



THE TYPOLOGICAL SIMILARITY OF CHARACTER-BUILDING TECHNIQUES IN THE NOVELS OF CH. DICKENS, V. HUGO, AND G. FREYTAG

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Abstract: *In this article a comparative-typological analysis, the character-creating methods of three great nineteenth-century English, French and German realist novelists - Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Gustav Freytag - are investigated. The comparison of selected passages from the novels of the three authors is done at the level of portraiture, speech and personal names. The findings demonstrate that the works of the three writers were written independently of each other and that they did not directly influence one another's literature, but that nevertheless, the techniques that they used to build their characters reveal typological similarities, explained with the theory of typological convergence.*

Keywords: *typological convergence, character-building, portraiture, realism, comparative literature, inner content, and social stratification.*

Introduction

Realism developed virtually at the same time in European literatures in the 18th century, especially in England, France and Germany. Not only did literary contacts influence this development, but also other social and historical events like industrialization, the emergence of bourgeois society and increasing class divisions. But it hasn't been sufficiently researched how these processes are reflected in character-building techniques. The present study compares and contrasts some of the similarities and differences in the ways the characters are described, the way in which they speak, and the symbolic role of names in the novels of Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Gustav Freytag. It tries to decide if these parallels were a result of the direct influence of literature and/or typological convergence.



The study will respond to three questions:

What are some of the shared features of character portraits?

How do speech and names contribute to characterization?

Are these similarities caused by literary influence or typological convergence?

The research is based on comparative literary studies and the theories of Erich Auerbach and George Lukas, and examines the similarities and differences in the way nineteenth-century European realism has been realized in terms of methods of characterization.

Methodology

The study is a qualitative study and based on the comparative-typological method of analysis. By applying this method, literary phenomena can be analyzed and examined in view of their social historical context, to be able to systematically identify similarities and differences. The research took place in three phases: (1) selection and close reading of the texts; (2) extraction and categorization of passages related to character building; and (3) comparison of those extracted according to three criteria — portraiture, speech and personal names.

For analysis, the following novellas were chosen: Ch. Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) and *Oliver Twist* (1837–39); V. Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862); and G. Freytag's *Soll und Haben* (1855). These were selected on two grounds: first they are each the best known and most characteristic of the author's works; and second, they all focus on the theme of social stratification, thus creating something of a thematic platform for comparison of characters.

The texts were analyzed on the basis of three criteria:

1. Portraiture — Description of a character in terms of inner moral characteristics, through his/her external appearance;
2. Speech — the individualization of the character's speech, tone and stylistic characteristics of it;



3. Personal names – whether and how character names imply metaphoric or connotative significance.

Representative episodes of the three authors' novels were then compared, in an effort to discover common principles and differences stemming from national literary tradition for each criterion.

The analysis is based on the theory of typological convergence: the similarities identified are attributed to the authors being influenced by a common social-historical environment, when they are not explicable by means of direct literary influence (for instance, the proof that the authors were aware of each other's work or used it as a source).

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed that in all three authors a portrait of a character is not only a means to look at the external appearance of the character but it is also a way of revealing his or her social status and moral nature. Dickens' portraits have a tendency to exaggerate, to give one detail of a character's look a symbolic meaning for one of his defining properties: a rigid line, a cold color, a mechanical movement.

In Hugo, portraiture is built by romantic contrast: a contrast between outward ugly and inner beauty (or vice versa), which shows the true character of the moral nature of the character. In Freytag, on the other hand, the portraiture is more everyday, practical: A character's attire and behavior reflect their status in the bourgeois framework of conduct. For all three authors, there was a universal principle, the expression of inner content, moral content, expressed from the outside, by means of description, but the concrete art forms in each case, grotesque, romantic contrast, everyday detail, are determined by the national literary tradition.

The speech criterion revealed a very distinctive style for the characters of Dickens, with a number of repeated phrases and unique intonation. The characters of Hugo are philosophical-religious in nature. Character speech in Freytag is more business-like and practical. These differences are indicative of language and communication differences in each country environment. It was discovered that



Dickens frequently employed the symbolic possibilities of names (the name of a character often symbolized his personality or role in society). This technique is much less frequent in Hugo and Freytag where characters' names seem more neutral and realistic. The contrast indicates the relatively greater continuity of the practice of allegorical-symbolic naming in the English literary tradition.

The findings reported under the three criteria suggest that all three authors have a more general principle of character building: to convey inner, moral content through external manifestations (typological convergence); but the realization of that principle is imbued with the stamp of the national literary tradition: grotesque-symbolic in Dickens, romantic-philosophical in Hugo, and pragmatic-realistic in Freytag.

The conclusions drawn from the results show that Ch. Dickens, V. Hugo and G. Freytag have a very strong typological likeness in the way they create their characters. As the study's hypothesis suggests, this similarity is not a direct result of literary influence but rather an autonomous artistic manifestation of social-historical similar processes of the 1800s in Europe: industrialization, the formation of bourgeois society, intensification of class divisions.

Conclusion

These findings substantiate and contribute to Auerbach's larger observations about the common path of European realism, specifically in regard to character-building, a concrete level of the pictorial process. Several previous comparative studies have been based on common themes and ideas, this one shows that comparison at the level of artistic technique is fruitful, too.

The results can prove useful for comparative literature classes as well as for teaching realism in the nineteenth century in Europe. They could also be applicable in translation, especially in terms of keeping the stylistic identity of a technique intact when translating it into another language.

The study was confined to the study of one of two works of a given author, limiting the scope of its conclusions. A possible extension would be the increase of



the corpus and the use of quantitative analysis techniques as, for instance, corpus-based lexical-stylistic analysis to support these results.

Finally, this study confirms that there is a typological convergence in the techniques of character building among Ch. Dickens, V. Hugo and G. Freytag: all three have a common rule of using an external description to indicate the inner and moral meaning, but this rule is expressed differently in each national literary tradition. Future studies are suggested to compare this in terms of the level of descriptive devices used (contrast, detail, symbolism).

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