, non-human.

## FORSTER'IN KARAKTER MODELİ VE KURGUSAL ANLATIDA İNSAN DIŐI KARAKTERLER: IRIS MURDOCH'TAN MISTER MARS VE FRANZ KAFKA'DAN GREGOR SAMSA

### Öz

*Aspects of the Novel* adlı eserde Edward Morgan Forster, farklı türlerdeki kurgusal karakterlerin yapılarını tanımlamak için düz ve yuvarlak kavramlarını ortaya koymaktadır. Forster'ın kuramsal sınıflandırmasına göre düz karakterler, buldukları kurgusal ortamda tek bir özellik ya da nitelik etrafında yapılandırılır ve varlıklarını sürdürürler. Anahtar ölçüt bu durum olduğundan, Forster düz karakterlerin okuyucu tarafından kolaylıkla tanınıp hatırlandığını savunur. Düz karakterler olaylar boyunca da çoğunlukla aynı kalırlar. Başka bir deyişle, düz karakterler okuyucuyu hiçbir zaman şaşırtmazlar. Düz karakterlerin yapılarının aksine, yuvarlak karakterler karşıtlarına aksi yönde hareket ederler. Yuvarlak karakterler olay örgüsü boyunca aynı şekilde kalmazlar ve tek bir özelliğin etkisi altında varlıklarını sürdürmediklerinden, tanınmaları da kolay değildir. Bütün bunların yanında, yuvarlak karakterler okuyucuyu şaşırtan karakterlerdir. Her ne kadar çoğu örnekte Forster'ın karakter sınıflandırması doğru işlese de, bazı kurgusal karakterler bu kural altında çözümlenememektedir. Örneğin Franz Kafka'nın Gregor Samsa adlı karakteri ne düz ne de yuvarlak bir karakter gibi görünmektedir. Hikâyesi boyunca da aynı şekilde kalmaktadır. Metinde çoğunlukla aynı karakter olarak kaldığı için, aynı zamanda da kendinden beklenmeyecek bir şekilde okuyucuyu şaşırtmaktadır. Samsa'nın bir böceğe dönüşmesi düzlüğü ya da yuvarlaklığı daha da karmaşıklştırmaktadır. Diğer bir örnek de Iris Murdoch'ın Mister Mars adlı karakteridir. Mister Mars aslında bir hayvan karakterdir. Aynı zamanda da bir film yıldızı, ünlü bir varlıktır. Metnin ana karakteri için de vazgeçilmez bir konuma sahiptir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma öncelikle kurgusal karakterlerin yapısı konusundaki kuramsal arka planı göstermeyi ve iki insan dışı karakter üzerinden Forster'ın sınıflandırmasındaki bazı zorluklar üzerinde durmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kurgusal karakterler, düz, yuvarlak, insan, insan dışı.

## I. INTRODUCTION

What exactly are fictional characters who exist on the pages of literary works? What theoretical descriptions could define the specific ontological qualities of such fabricated entities? These and many other questions about the presumed nature of fictional characters have been asked many times not only by a number of literary theorists but also by a number of writers since the classical period. According to a critical approach to the nature of such formulated beings, "*fictional characters are clearer and more sharply drawn than their counterparts in real life. Because the author is only required to create one plausible view, his vision is far more coherent and compelling than the ordinary vagueness of indefinitely analysable real people ...*" (Blocker 1974: 35). Quite corresponding to this specific example, as it is aptly reported by another speculative enquiry, the situation of fictional characters can be summed up in such a way that "*Apparently we refer to objects which do not exist: we speak about Sherlock Holmes and the Easter Bunny, but never expect to see them in the street or to read about their activities in the newspapers. Some ... have believed that although these things do not exist they still have being in some sense. [Some], though once attracted to this view, felt that it led to absurd consequences...*" (Crittenden 1966: 317).

Coupled with the statements above, in order to provide the reader with a more or less comprehensive perspective of some of the most significant discussions about fictional characters, some studies carried out to contribute to the discovery of possible answers to the opening questions should first be recollected. It will be productive, for example, to start the discussion with how an argument about characterisation in narrative fiction specially foregrounds the idea that "*One can easily arrive at the claim that characterisation in fiction provide us with 'universal truth' by implication*" and continues to explain this implication by claiming that "*a given character in fiction is to be taken as representative of a certain class of human beings and that the implied statement is 'this individual (or what happens to him) is representative of a class of persons (or what typically happens to them)'*" (Hospers 1980:5-6).

According to this theory, however, the discussion referred in the passage above should be further carried out with the idea that there are some significant shortcomings one must take into consideration in terms of similar claims. First of all, it is argued that "*the author nowhere says that his characters are to be taken as representing a class; that inference is made by us, and in most cases there is no evidence in the work of fiction that such an inference is to be made. Novelists and dramatists trace the careers of individuals, who may or may not represent a certain class, but the novelist himself does not usually generalize*" (Hospers 1980: 6). In addition to this claim, further discussing the problematic nature of character description, another similar idea is that "*There could be much dispute about which class the individual is representative of ... and ... The fact that a person is in a class does not mean that he is representative of that class, particularly when 'representative' is taken in its common meaning of typical*" (Hospers 1980: 6). However, according to the speaker, such a powerful claim by no means intends upon creating the idea that all major characters in narrative fiction then are types pictured according to the established norms of an entire class in life:

*Type-characters are those who possess a limited range of characteristics, namely those that they have in common with all members of their type ... but who have few or no characteristics which distinguish them from other members of the same class ... major characters of literature are not type-characters nor is their value to us that they typify a class of persons. What strikes us about them is that they are through and through individuals. Nor is there any individual in the world who is merely a representative of a type, without individualising features. (Hospers 1980: 6)*

Whenever the extensive time span of such literary and theoretical inquiries has been considered, perhaps the first and the most important source from classical antiquity in terms of the questions of this study within the body of the modern literary theory is the Greek philosopher and

scientist Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle,<sup>2</sup> through a very well-known comparison between the plot and the character in poetry, grants privilege to the former over the latter. Aristotle considers the plot in his canonical study *Poetics*<sup>3</sup> the most important element in poetry, particularly in tragedy. Whenever Aristotle concentrates on the character, he provides only brief descriptions such as the following statements: “*In regard to character, there are four points to be aimed at. First and foremost, character should be good ... Second, character must be appropriate ... The third point about character is that it should be like reality ... The fourth aspect of character is consistency*” (2007: 69). What becomes accessible in this statement is that Aristotle mostly makes a study of the character under the broad presumption that fictional characters are life-like entities. They can be studied assuming that they are like actual human beings. Nevertheless, the annoying truth is still that the inquiries into the essence of fictional characters have not been satisfactorily answered yet. As it is addressed here, “*‘What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?’ asked Henry James in his 1884 essay ‘The Art of Fiction.’ More than a century later, we can still ask the same questions when we begin thinking about the nature of fictional character in narratives*” (Keen 2003: 55). The same questions are further asked through another enquiry into the lack of comprehensive theoretical formulations: “*So far nobody has devised a theory that is meant to cover fictional characters exhaustively. It has repeatedly been claimed that the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon makes it difficult to expect a fully satisfactory result*” (Heidbrink 2010: 67).

It is even in the modern times that the same speculative discussions that particularly focus on the nature of fictional characters continue to exist. The reason for this is that “*characters prove to be highly complex objects in a number of ways. They remind one of real persons, but at the same time they seem to consist of mediated signs only. They are ›there‹ but they do not appear to exist in reality – we do not meet them on the streets, after all. They do exert an influence on us, but we cannot interact with them directly. They are incredibly versatile, they change over time and appear in different forms in different media*” (Eder and Jannidis et al. 2010: 3). However, as an outcome of these absolutely lengthy but at the same time rewarding discussions, two different yet canonical theories of the character in narrative fiction have been adequately introduced.

## II. MIMETIC AND NON-MIMETIC THEORIES OF CHARACTER:<sup>4</sup>

One of these approaches to the question of the essence of fictional characters is what critics have called the mimetic theory. Referring to one of the most realistically drawn characters of English language fiction, Weinsheimer writes “*How is it possible to refuse the illusion that Emma Woodhouse was a woman whom I can discuss with as much self-consciousness as the woman next-door? At the very moment I refer to her ... I have already tacitly removed her from the novel, credited her with an independent life, and assumed a mimetic theory of character*” (1979: 185). Related to this, the fundamental argument of the mimetic theory addresses the idea that literature is essentially the final product of the writer’s original reproduction of the universe as an artist. Furthermore, this idea comes from one of Plato’s principal notions that all forms of representative arts are the product of the artist’s imitation of nature (2003: 316).

The character in literature that the mimetic theory focuses on is undoubtedly the character created through a realistic composition. In other words, the character of the mimetic theory is a

<sup>1</sup> Even before Plato whose theories of the art and the artist have been considered as the primary source of reference for Western literature.

<sup>2</sup> He lived between the years 384-322 BC.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle’s work of dramatic theory; written in 335 BC.; includes his dramatic theory, particularly the theory of tragedy.

<sup>4</sup> This division of fictional characters into two broad groups is to provide clear understanding of further divisions under other categories. For a more detailed discussion see Jens Eder and Fotis Jannidis et al. (2010). “Characters in Fictional Worlds: An Introduction”. *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film and Other Media*. eds. Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis and Ralf Schneider. New York: de Gruyter.

life-like entity. Therefore, what is specially meant by the universe in this theory is the writer's historical reality as a human being who essentially witnesses what has been taking place in life. According to the argument of the mimetic theory, characters in literature are the reproductions that are deliberately based on the models of actual human beings who once existed or who still exist in their historical realities. The special environment in which fictional characters exist is "*the fictional 'reality' in which the characters of the story are supposed to be living and in which its events are supposed to take place*" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 7). The same idea is projected from another perspective in such a way that "*characters can serve mimetic functions when they are represented in a way that underscores their status as lifelike individuals, synthetic functions when a text foregrounds their status as artificial constructs*" (Herman 2009: 205).

Although it is principally fiction, mimetic theory expects the reader to assume that what he or she is reading as a narrative is actually an integral part of the historical reality. In other words, this means that mimetic theory acknowledges the assumption that characters are like real people, they are similar to everyday human beings. And this hypothesis, on the other hand, is exactly why readers of realistic literature are supposed to develop empathy with fictional characters. Therefore, it would be relevant to the discussion to remember that "*We have empathy for the fictional characters – we know how they are feeling – because we literally experience the same feelings ourselves*" (Iacoboni 2009: 4).

The other mainstream approach to the theory of character is called the non-mimetic doctrine. Contrary to the argument that has been carried out by the mimetic theory, the non-mimetic understanding of literature recognises fictional characters not as the portraits of actual human beings but as mere textual entities. Characters are now removed from their socio-historical background due to the assumption that "*Character is an adjective, an attribute, a predicate (for example: unnatural, shadowy, star, composite, excessive, impious, etc.)*" (Barthes 1974: 190). In the case of the notion of the character in non-mimetic theory, fictional characters created in literary works are quite far away from having the exact images of real human beings who are living in their own experiences of the contemporary historical reality. According to Weinsheimer, "*The ... alternative to mimetic criticism ... affirms the gap between the critical language and that of the text and denies the necessity for an imitative relation between them ... [Mimetic] critic can show that characters are fictive ... and characters are recognized as fictional*" (1979: 186, 188).

In addition to this situation, non-mimetic theory of the character observes fictional entities merely as textual beings whose life is necessarily limited to the pages they have been written on by the writer. Analogous to this perception, in one of the best examples of the thematic interpretation of the theory of character in English Literature, John Fowles'<sup>5</sup> *Mantissa*,<sup>6</sup> characters surprisingly<sup>7</sup> measure time in terms of the pages of the book (1982: 10). When the text in which the characters have existed as paper figures finally ends, non-mimetic theory, speculating about the description of fictional entities, asserts that the existence of the characters dramatically comes to an end. According to non-mimetic theory, therefore, historical reality has been replaced by the textual existence.

After this concise explanation of the two widespread theories of the character, it should further be added that the mainstream theory of literature is the liberal humanist school that significantly highlights the following doctrines: "*good literature is of timeless significance; it somehow transcends the limitations and peculiarities of the age it was written in, and thereby speaks to what is constant in human nature ... The literary text contains its own meaning within itself ... The purpose of literature is essentially the enhancement of life and the propagation of humane values*" (Barry 1995: 17-19).

<sup>5</sup> The English novelist; lived between the years 1926-2005.

<sup>6</sup> A novel by John Fowles; first published in 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Although it is surprising for the reader to notice that time is measured in the novel in an unusual unit, it is quite ordinary for the characters whose lives are limited to page numbers.

Furthermore, the liberal humanist school of literature expects the reader to be involved in literature assuming that the story the reader is reading actually happened. In other words, it is the assumption that the writer has reported to the reader an event that actually took place in this world at a specific time in history. Therefore, it should be concluded that if this is what is expected from the reader, then the liberal humanist school of literature observes characters as copies of real human beings. Literary characters become life-like people.

### III. FORSTER'S THEORY OF CHARACTER:

The English novelist and short story writer Edward Morgan Forster's<sup>8</sup> well-known classification of characterisation in narrative fiction is undoubtedly an outcome of the liberal humanist realistic school of literature.<sup>9</sup> Forster's classification has become an integral part of canonical literary criticism. Furthermore, his analysis is now regarded as one of the most widespread and highly accepted theories of characterisation in literature.

In his *Aspects of the Novel*,<sup>10</sup> Forster, who is discussing about the English language novel, offers two particular categories of characterisation. Forster argues that characters can be divided into two separate groups as being flat and round. Describing flat characters, Forster claims that "*Flat characters were called 'humorous' in the seventeenth century, and are sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round*" (1985: 67). From this statement, therefore, it can be achieved that a single specific trait is the defining quality of flat characters according to Forster's interpretation. In other words, this special feature of the character is so dominant that flat characters display almost no other feature. The formation of flat characters is accomplished through a leading idea or a principal concept that prevails throughout the particular story where flat characters exist. In other words,

*Another important aspect of characters is their relative complexity. Complex characters ... are often called round characters. Flat characters, on the other hand, possess a single marked trait that can be captured in a word or phrase—the miser, the prostitute with the heart of gold, the mad doctor, the cop that can't be bribed. Many of the Dickens characters ... manifest only the single trait bound up in their names. Round characters are not so easy to sum up. Their traits are many, divergent, or even conflicting. Consider the complexity of Polzunkov in Dostoevsky's story (pp. 430-440); the narrator can barely find words to portray the contradictions of this 'comic martyr.' Or the characters may be nondescript, yet compellingly alive. Round characters, like people in real life, can be very complicated and not easy to explain. Learning about them, however, is a fascinating and absorbing experience, no less absorbing, once one gets into it, than discovering the solution to a murder mystery. (Chatman 1993: 60)*

In addition to the above discussion, Forster emphasises the practical properties that flat characters generally present. One of them, according to Forster, is the situation that "*One great advantage of flat characters is that they are easily recognized whenever they come in — recognized by the reader's emotional eye, not by the visual eye, which merely notes the recurrence of a proper name.*" (1985: 68) Forster's flat characters are types who seldom step outside the general characteristics that the mentioned specific type has had in literature. Whenever flat characters come across the reader, the reader has usually no difficulty in recognizing flat characters due to the long-established familiarity with this representative type in literature. The way in which flat characters are represented effectively reminds the reader of his previous experiences with similar other character descriptions. Instead of being individual creations, therefore, flat characters are mere typical representations of their previous examples.

<sup>8</sup> He lived between the years 1879-1970.

<sup>9</sup> This is from Forster's 1927 book, *Aspects of the Novel*.

<sup>10</sup> First published in 1927 from Forster's series of lectures.

Following Forster's analysis, it can be asserted that flat characters are so typical that even after the disappearance of the text in which they have been constructed, flat characters adequately continue to be recalled by the reader. This is because of the fact that the memory of the reader has already been accustomed to flat characters. Relevant to this, Forster claims about flat characters that "A second advantage is that they are easily remembered by the reader afterwards. They remain in his mind as unalterable for the reason that they were not changed by circumstances; they moved through circumstances, which gives them in retrospect a comforting quality, and preserves them when the book that produced them may decay." (1985: 69) What is emphasised here in this quotation is the unchangeable nature of flat characters. As they are defined by the adjective flat, this terminology is a reference to their one-dimensional characterisation. Flat characters are entities that are easy to remember by the reader in several other encounters. It might also be proposed that flat characterisation has a number of common properties with caricatures.

As a result of this, flat characters are attributes that conclusively fall behind what might be called authentic human portraits. This situation forces flat characters to be uncomplicated formations. Forster, therefore, asserts that "For we must admit that flat people are not in themselves as big achievements as round ones, and also that they are best when they are comic. A serious or tragic flat character is apt to be a bore." (1985: 72-73). Forster's observation might be interpreted in the way that since flat characters are straightforward enough for the reader, they may effectually comply with the idea of the humour character in character comedies.<sup>11</sup>

The following commentary on round characters, on the other hand, acknowledges the fact that if the character surprises the reader in one way or another, this is most probably a round character: "The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round. It has the incalculability of life about it—life within the pages of a book. And by using it sometimes alone, more often in combination with the other kind, the novelist achieves his task of acclimatization and harmonizes the human race with the other aspects of his work." (1985: 78). Flat characters, according to Forster, typically fail to confuse the reader since they consistently remain the same. As a result, what is emphasised in Forster's theory is that "characters are understood, they are comprehensible, not by who they are or represent or what they refer to, but by the number of roles or relationships they enter into, by the variety of their presence in the text" (Mead 1990: 444). In addition to this, Forster's flat and round characters have been interpreted as static and dynamic characters (Eder and Jannidis et al. 2010: 43). Another analysis of Forster's character theory concentrates on the degree of psychological complexity characters display. According to this idea, "As regards the character conception of the individual hero, that is, of the two-protagonist structure, in realistic texts, this meets the requirements of a psychologically ›round character‹. In contrast to the less important, ›flat characters‹ or ›types‹, this emphasises the singularity and complexity of the individual. Round characters appear as a conglomerate or bundle of ›distinguishing features‹, and they can always spring a surprise" (Tröhler 2010: 460).

#### IV. MISTER MARS AND GREGOR SAMSA

As both *Mister Mars* and *Gregor Samsa* are non-human characters, it should first be stated in this chapter that

*An event in a narrative doesn't happen by itself. Somebody or something makes it happen. In other words, plot actions require agents. These agents are usually human, but need not be: most of the agents in Aesop's Fables are animals. So is Lassie, the collie who stars in several novels and films. The principal agent of Herman Melville's Moby-Dick is a whale, and of Peter Benchley's Jaws, a shark. Remember, too, Bugs Bunny, White Fang, and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. Narrative agents don't even have to be made flesh and blood: a tin man and a scarecrow are agents in The Wizard of Oz, robots play*

<sup>11</sup> See the English playwright Ben Jonson's 1598 play *Every Man in His Humour*.

leading roles in Star Wars, and a computer named Hal is the villain of 2001. A forest fire and a tropical storm are important agents in two modern novels. Literature and films are filled with supernatural creatures who are important agents. There is also a category of narrative, called allegory, populated by abstract qualities, for instance, Mr. Worldly Wiseman and Mrs. Timorous in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. (Chatman 1993: 58)

Besides the human beings, Forster's character classification includes animals depicted in literary texts. According to his discussion, most of the animals portrayed in realist literature are essentially flat characters. Animals do not display elements of surprise for the reader, which is basically the main reason for their two-dimensional flat characterisation. The Anglo-Irish novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch's<sup>12</sup> first published novel *Under the Net*<sup>13</sup> illustrates an animal character, particularly a dog. Mister Mars is an old Alsatian who has starred in a number of movies in Britain in the story that the novel narrates. Principally portrayed as an animal in a thoroughly realistic text, Mister Mars naturally does not display human features in the novel such as writing, reading or speaking.

The dialogue about Mister Mars between the two characters of the novel includes the following sentences: "I suppose it's some sort of special dog ... It's Mister Mars ... It's Marvellous Mister Mars, the dog star ... Nothing thrills me so much as meeting a film star in real life, and I had been a fan of Mars for years" (141). Murdoch, however, plainly portrays Mister Mars as a flat character in Forster's terminology. Apart from being a movie star, Mister Mars displays no other extraordinary characteristics that may truly differentiate him from other animals. In other words, the ontology of Mister Mars as an animal does not encounter any specific modifications, which effectively strengthens his flatness. Recalling once again Forster's commentary, therefore, Mister Mars first of all is a flat character who can easily be recognised by the reader. Since what he principally reveals as a character is no more than a set of already pre-defined qualities, Mister Mars is diagnosed by the reader without a serious complication. In addition to this remark, Mister Mars does not surprise the reader in an authentic fashion. As a result of these, Mister Mars is quite an ordinary animal that is similar to any other example in realistic fiction.

Although Forster's character classification has been a practically well-defined and established approach to the question of character construction in narrative fiction, even including animal characters, it is not unlikely that some characters in literature might seem to be unquestionably unfit to this otherwise illustrious definition. Drawing attention to some vulnerability in Forster's theory, this commentary is meaningful:

*E. M. Forster's famous distinction between flat and round characters has the credentials of a successful critical idea: it falls in a field where useful critical ideas are in short supply, it is simple enough as a theory for anyone to grasp at a glance but difficult enough in the application to stimulate qualification and dissent ... and it comes from a writer whose name adds distinction to any page where he is quoted ... within a few pages of its formulation ... the reader is left with the impression that most characters are one variety or another...* (Pickrel 1988: 181)

Besides the above commentary, Forster, in his essay, mostly concentrates on the examples of liberal humanist realist literature that principally attempt to depict almost flawless copies of real human beings in literary texts. However, this feature means that the examples of characterisation from non-realistic literature have generally been left untouched in Forster's analysis. Therefore such an obvious void in Forster's theory of characterisation might be filled with the inclusion to the discussion of other types of characterisation that might stand between the two underlined leading groupings.

<sup>12</sup> She lived between the years 1919-1999.

<sup>13</sup> Published in 1954.

One of the most outstanding of these in between characters in literature in terms of Forsterian classification is the protagonist of the Hungarian-Czech novelist and short story writer Franz Kafka's<sup>14</sup> *Metamorphosis*,<sup>15</sup> Gregor Samsa. Samsa is neither a human being nor an animal, he is an insect. Forster's theory of characterisation, however, does not describe the flatness or roundness of an insect that has been depicted as a fictional character. Whether an insect, like most of the animals in literature, is a flat character is not offered to the reader to be put into question in Forster's theory. This is because of the fact that Forster's classification mostly relies on realistic elements and examples. Talking about characterisation in a text where human beings turn into insects, however, is stepping on another realm, fantasy literature.

Forster's notion of fantasy in literature, particularly in the novel as a literary genre, suggests the presence of the supernatural. Furthermore, it relies on the decisive coherence between human characters and various other materials that are not human beings. Therefore, human characters have already been separated from other characters such as animals or supernatural beings in Forster's theory of characterisation. There is a clear-cut differentiation between these two types of characters in terms of realism and fantasy in literature. Because of this, flatness or roundness of characters in Forster's theory is a feature that is mostly related to human beings. Other characters that are not human beings are commonly excluded from being flat or round characters. There is an obvious existence of the supernatural in *Metamorphosis*. Considering this as the basic reference point, Forster's character classification might be enlarged to include unrealistic characters of fantasy literature.

Particularly prior to his metamorphosis, Samsa is obviously a flat character. The most significant feature of flat characters, according to Forster, is the condition that they remain noticeably the same throughout the text, which is very much similar to the condition of Murdoch's *Mister Mars*. Besides this quality, flat characters never surprise the reader as they begin and end their stories having the same features and characteristics. Similar to Forster's criterion, "*The really flat character can be expressed in one sentence*" (1985: 67-68), Samsa has been so devoted to his family that he can be summarised not in a sentence but in a single word or in a few words as a character. Samsa is the idea of devotedness, he is the idea of doing everything for one's family; he is the idea of forsaking himself for others. Comparable to this, *Mister Mars*, as a flat character, is the mere idea of being a superstar.

Such an interpretation of Samsa as a flat character should now be confirmed by some examples from the text. When Samsa sees his new body for the first time, he is obviously expected to react to that unexpected situation. Instead of a reaction to his overnight metamorphosis, Samsa is ironically worried about his family. If he misses the next train to his office, he should be absolutely ashamed of his laziness. If he loses his job, who will take care of all the members of his family? There is anxiety and terror that Samsa feels. But this is not because of his metamorphosis, his turning into a giant insect, but because of his meaningless over-devotedness to his family members. At the end of the text, all the family members that Samsa foolishly has devoted himself are cheerful enough to get rid of Samsa's dead body. This is Samsa's father saying to his wife and daughter, "*Come along, now, do. Let bygones be bygones. And you might have some consideration for me*" (1993: 107). Besides this example, what is more dramatic is Samsa's indifference to his own condition. Particularly his poor working conditions, damp and dirty hotel rooms, have already turned Samsa into a metaphoric insect. However, his true transformation now fails to show him how he has been abused and manipulated by his own family. Samsa ridiculously describes his terrifying condition as such: "*A slight illness, an attack of giddiness, has kept me from getting up. But I feel all right again. I'm getting out of bed now ... I'm all right*" (1993: 86).

<sup>14</sup> He lived between the years 1883-1924.

<sup>15</sup> A novella; first published in 1915.

Samsa's flatness as a character becomes more obvious especially during the later stages of his metamorphosis. Highlighting Forster's comment that flat characters display the tendency of remaining mostly the same for the reader in the text, Samsa, not only at the end of his story but also at the end of his life, is still worried about his inability as an insect of travelling and earning money for his family. His thoughts are clear indications of his situation: "*Gregor hardly slept at all by night or by day. He was often haunted by the idea that next time the door opened he would take his family's affairs in hand again just as he used to do ...*" (1993: 100).

Samsa's characterisation, however, is special enough to suggest more than a single trait. In other words, although flatness is his dominant feature, Samsa in several occasions in the text tends to appear like a round character. This situation is precisely opposite to that of Murdoch's Mister Mars. The first implication of this can be found in the fact that Samsa occasionally displays some signs of change in his character. Sometimes it is difficult to argue that Samsa is the same character. This becomes obvious especially after Samsa's wilful refusal to eat any more and his implied suicide. His death powerfully suggests that Samsa must have questioned the relationship between himself and his family particularly during the final days of his life. Another implication of Samsa's potential roundness as a character is the fact that he cannot be categorised as an easily recognised character by the reader. A character that can easily be recognised by the reader, according to Forster's argument, is a flat character. Although Samsa's most dominant quality as a character is his meaningless devotedness to his family, and although this quality remains the same during most of the story, there is absolutely no indication, in the text, of his easy recognition by the reader. Samsa never seems to be a familiar figure for the reader. In Forster's terms for flat characters, Samsa is not a "*photograph*" (1985: 72), which is definitely not the case for Mister Mars that is almost a caricature.

In addition to the above features that force Samsa to appear as a round character, his full display of almost all the characteristics of a modern tragic hero<sup>16</sup> also establishes him as a protagonist who stands nearer to round characters. Samsa is a travelling salesman who has been working harder and harder in order to pay off his father's debts. His working conditions are poor enough to offer him no more than long working hours that start quite early in the morning, ordinary food and poor hotel rooms. Life is so difficult for Samsa that he has turned into an insect.<sup>17</sup> Samsa loses his human qualities because of the difficulties he has met in life whereas Mister Mars has never been a human being at all. Samsa has been abused not only by his employer, but also by his own family members.

Forster specially underlines that "*It is only round people who are fit to perform tragically for any length of time and can move us to any feelings except humour and appropriateness*" (1985: 73). Therefore, if Samsa is a modern tragic hero, which is well obvious in the text, then he should be a round character as well as a flat one. Besides the qualities through which Samsa appears in his story as a flat character, which specially centres around Samsa's having a single defining trait, his tragic presentation as a character in his story where he finally dies out of the difficulties he has had situates him into the category of round characters. Perhaps the only tragic element for Mister Mars that situates him closer to round characters is the fact that because of his old age, he is no longer able to perform as a movie star. Mister Mars, as it is accidentally discovered by Murdoch's protagonist, is no more than an ordinary Alsatian. If this might be considered as a tragic end, not in its classical but in its modern sense, Mister Mars might possibly be classified as a round character. The turn of the fortune for Mister Mars is tragic.

Considering the situation of Mister Mars once again, his characterisation is so special that it is undoubtedly challenging to fully decide on his typology. However, these suggested criteria

<sup>16</sup> This is to refer to Samsa's ordinariness, his suffering and his death.

<sup>17</sup> This transformation is meant both in metaphorical and in physical sense.

might further shed light on Mister Mars' possible categorisation: "... whether the given character has a proper name; whether his consciousness is presented to us; whether he is presented from varied points of view; whether he is presented in a 'showing' or a 'telling' technique; whether many traits of the character are explicitly mentioned in the text ..." (Fishelov 1990: 425). According to these principles, therefore, it can now be argued that although Mister Mars is not devoid of a particular name, he clearly fails to comply with the other examples. The reader is not given any implications of the conscious of the character since Mister Mars is an animal. Besides this, Mister Mars is presented to the reader almost from a single point of view, from the point of view of the protagonist of the novel. Furthermore, apart from being an old movie star, no other aspect of Mister Mars is specially mentioned in the novel.

Compared to the characterization of Samsa, however, Mister Mars' portrait is quite a limited description of an animal character in narrative fiction. As Murdoch's text is a work of realist tradition, Mister Mars has not been equipped with qualities that would not be suitable for his realistically depicted nature. In other words, Mister Mars is merely an animal whose own nature makes him a flat character for human beings. The only exceptional quality that Mister Mars has is the fact that he is a celebrity, a movie star in particular. Although this situation truly places Mister Mars in a position that is nearer to round characters, it is absolutely not enough for him to be a round character in its full sense. However, it can still be argued that Mister Mars is an animal character that surprisingly stands between the two categories. The special status that Mister Mars has in the story does not allow him to be classified simply as a flat character.

## V. CONCLUSION

Forster's character classification has become one of the leading discussions about the true nature of characters in narrative fiction. Almost every single published study that specially talks about the nature of characters in literature is expected to refer to Forster's theory of characterization among other theories of character construction. On the other hand, it is also the case that there are a number of critical studies about fictional characters that seriously question the efficacy of Forster's prominent categorisation.

This significant development is mainly because of the fact that there are characters in literature that exactly exist between the two Forsterian classifications. These characters are neither completely flat nor completely round types. Some of the features they have make them appear as flat characters while some of their traits make them look like round ones. Among the examples for such in-between characters, as it has been intended to display in this study, are Iris Murdoch's Mister Mars and Franz Kafka's Gregor Samsa.

Neither Mister Mars nor Gregor Samsa is suitable as a fictional character to be clearly positioned as a flat or a round character according to Forster's character classification. This is because of the fact that these two characters originally display the characteristic features of both flat and round typologies. As both of them are non-human characters, this further adds to the main difficulty of classification for the characterisation of Mister Mars and Gregor Samsa. The most productive outcome of this situation, therefore, would be to propose an in-between position that specially fits for some fictional characters such as the ones that have been studied in this essay.

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