

The extravert character

Literature, of course, is not life. A character in a book is a construction of words, yet it simulates a character in life, me or you, or, viewed differently, Tom or Jenny out there, the real people in the world. To speak of a literary character as extravert or introvert is to say that we ourselves can be modeled in language which gives a sense of what we are. Life comes first, then literature, and yet life can look different after literature has replicated it.

Thus the strange extravert literary bedfellows, that we have assembled in our character chart, form an artificial subset of imaginative possibilities, and yet manage to convey a distinct impression of what being extravert is like in life. These characters present some of the variegated shadings that literary extraversion can take on. **Teiresias**, **Trimalchio**, the **Wife of Bath**, **Grushenka** and **Demetrio**, although all created in widely different imaginations, all manage to enrich the sense of what extraverts are like.

Teiresias stems from the mythological imagination, bisexual, preternaturally insightful, sinister, deeply in touch with destiny. As this mysterious character is presented, in Sophocles' *Oedipus*, he brings with him a cocky aggressiveness. He accuses Oedipus, with increasing directness throughout the play, of being the guilty man who is bringing plague onto the city. Although Oedipus grows increasingly enraged, at these insinuations, Teiresias persists in his taunts. His extraversion takes the form of saying the harshest of truths directly to the King.

Trimalchio is the genial lascivious host of a great feast, in Petronius' *Satyricon*. This is a man who lets it all hang out, masturbating in a cup, in front of his guests, fondling every pretty little acolyte, vomiting copiously so that he can reawaken his appetites and consume more sensuous delicacies. Trimalchio has as much self-confidence and gift for self-expression as Teiresias! How different are the extravert natures of these two imaginary characters!

Our third male example, Demetrio in Azuela's *The Underdogs*, is neither eery nor sensual, but is of a hard bitten, realistic extravert type. He is fighting for the Mexican Revolution, and is the leader of a band of dogged irregulars, struggling in the Mexican mountains against the Federales. In Demetrio's case extraverted means literally turned toward the outside, the world of action and events.

Two women appear on our list.

Grushenka, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, is a classic minx, fatally attractive to men, but complex in her sexuality. Her normally bumptious and flirtatious nature is bracketed, in her relation to Alyosha, the youngest of the brothers. Toward Alyosha, a monk but a live wire, she is charmingly respectful, while at the same time exercising her wiles, and bringing out an otherwise carefully controlled masculine side of the young man. Grushenka is an extravert with taste.

Chaucer's Wife of Bath is, like Grushenka, a robust lover of men, and at the same time a sensitive judge of the male gender. She has had multiple husbands, some lusty and some wimpy, and has learned to take what she can, gleefully, out of each relationship. If the guy can't get it up, she will make do with the inheritance he leaves her.

Discussion questions

What can literature teach us about life? Or is literature instructional at all?

Is extraversion, in literature, a special kind of turning toward the outer world? Does it involve a certain *élan*, which distinguishes it from mere orientation toward action? Is there not a boisterousness in the extraverted characters sampled here?

The two women sampled here are marked by the robust genital sexuality of their extraversion, whereas the three men in question are either non sexual (Teiresias), perversely sexual (Trimalchio), or deeply immersed in a non-sexual male guerilla war existence. Is this gender disparity, in the matter of extraversion, simply the luck of the draw, in our samples, or has it a wider significance?

Teiresias is the character, in our present list, who might most seem to challenge the category of extravert. Is it useful to include a wide range of examples under the single heading of extraversion? Do we learn something about The Wife of Bath and Teiresias, by putting them in bed together?

Reading thoughts

Aristophanes, *The Lysistrata* (Lysistrata) 411 BC

Cleland, John, *Fanny Hill* (Fanny Hill) 1748

Irving, John, *The World According to Garp* (T. S. Garp) 1978

Kazantzakis, Nikos, *The Odyssey: a modern Sequel* (Odysseus) 1985

Salinger, J.D., *The Catcher in the Rye* (Holden Caulfield) 1951

Twain, Mark, *Huckleberry Finn* (Huck Finn) 1885