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The Theory and Analysis of Drama

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translated from the German by John Halliday

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Wenn man nur endlich aufhören wollte,
vom Drama im allgemeinen zu sprechen.

(If only people would at last refrain
from speaking of drama in general terms.)

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figuration consisting of the soliloquising hero (I,vii; II,i,ii; III,i; V,iii,v, vii,viii) and the double configuration consisting of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (I,v,vii; II,ii; III,ii,iv) are repeated several times, thereby underlining their central importance for the form and content of the drama. By repeating an identical configuration it is possible to demonstrate and clarify the change in the way the figures relate both to each other and to themselves.

5.4. Figure conception and characterisation

In the previous section we showed how a dramatic figure is constituted and defined through the sets of relationships connecting it with the other figures of the play in the varying constellations and configurations. We would now like to concentrate on the dramatic figure in isolation. In doing so we shall divide our analysis into two levels: figure conception and figure characterisation. Figure conception refers to the anthropological model that the dramatic figure is based on and the conventions involved in turning this anthropological model into fiction. Figure characterisation refers to the formal techniques of information transmission that are used to present the dramatic figure. With the help of the communication model for dramatic texts it is possible to set up a suprahistorical repertoire of techniques used in figure characterisation. The historically specific qualities of a particular text can then be understood as a specific selection taken from this repertoire. Figure conception, by contrast, is a purely historical category, a historically and typologically variable set of conventions, since it is not possible to relate the broad spectrum of historically realised images of man and their dramatic manifestations back to a suprahistorical repertoire of possible variations.

5.4.1. Figure conception

5.4.1.1. Three dimensions

In the chapter on dramatic figure in his *Dynamics of Drama* B. Beckermann identifies three dimensions that are relevant to a typological analysis of figure conception: breadth, length and depth.[25] By breadth he means 'the range of possibilities inherent in the dramatic figure at the commencement of the presentation' (p. 214) – that is, the number of possibilities for development open to the figure, its openness or immobility. By length he means the development it will actually go through as a result of a process of change, intensification or a number of revelations, and by depth he means the relationship between its external behaviour and inner life. However, since they are expressed in such general and undifferentiated

terms, these three dimensions can only serve as a set of general guidelines for our own analysis, within which we would like to propose a series of opposing models for the analysis of figure conception.

5.4.1.2. Static versus dynamic figure conception

Beckermann's notions of breadth and length provide a framework for distinguishing between statically and dynamically conceived figures. Statically conceived figures remain constant throughout the whole of the text. They never change, though of course the receiver's perception of them may gradually develop, expand or even change under the influence of the inevitable linear process of information transmission and accumulation. Dynamic figures, on the other hand, undergo a process of development in the course of the text; their sets of distinguishing features change, either in a continuous process or a disjointed series of jumps. Thus, with the latter it is not just the receiver's views of these figures that change in every phase of the text – according to the information available – but the figures themselves.[26] This purely descriptive juxtaposition of two contrastive possibilities for figure conception has often been forced into an evaluative hierarchy. In *Mein Wort über das Drama* (1843), the German playwright Friedrich Hebbel defended a normative position that regarded the dynamically conceived figure as the only true dramatic figure:

> The matter of the greatest importance . . . is the way the characters are treated. They should never appear as complete products who merely go through the motions of all kinds of relationships and who, although they participate superficially in happiness and misfortune, are nonetheless incapable of either attaining or losing any depth of personality or inner essence. This is the death of drama, a death suffered before birth. For drama can only live by demonstrating to us how the individual assumes form and a centre of gravity in the struggle between his own personal world will and the common world will. The latter modifies and transforms his actions (the expressions of freedom) by introducing a circumstance (the expression of necessity) . . . This is the only way that drama can live.[27]

Not surprisingly, this kind of normative statement is itself conditioned historically and can only be understood in the intellectual and social context of a particular historical image of man. Thus, Hebbel's call for dynamic figures clearly derives from his own idealist vision that each individual has an autonomous will that is in conflict with the necessities imposed by the world around him. If this dynamic conception of figure generally presupposes an image of man that is marked by the notion of an autonomous consciousness, then a static conception of figure is often based on an ideology of social, biological or psychological determinism. Furthermore, the selection of a dynamic or static conception of figure is also conditioned typologically in that the figures in comedies are often con-

ceived of as static, for example. Their comic quality often manifests itself in the rigidly automaticised and inflexible way they react to situations that demand a greater degree of adaptability, whilst the figures in tragedies are often able – if too late – to attain new levels of wisdom and new ideological positions. However, not even this division can be applied universally (after all, there are also tragic figures who fail exactly because of their inflexibility and comic figures who do actually change frequently and develop freely) and can only be invoked for certain historical modes of comedy and tragedy.

5.4.1.3. Mono- versus multidimensional conceptions of figure

Our second pair of contrasting features has been borrowed from E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* – namely his much-quoted distinction between 'flat' and 'round' characters, or mono- and multidimensional figures. This distinction applies as much to dramatic figures as it does to those in a novel since it is independent of the communication structure of the text.[28] Monodimensional figures are defined by a small set of distinguishing features. In its most extreme form this set is reduced to a single idiosyncratic characteristic which, thus isolated and exaggerated, turns the figure into a caricature. One example of this is Mrs Malaprop in Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals* (1775), who is identified by the characteristically inflated view she has of her own intelligence and attractiveness and the corresponding verbal idiosyncrasies linked with her vain attempts to show off by using words of foreign origin which she has completely misunderstood and thus repeatedly uses incorrectly. This characteristic is reflected in her own name and is referred to immediately when she is mentioned for the first time (I,ii). Her own utterances, and the remarks made about her by others, merely serve to confirm this impression. They are therefore largely redundant as far as the transmission of expository information is concerned, though of course this redundancy creates the comic effect of rigid repetition.

Our example of an extremely monodimensional figure also shows quite clearly that her monodimensional quality, or 'flatness', is based not only on the fact that the set of features defining her is very small, but also that this set is unified and homogeneous – every single piece of information we receive about Mrs Malaprop points towards her vain, exaggerated sense of self-esteem – and that none of the figure-perspectives without her supply any evidence of a distinguishing feature that is any different. By contrast, a multidimensional figure is defined by a complex set of features taken from the most disparate levels and may, for example, concern his or her biographical background, psychological disposition, interpersonal behaviour towards different people, the ways he or she reacts to widely differing

situations and his or her ideological orientation. Each figure-perspective and each situation reveals new sides to a figure's character, with the result that his identity is revealed to the receiver as a multidimensional whole with a wealth of different facets and distinguishing characteristics.

5.4.1.4. Personification – type – individual

If we wish to make the step from ideal types to actual dramatic texts, the binary opposition of mono- versus multidimensional conceptions of figure need to be resolved in a continuous spectrum of intermediate forms. In historical analyses of drama there are three main forms that have been considered to be particularly important: personification, type and individual.

The most abstract of these in comparison to a real person is personification, the predominant form of figure conception in the medieval morality dramas and also in the Roman Catholic propaganda plays of the Jesuits. In these cases the set of information that defines the figure is extremely small and designed in its totality to illustrate an abstract concept with all its implications. Thus, the personification of a vice in a morality play, for example – let us say *superbia* – is fully subsumed in the function of illustrating the causes and effects of that vice. Both the appearance of such a figure and his or her utterances and behaviour are totally determined by this function and there is not a single piece of information pertaining to that figure that cannot be allocated to the paradigm *superbia*. Since we are dealing here with an allegorical procedure and since personifications of this kind do not usually appear in isolation but in the context of an allegorical paradigm, such as the paradigm of the Seven Deadly Sins, they are more precisely defined by their exact position within that system.

The type, on the other hand, is not quite so one-dimensional because here the figure embodies a whole set of qualities – which can be larger or smaller – rather than just one single quality or concept. He or she does not represent one single quality but a sociological and/or psychological complex of features. Although overlaps often occur in actual cases, such types can have two different origins: they are either selected synchronically from contemporary characterology and social typology or they stem from the diachronic tradition of preconditioned dramatic figures (stock figures). Thus, as an example of the first, the conception of figure in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama (Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, *et alii*) was often determined by the characterological types of humoral psychology and, thus, the genre of character portraits that were taken up again around 1600 by the imitators of Theophrastus made a whole repertoire of socially defined types – such as the 'country squire', the 'scholar', the 'courtier', etc. – available to the dramatist. On the other hand, one particularly well-

known example of a dramatic stock-figure is the *miles gloriosus*, the boastful, swaggering and yet cowardly 'warrior', whose origins can be traced as far back as the comedies of classical antiquity.[29] Even though this type varies from text to text there are nonetheless certain basic characteristics that remain constant.

If the 'type' is divorced from individual qualities so that it can be used to represent some universal or typical supra-individual quality, the intention underlying a figure conceived as an individual is to bring out the features that are unique and contingent. These can only be grasped if the author produces a wealth of detail that characterises the figure, so that its individuality can be presented on as many different levels as possible – appearance, speech, behaviour, biography, etc. – going beyond the social, psychological and ideological clichés inherent in a particular type. It was this kind of figure conception that predominated within the dramaturgy of naturalism. Here the figure is no longer an allegorical personification exemplifying a certain concept and no longer an illustration of a particular social or psychological type, but represents itself in all the complexities and contingencies of reality.

5.4.1.5. Open versus closed figure conception

The contrast between open and closed figure conception touches on, though does not coincide with, the contrast between mono- and multi-dimensional figures. This contrastive model which, once again, merely marks the extreme positions on a spectrum of possible intermediate forms has been borrowed from Eric Bentley, though without taking over the strongly evaluative implications of his interpretation:

> The 'great' characters – Hamlet, Phaedra, Faust, Don Juan – have something enigmatic about them. In this they stand in stark and solemn contrast to – for example – the people of the present-day psychological play who are fully *explained* . . .
>
> If the final effect of greatness in dramatic characterisation is one of mystery, we see, once again, how bad it is for us, the audience, to demand or expect that all characters should be either predefined abstract types or newly defined concrete individuals. A mysterious character is one with an open definition – not completely open, or there will be no character at all, and the mystery will dwindle to a muddle, but open as, say, a circle is open when most of the circumference has been drawn. Hamlet might be called an accepted instance of such a character, for if not, what have all those critics been doing, with their perpetual redefining of him? They have all been closing the circle that Shakespeare left open.[30]

In principle, we can agree with this distinction between 'fully explained' and 'enigmatic' characters, despite the fact that the image of the incomplete circle is a misleading one for describing open figure conception. After

all, an incomplete circle is not really open in the sense that a 'mystery' is since there is really only one way that it can be completed. By contrast, one of the crucial components of an open figure – and Bentley's reference to the figure of Hamlet and the numerous interpretations that have been applied to him over the centuries makes this quite clear – is his fundamentally irreducible ambiguity. The figure conception implied in Bentley's image can therefore only be applied to the type associated with the closed figure conception and this, in turn, must be divided into two subtypes: a closed figure conception in which the figure is completely defined by information that is explicit, and one in which it is completely defined by information that is partially explicit and partially implicit. In the first case, the figure is defined explicitly and unambiguously for the receiver, in the second it is also unambiguous, but in a way that is only implied, thus encouraging the receiver to interpret for himself. In both cases, the receiver regards the defining set of information as complete without any insuperable contradictions within it.

Open figure conception is a different matter altogether. From the receiver's perspective the figure becomes enigmatic either because relevant pieces of information – explaining the reasons for a figure's actions, for example – are simply omitted, the information defining the figure is perceived by the receiver as being incomplete, because the information contains a number of unsolvable contradictions or because these two factors (incompletion and contradiction) function together.

It is noticeable that in distinguishing between two subtypes of closed figure conception and the open conception we have established a pattern of distinguishing criteria that is analogous to the tripartite pattern of perspective structures (see above, 3.5.4.). This is not accidental and the reason for it derives from the fact that the figures in dramas with an a-perspectival structure tend to be conceived as closed and explicit, those in dramas with a closed perspective structure as closed and implicit, and those in dramas with an open perspective structure as open. And in the same way that the appearance of a particular type of perspective structure is bound up with certain social and intellectual contexts and implies a particular social function for the text, the appearance of, for example, openly conceived figures cannot simply be determined by what Eric Bentley understood as the 'greatness' of the playwright. It presupposes the existence of a certain anthropological model. In the case of Hamlet, for example, this would be the philosophical context of an introspective scepticism in the Montaigne tradition.

5.4.1.6. Transpsychological versus psychological figure conception

The last distinction we should like to establish at this point refers to the role played by a figure's consciousness in relation to his emotions and passions, his subconsciousness and his physical existence. In this we have been influenced by some remarks made by K. Ziegler on 'personality structure' – i.e. figure conception – in classical drama. In Ziegler's words, it is characterised by the fact that

in psychological terms, human beings exist virtually exclusively in the sphere of their consciousness – that they are decisively influenced by what they consciously know and express about themselves. Of course, in the context of the classical drama of the early modern period the notion of individual consciousness should not be interpreted 'psychologically' but 'transpsychologically' in the sense of the baroque concept of reason as a function of the objective ordering and content of ideas. That is, not so much as a unique and idiosyncratically individual character or an irrational and complex collection of natural qualities as a positively – or negatively – evaluated position in the hierarchical structure of ethical, metaphysical or religious values and meanings – or indeed lack of values and meanings.[31]

Thus, by a transpsychologically conceived figure we mean one whose level of self-awareness transcends the level of what is psychologically plausible, whose utterly rational and conscious forms of self-commentary can no longer be accounted for in terms of the characteristic expression of an utterly rational and conscious being. Instead, the dramatic figure has become a medium of epic commentary which integrates it into a prescribed system of values (see above, 3.6.2.3.). In this case, then, the figure's subjectively restricted perspective is broken in the context of an a-perspectival dramatic structure in so far as the figure is able to discuss itself and its situation with a degree of explicitness and self-awareness that it could not possibly have acquired from 'own' experiences alone (see above, 3.5.4.1.). This kind of transpsychological conception already existed in the theatrical convention associated with the objective or 'direct form of self-explanation' in medieval morality plays and, occasionally, in the dramas of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. It is also frequently found in satirical figures which then function simultaneously as both the subject and the object of the satire. And it has also been observed in certain figures of Schiller's dramas, who are able to articulate their tragic dilemma with such a level of self-awareness that they then transcend it. Thus, V. Klotz was right to point out that figures in closed dramas often possess such a high level of self-awareness that – as with the wildly passionate love of Racine's Phèdre, Orestes' flight from the Furies and the jealous hatred of Schiller's Don Manuel and Don Cesar – they are able to

distance themselves analytically from their passions at the same time as falling victim to them.[32]

The opposite is true of naturalist and realist dramas, in which the figures are actually conceived as multidimensional individuals and not as idealised representatives of mankind. For this reason the figures' respective levels of awareness are restricted and relativised by the emphasis on the irrational qualities of their emotions and moods, on the unconscious influences exerted by milieu and atmosphere, and on the subconscious influence of collective drives and traumatic experiences. In such dramas, the structure of the dramatis personae itself actually encourages a reduced level of awareness for the simple reason that the central figures are often from a lower social class with the result that their capability of rational thought is relatively underdeveloped and their ability to conduct an articulate discourse relatively unsophisticated. Pathological states such as madness or feverish visions and states of a partial loss of self such as semi-sleep, dreams and intoxication serve to expose the workings of a figure's subconsciousness. Intense physical influences such as sickness and extreme climate, and the strong impressions such as those created above all by the immediate senses of smell, taste and touch undermine the significance of the consciousness and reduce idealist claims for the autonomy of consciousness to the level of the absurd.

Once again, then, this supports the view that the appearance of a particular conception of figure is ultimately bound up with certain social and intellectual contexts, though of course in this particular case – to put it in rather simplistic terms – it is possible to maintain that there is a special affinity between idealistic philosophies and a figure conception that emphasises a transpsychological or distanced level of awareness on the one hand, and between a materialist philosophy and a figure conception that emphasises the physical qualities and the un- or subconsciousness on the other.

5.4.2. Characterisation

5.4.2.1. Repertoire of characterisation techniques

The repertoire of possible characterisation techniques may be derived from the repertoire of theatrical codes and channels demonstrated in 1.3.2. However, before commencing our illustrated presentation of the most important characterisation techniques we should first like to present the repertoire of these techniques in the form of a diagram in order to provide the reader with a clear overview of the various aspects that will be discussed below. For although this repertoire has been derived from the general repertoire of codes and channels, we nonetheless feel that it is

advantageous in view of the more precise nature of the problems under discussion here – namely the transmission of information with regard to the dramatic figures – to classify this information according to, in part at least, a different set of distinguishing criteria. Of course, some of the points on the diagram could easily be expanded or differentiated further but in the context of this introduction we would like to restrict our discussion to the most relevant of these distinctions.

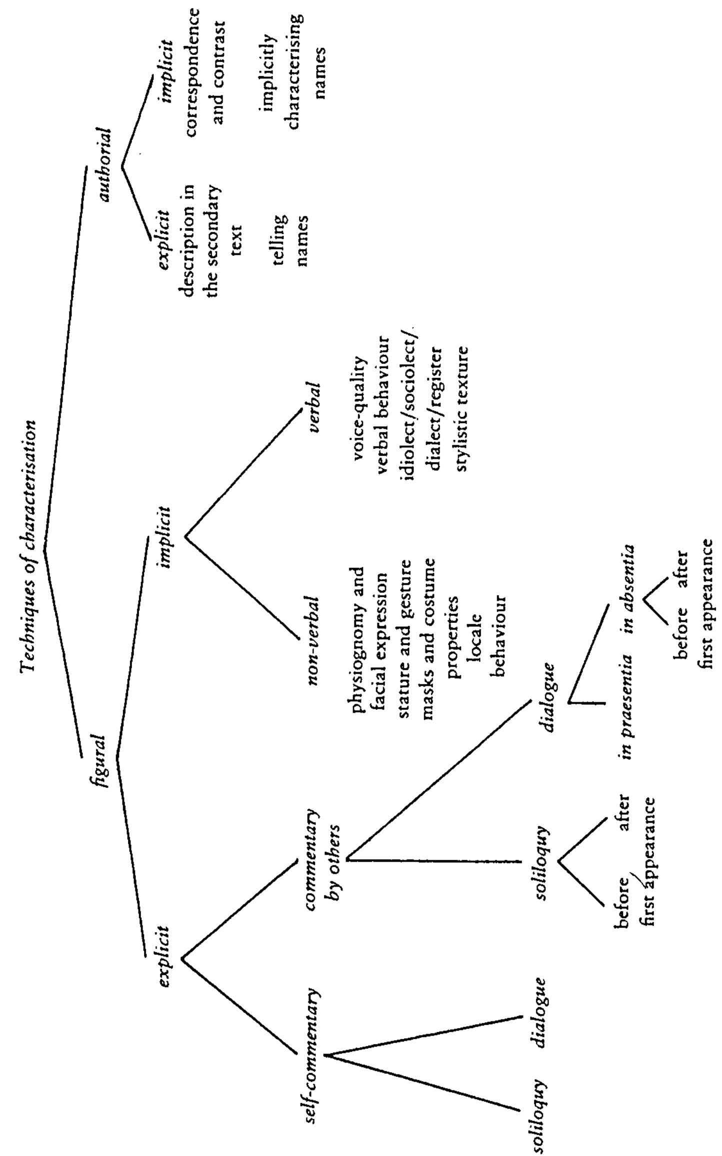
The overriding classification criterion here stems from the question whether the information used to delineate character is transmitted by one of the figures ('figural') or whether it can only be associated with the position of the implied author as its expressive subject ('authorial'). Whichever is true, we then have to identify whether this information has been sent implicitly or explicitly.[33] In this way we arrive at four classes of characterisation techniques: explicit-figural, implicit-figural, explicit-authorial and implicit-authorial.

5.4.2.2. Explicit-figural characterisation techniques

All explicit-figural characterisation techniques are verbal. They may be divided into two categories: the self-commentary, in which a figure functions simultaneously as both the subject and the object of information transmission, and the outside commentary, in which the subject of the information transmitted is not identical with the object. A self-commentary (see above, 4.4.2.1.) is one in which a figure explicitly articulates the way it sees itself, whereas an outside commentary is one in which one figure is characterised explicitly by another. The various pieces of information on a particular figure sent to the audience either by that figure itself or by another need not coincide. In fact, in most cases they do not coincide, or if they do then only in part, since they are always bound up with a particular figure-perspective.

In turn, self-commentaries must be divided up into those that are monological and those that are dialogical since each of these two types of explicit self-characterisation possesses a different level of credibility. For although both the monological and the dialogical variants are bound up with a particular figure-perspective which may be subjectively distorted, dialogical self-commentaries contain additional distorting factors, such as the various strategic aims and tactical considerations adopted by the figure towards its dialogue partner and which often persuade that figure to provide a deliberately false interpretation of its own actions and motives. Thus, in dialogical self-commentaries, the possibility of deliberate pretence or the deceit of others is added to the possibility of involuntarily deceiving oneself.

Naturally enough, the differing status of monological and dialogical



commentaries applies in equal measure to the outside commentary. In this case, however, it is important to establish whether the dialogical outside commentary is conducted in the presence or absence of the figure being discussed because in the first case strategic and tactical distortions will occur more frequently. Finally, the status of the outside commentary also differs according to whether it is presented before or after the first appearance of the figure under discussion. The first of these represents a common convention used by the playwright to prepare the audience for the figure's appearance. In his *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* (1668), John Dryden referred to this fact in the context of an analysis of a comedy by Ben Jonson:

> when he has any character of humour wherein he would show a *coup de maistre*, or his highest skill, he recommends it to our observation by a pleasant description of it before the person first appears.[34]

The special status of this kind of outside commentary consists in the fact that since the audience has not yet been able to make its own assessment of the figure, it does not have access to the information that would enable it to place that figure in any sort of perspective. As a result, the audience is obliged to await the entrance of that figure in a state of expectant suspense, a state that can be intensified if the audience is confronted with a number of different and contradictory outside commentaries. Brilliant examples of this are the build-up to Olivia's entrance in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (I,i–v) and the preparations for the appearance of Tartuffe which are in fact drawn out over two whole acts (I,i–III,i).

Explicit self- and outside commentaries cannot be considered in isolation, however, since they always involve a greater or lesser degree of implicit self-characterisation. The manner in which a figure comments on itself can serve as an implicit characterisation technique, though of course the information conveyed explicitly can be decisively undermined or even contradicted by that conveyed implicitly. And, by analogy, the way one particular figure comments explicitly on another also contains elements of implicit self-characterisation.[35] From this it should be clear that the aim of such a systematic analysis of characterisation techniques is not to demonstrate how particular isolated units occur in individual sections of a text, but to expose certain processes in the way they constantly overlap or are superimposed on one another.

At this point we should like to provide a concrete example to support the arguments developed in the preceding paragraphs. We decided to select a contemporary drama, Peter Nichols' *The National Health* (1969). Our choice was guided by the fact that, although this is a drama in the conventional realist tradition, it nonetheless experiments with epic forms (such as the play-within-the-play, epic commentator figures, etc.) and therefore employs a wide range of different characterisation techniques.

As the title suggests, the action takes place in a national health hospital. The dramatis personae is divided into two main groups: the patients on the one hand, and the doctors, nurses and hospital staff on the other. The events portrayed represent everyday life in a hospital ward. Embedded in this primary dramatic level is a trivial television soap opera about the romantic world of doctors and nurses that bears the title 'Nurse Norton's Affair'. As far as the primary dramatic level is concerned the author has chosen to concentrate on the presentation of the dramatic figures and their differing attitudes towards their hospital environment rather than on plot. The focus of interest is distributed relatively equally amongst the various figures, thus eliminating the distinction between primary and secondary figures. We can therefore select any one of the figures at random to serve as an example – in our case, Ash, a patient suffering from stomach ulcers who, as a former teacher who had been forced to resign because of his homosexual tendencies, is now plagued by his present job as an office worker, the separation from his wife and the strained relationship with his adopted son.

Like all of the figures on the primary dramatic level, Ash is conceived statically. His character and his opinions have been shaped irrevocably by his milieu, his physical condition and his life story. The figures in the play-within-the-play, by contrast, are conceived dynamically. Their ability to change their behaviour and opinions overnight guarantees an edifying solution to the superficially tackled problem of race. By contrasting these two different figure conceptions, the author is voicing an implicit criticism of the ideological presuppositions behind trivial drama and is also implying an anti-idealist world-view. Ash appears as a multidimensional individual (again in contrast to the monodimensional figures of the play-within-the-play) whose character is obvious to all, right down to his subconsciousness. Despite this multilayered quality he is nonetheless perceived by the receiver as a closed figure that can be defined clearly and completely on the basis of the sum of all the information provided.

Compared to other figures, Ash is particularly prone to producing explicit self-commentaries in his dialogues. Thus, quite apart from the specific contents of these commentaries, their very frequency is enough to portray him implicitly as a character who tends to reflect upon his own fate and yet who is also looking for dialogical intimacy and the sympathy of others. This sets him apart from the other patients, who are lacking in any degree of reflective distance towards themselves and who are completely absorbed with themselves in a monological way. The recurring themes of Ash's explicit self-commentaries are his illness – he introduces himself to Loach, the new arrival, with grim self-irony as 'Mervyn Ash, tummy ulcer' (p. 17) – and, almost obsessively, his life history:

Handling the young is my vocation. My first year at teachers' college was a benediction. I felt: I have come home, this is where I belong. Amongst people of my own kidney . . .

I've always been able to handle boys. Why did I leave it? You may well ask. A matter of preferment. Nepotism. Muggins here didn't give the secret handshake, never got tiddly in the right golf-club. I didn't have the bishop's ear. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. I wasn't smarmey enough by half. (pp. 30f.)

The fragmentary quality and implausibility of this first commentary on his past is such that the audience is able to see through it, even though there has not yet been any definite information that might contradict Ash's self-interpretation at this point. In fact, it is exactly this lack of information that stimulates the audience into making up its own hypotheses and sensitises it to any implicit pointers towards character in Ash's utterances. His self-commentary becomes clearer in a subsequent dialogue, once again with Loach, whom he has constantly been trying to take into his confidence:

When I was forced to give up teaching, I had a mental break-down. They made that an excuse for getting rid of me, but it was they who'd caused it. In fact, I could lay my perforated ulcer directly at their doorstep. (p. 68)

This clearly demonstrates that Ash did not simply resign from his job but was sacked against his will. But, as is true of all his utterances, he never refers explicitly to the actual reason for his dismissal, namely homosexual behaviour. Thus, one of the most important pieces of information that is required for the definition of this figure has been excluded from the explicit information given and is encoded in a more implicit mode of characterisation. In the same vein is the implicit information that the receiver must decipher from what Ash explicitly articulates with regard to his philosophy of life – his 'belief in reincarnation', his 'belief that we can store up character in life after life until we attain perfection' (p. 69), and his elitist views on education and the value of self-improvement (p. 107). Such statements are understood by the audience as a desperate attempt on the part of Ash to give his life meaning and to justify his existence to himself.

The audience's ability to recognise that Ash's explicit dialogical self-commentaries are strategically and perspectively distorted does not only derive from the implicit information provided by Ash. It also derives from Ash's monological self-commentaries. For although these are very short, as befits the realist context, they nonetheless provide a clear insight into his un- and subconscious, and are justified psychologically as speech during sleep – again in accordance with realist convention. His two monological exclamations:

No . . . no . . . please don't do that . . . (p. 9)

and

That boy – I warn you . . . (p. 35)

are gestures of resistance and warning which bring to the surface the suppressed homosexuality he successfully manages to avoid when talking about himself in his conscious, waking hours.

Explicit outside commentaries hardly occur at all as characterisation techniques in *The National Health*. Most of the dramatic figures are so preoccupied with themselves and their respective ailings that they generally take little notice of each other, existing alongside rather than together with the others and speaking in monologues. This explains why Ash is the object of an explicit outside commentary on two occasions only, and the subject of those commentaries, Barnet, a hospital porter, operates outside the world of the patients and functions as an epic commentator figure on the periphery of the dramatic fiction. In both cases the outside commentary is dialogical and is conducted in the presence of Ash. In both cases the subject of the commentary is Ash's homosexuality:

BARNET: I think they [i.e. homosexuals] can be useful members of society, long as they sublimate their libidos. Look at male nurses.
FLAGG: You're a male nurse.
BARNET: I'm an orderly, thank you. No connection with the firm next door, Fairies Anonymous. Ballet dancers. Scout masters. Teachers. There you are. Teachers? We had a master when I was a kid, name of Nash, we called him Nance. Everyone knew but him.
ASH: I bet he did know.
BARNET: What?
ASH: His nickname. You always do. The boys think you don't but you do.
BARNET: Did you know yours?
ASH: Cinders.
BARNET: Short for Cinderella, was it? . . .
ASH: No. (Laughs) A play on words. My name Ash, you see. Cinders – Ash. (pp. 99f.)

BARNET: I suppose young Ken arouses your old interest in boys?
ASH: Once a teacher, always a teacher, eh, Kenny? (p. 104)

In these dialogues, Barnet blatantly expresses the things that Ash is trying to conceal. In doing so he does not merely explicitly characterise Ash as a homosexual, however; he is also implicitly characterising himself as someone who revels in obscenity, who does not miss any opportunity to indulge in sexual innuendoes and who completely disregards all rules of tact.

5.4.2.3. Implicit-figural characterisation techniques

Implicit-figural characterisation techniques are only partially verbal because a dramatic figure is presented implicitly not only through what it says and how it says it, but also through its appearance, its behaviour and the context within which it operates (clothing, properties, interiors, etc.). Playwrights have repeatedly emphasised the importance of these implicit characterisation techniques. Lessing did so in Part 9 of his *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, for example:

In everyday life it is undoubtedly extremely insulting to view the characters of others with complete distrust and one should strive to lend credence to the testimonies professed by honest people amongst themselves. But should the dramatic poet be given the benefit of the doubt in quite the same way? Certainly not, though his job would be much easier if we were to do so. What we want to see on stage is who people are and we can only see this from their actions. . . . True, a private individual cannot perform many great acts within the space of twenty-four hours. But who is demanding great acts anyway? The character of a man may be manifested in the most insignificant action – and from a poetic point of view the greatest acts are those that shed most light on that character.[36]

Whilst Lessing preferred to emphasise the way a figure is characterised by its actions, Hebbel concentrated on the way implicit characterisation occurs through use of language. He completely rejected explicit self-commentaries and demanded instead that the dramatic figure should be presented implicitly and indirectly through the various ways it uses language to refer to its environment:

When the poet attempts to delineate character by allowing his figures to speak for themselves then he must be on his guard not to let them speak about their own inner selves. All utterances must refer to something external. It is only then that they can really express the inner workings of the character's mind most colourfully and powerfully, because that inner self can only be formed as a reflection of the world and life.[37]

As we see here, the relationship between explicit and implicit characterisation techniques has already been discussed in some detail in normative dramatic theories. As such it may therefore be seen in the broader context of a more generally conceived pair of contrasting features which in Renaissance England were paraphrased as the rhetorical categories of 'telling' and 'showing'. The decision to favour the predominance of implicit techniques is thus tantamount to emphasising the 'showing' of specific things and encouraging the audience to think for itself, rather than the more abstract 'telling' that does not require much audience involvement. In rhetorical terms, the justification for such a decision is the greater degree of 'evidence' and sensuous immediacy, and thus the greater persuasive powers wielded by techniques that are concrete and implicit.

In recent years critics have become more aware of the significance of implicit self-presentation thanks in particular to the advances made in sociology and the theory of interpersonal communication. Niklas Luhmann has provided a concise summary of the results of these developments in the following argument:

All action ('action' here in the broadest sense of the word) in the presence of others is also communication; it does not merely make the action and its immediate consequences visible but also gives an indication of who the person conducting the action actually is.[38]

Of course, the categories established in studies of this kind and the conclusions they come to – further examples are Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson's *Pragmatics of Human Communication* (1966) – cannot be applied to the analysis of fictional figures without a number of significant reservations. This is because the fictional model will inevitably abbreviate and stylise empirical reality – though the degree to which this occurs varies historically. The situation in dramatic texts is complicated further by the fact that there are two different levels of communication – one between the fictional figures and one between the figures and the audience – with one superimposed on the other. Nonetheless, if these categorical differences are taken into account, then a deeper understanding of sociological concepts and communication theory can be extremely useful in any attempts at a sophisticated analysis of the communication processes in drama. Examples of this might be the interplay of voluntary and involuntary self-presentation (Goffman) or of the superimposed aspects of content and relationship (Watzlawick).

We no longer need to provide a theoretical analysis of the various layers of implicit verbal self-characterisation since these were discussed in connection with the verbal constitution of figure (see above, 4.4.2.2.). We can therefore turn to an illustration of the three aspects of voice-quality, verbal behaviour and stylistic texture, using Peter Nichols' *The National Health*, once again, as our model.

Of these three aspects, voice-quality is the one that is least accessible to analysis because, in this particular play at least, it has not been prescribed in either the secondary text (in the form of a stage-direction, for example) or in the primary text (in the form of a reference to Ash's voice quality by another figure, for example). However, there is no doubt that in performance this aspect is important in the area of characterisation. Thus, Robert Lang, who played Ash in the first performance at the National Theatre in London (16.10.1969) used a voice that was soft and cultured and yet which occasionally became shrill and hectic. The intention was to express both Ash's cultural pretensions and sensitivity on the one hand and his psychological instability on the other.

The verbal behaviour of a figure is generally prescribed in the literary text but the producer and the actors can introduce pauses and variations of tempo to create a variety of subtle nuances. The frequency of Ash's self-commentaries in dialogues has already been identified as a characteristic feature of his verbal behaviour, exposing him as a reflective, problematic character – not least to himself – for whom it is important to be appreciated and liked by his dialogue partners. In fact, it is always Ash who is on the look-out for, and then initiates, dialogical contact with his fellow patients. The fact that he attempts to make this verbal contact as personal as possible by repeatedly addressing his dialogue partners by their first names or nicknames only serves to underline his need for contact with others. In doing so, he never violates the rules of tact and responds politely to his conversation partner, refusing to allow himself to be provoked by the crude vulgarities of others, and is constantly concerned to achieve balance and understanding.

Since he masters an elaborate verbal code, the stylistic texture of his utterances separates him from his conversation partners who speak the restricted code of the lower classes. By constantly clinging to the social stylistic norms associated with speaking 'nicely' (p. 107) and using a 'decent voice' (p. 21) free of dialect, which he refers to metalinguistically, Ash makes it clear that he regards this form of cultivated language as a status symbol, the symbol for a social status that, in real terms, he has already lost. Thus, through language he is still able to identify with the 'upper class' although he has already been banished from it. He frequently employs abstract nouns and introduces complex syntax, and his utterances are often articulated with a high level of logical coherence. However, the frequent use of foreign words, fairly obscure biblical references – to the Gadarene swine, for example (pp. 11 and 103) – and Latin quotations in his dialogues with partners who cannot possibly understand them reflect a certain level of affectation and need to impress that is often comic. The comic aspect is occasionally emphasised by the introduction of abrupt contrasts in style and register:

> ASH: . . . People with dependent natures, we have to draw our strength where we can.
> LOACH: Man needs a mucker. (p. 69)

This aspect culminates in the penultimate scene, in which Ash waxes lyrical about the 'tongue Shakespeare spake' to the dyslexic Ken, the victim of a motor cycle accident (p. 107).

The implicit non-verbal form of self-characterisation can only be determined in part from the literary text (see above, 2.1.). Physiognomy and mime, stature and gestures are largely dependent on the physical qualities and theatrical capabilities of the actor who has been selected by the

director as most suitable for the particular role under consideration. The choice of Robert Lang to play Ash was a successful one in that this actor's long, oval, soft and slightly bloated face convincingly conveyed the feminine sensitivity of the character, and Lang's cultured use of his hands complemented Ash's efforts to maintain a level of verbal culture and preserve a set of social signals which he could use to preserve his identity. Such gestures are not specifically prescribed in the text itself, but there are a number of other characteristic aspects which are, such as the occasions when Ash places his hand on Loach's knee (pp. 69 and 86) – a physical manifestation of his need for intimacy and contact which betrays his homoerotic tendencies.

Ash's costume is predetermined by the dramatic context as either pyjamas or a bathrobe, and yet even here it is possible to bring out certain characteristic differences with regard to the elegance of the cut or quality of the material used. Even the properties (see below, 7.3.3.2.) assist the characterisation process and in this text they are especially relevant for the hospital personnel. In *The National Health* they merely serve to indicate the job a particular figure does, in contrast to the conventionalised, symbolic properties in non-realist drama which are used to define a figure more comprehensively – a king by a crown and sceptre, an old man by a stick and a scholar by a book, for example.[39]

In the same way, the locale (see below, 7.3.) can also function as a form of implicit self-characterisation if, for example, the setting reflects the state of consciousness of a particular figure (such as Lear and the blasted heath) or if a figure is characterised metonymically by a particular interior that has been furnished as a voluntary or involuntary expression of that figure's personality. Thus, in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, the figure of Consul Werle is characterised by the interior presented on stage, a manifestation of his status and taste as a wealthy, upper-middle class citizen, even before his first appearance:

> Werle's house. An expensively and comfortably furnished study; bookcases and well-upholstered furniture; in the middle of the room a desk, on it, papers and ledgers; lighted lamps with green shades provide a subdued light. At the back, open folding doors with curtains drawn back. Beyond, a large, elegant drawing-room, brightly lit by lamps and candelabras . . .[40]

Finally, the character of a dramatic figure is also revealed implicitly through its behaviour and actions. However, this is such an enormous subject that we can only deal with it successfully in this context by selecting a few concrete examples from the text under discussion. Thus, the way Ash behaves towards his fellow patients and the hospital personnel is characterised by a level of helpful generosity and polite formality which reflects his conscious wish to adhere to the behavioural norms of the upper class. The

attitude he adopts towards himself is one of self-pity interlaced with irony and, at the same time, he strives to compensate for his instability and vulnerability by yearning for order, correct behaviour and discipline. His actions are all determined by the single overriding aim of establishing strong and close friendships. In doing so he attempts to deny, both towards himself and others, the homosexual motivation upon which his efforts to win over Loach, and then Ken, are founded, sublimating it in an idealised vision of friendship and pedagogical eros and thus to make it socially acceptable.

5.4.2.4. Explicit-authorial characterisation techniques

Explicit-authorial characterisation techniques are not used in *The National Health*. All this means is that Peter Nichols has chosen to forego the opportunity to provide an explicit description of his figures in the secondary text, a technique which became a common feature, especially in modern drama after George Bernard Shaw (see above, 2.1.2.). Historically, this technique was derived from the list of dramatis personae which was then expanded epically by the addition of commentaries on the figures. Underlying the implementation of such techniques is the assumption that the printed literary text can, in its own right, influence the reception of a drama in a way that goes beyond its usual function of merely providing a set of instructions for the director.

A second technique of explicit-authorial characterisation is the use of telling names. Names such as Mr Pinchwife, Lady Wishfort, Mrs Loveit and Sir Wilfull Witwoud – i.e. those encountered in our analysis of the Restoration comedy – serve to define a figure even before his or her first appearance on stage and apply a label that is as permanent as it is critically intended.

5.4.2.5. Implicit-authorial characterisation techniques

In between this kind of explicit speaking name and names that have absolutely no characterising function there is a whole spectrum of possible intermediary variations. Van Laan has described these intermediate ones as 'interpretative names'[41] to distinguish them from explicit speaking names, and this also identifies them as manifestations of an implicit-authorial characterisation technique. The difference lies in the fact that an interpretive name is plausible in realist terms – that is, it accords with the conventions of real names – and also in the fact that the characterising reference to the figure remains implicit. In an earlier section (5.2.1.) we cited an example of this kind of name that will also apply here: the name of Ibsen's pastor Brand. In Norwegian, 'Brand' is an utterly conventional

name, meaning both 'fire' and 'sword'. Both of these meanings are thus intended as implicit references to Brand's character with his energetic attitude of 'all or nothing' in his struggle against the compromises of orthodox theology and the established church. The distinction between his name and an explicit speaking name is reflected in the simple fact that its function as a characterisation technique can be completely overlooked by the receiver, something which in the case of an explicit speaking name such as Sir Wilfull Witwoud would presumably be out of the question.

However, the most important form of implicit-authorial characterisation is the emphasis on the contrasts and correspondences that exist between one figure and the others. We drew attention to this in our analysis of the structure of the dramatis personae (see above, 5.3.1.3.), though of course at that point we were concerned to demonstrate the fact that these relationships actually existed, whereas now we should like to establish what form they take in actual texts. Thus, these correspondences and contrasts can be perceived and articulated by the figures themselves, so as to stimulate the receiver into making contrastive comparisons for him- or herself. To give one example: Ash assures Loach that they are similar in their social dysfunctionality and isolation ('We're in a very similar boat', p. 85), though of course it is actually the differences in their respective social backgrounds, their education and intellectual awareness that are implicitly brought out instead. Another possibility is to confront several different figures with a similar situation, either simultaneously or consecutively and thus to establish their individuality by comparing the differing ways they react to it. In Act I, Scene i of *The National Health*, for example, an elderly lady wanders from bed to bed holding short evangelical sermons and handing out religious leaflets in the hope of converting the patients. The various ways the patients react to this promise of salvation – laconic dismissal by the dying Mackie, complete incomprehension on the part of the senile Rees, Foster's scepticism and Ash's well-meaning open-mindedness – represent an economical dramatic technique employed by Peter Nichols that enables him to demonstrate the ideological positions and interpersonal behavioural patterns of a whole series of figures early on in the play.

Finally, it is also possible to characterise the figures contrastively by showing the different ways they address a particular figure or theme – in *The National Health* this might be the state-run health service, for example.

In all of the cases cited here – and they do not by any means represent a comprehensive repertoire – the figures are contrasted with each other and are thus characterised implicitly, in such a way as to establish a clear pattern of situational or thematic correspondences.