

The Symbolism of Sexuality in Trevisan's Short-story: "The Vampire of Curitiba"

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Abstract

The paper deals with the symbolism of sexuality represented in the text of Dalton Trevisan's short-story "The Vampire of Curitiba". The research is based on reader-response theory where every person may derive different meaning from the same text and according to this theory, there is no fixed interpretation of any given text. The entire text of the short-story was analysed and specific words and phrases which symbolized sexuality were focused. Personal symbols of sexuality utilized by author, were searched among the inter-textual connections of the short-story. From the textual analysis, it was revealed that numerous words and phrases of the short-story were symbolized personally by the author which implicated sexuality. In addition, the sexual symbols derived by the researcher from the Trevisan's fiction could not be expected from other readers necessarily, as every person have individual mindset with different cultural and educational background.

Keywords: Symbolism, Sexuality, Trevisan, Short-story, Reader-response,

Introduction

The use of symbolism is a significant tool in a fiction. It's a way of creating depth and meaning to a narrative, and it takes the story beyond simple plot or character development (Humpage, 2010). According to Ralph Ellison, "man is a symbol-making and –using animal. Language itself is a symbolic form of communication. The great writers all used symbols as a means of controlling the form of their fiction" (Butler, 2011). Symbols are dealt within different domains of human's life. It forms the basis of literature and also has a direct relation with poetry (Fadaee, 2010, p. 20). Symbolism in the sense of a use of symbols is everywhere in literature of many styles, periods and civilizations (Rene, 1970, p. 251).

Any literary term is a symbol which is issued in a paradoxical ambiguity (Charles, 1953, p. 64). In Perrine's point of view, a literary symbol is something that means more than what it is. It is an object, a person, a situation, an action, or some other item that has a literal meaning in the story, but suggests or represents other meanings as well (Thomas & Greg, 1974, p. 211; Fadaee, 2010, p. 20). To some critics, a symbol is not the same as metaphor, simile and allegory. The main difference between symbolism and imagery

in literature, proposed by some literary theoreticians, is that the former has a higher purpose and the latter stands for mental pictures in our minds (Abram, 2011, p. 1). Blake thinks that humans create symbolic worlds, and that these are for all practical purposes the only worlds they have (Adams, 1973, p. 146).

In present scenario, the researcher focused on the personal symbols of sexuality used by Dalton Trevisan in his short-story: "The Vampire of Curitiba". Personal symbols are different than universal symbols. Personal symbols are those that change from writer to writer or dreamer to dreamer. For example, my interpretation of a dog in a dream may be different from that of my neighbor, especially if I interpret dogs as representing bad attitudes and my neighbor sees them as symbols of protection (Honora, 2010). The researcher explored various sexual symbols used in Trevisan's short-story: "The Vampire of Curitiba". For many feminists, the relationship between symbolism and sexuality was not always degrading to women. For some symbolists, sex was a source of liberation (Shah, 2005).

Dalton Trevisan is counted as one of the preeminent modern short-story writers within contemporary Brazilian literature (Gordus, 1998, p. 13). He is considered by some the best contemporary short story writer in Brazil (Young & Cisneros, 2011, p. 477). According to Echevarria (1997), he is the disfiguring chronicler of the bourgeoisie in Curitiba, the capital city of the Parana state in Brazil (p. 433). Trevisan, a lawyer by training, specializes in the short stories that examine the vulnerable area of city life. He

writes in a clear and succinct, unadorned style as deliberately flat and rational as a police report (Rohter, 2012, p. 135).

Trevisan's famous short-story "The Vampire of Curitiba" is the area of inquiry of this study. This short-story deals with some social problems related to sexuality. Trevisan, like Borges and others, enjoys the covert dimension of things, but with him, that dimension is necessarily sexual rather than metaphysical, and completely negative (Kirkus, 1972). Like other postmodernist authors, Dalton Trevisan uses a cherished body of cultural knowledge including biblical myth or story (Bevan, 1993, p. 71). Of the many characteristics of the vampire the one that is usually universal and among the most obvious, especially in the case of Trevisan, is the vampire's overt eroticism (Gordus, 1998, p. 21). Rabassa translated Trevisan's work and to her (2005), "the vampire is a sad, neurotic twenty-year-old pining over the impossibility of love" (p.106).

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on reader-response theory. Reader-response theory stresses the importance of the reader's role in interpreting texts. Rejecting the idea that there is a single, fixed meaning inherent in every literary work (Mora & Welch, para. 2). Such critics also examine the significance of the series of interpretations the reader undergoes in the reading process (Delahoyde, para. 1). Reader response theory is founded on the idea that each reader comes to a piece of literature with a different background of worldly experience and a different knowledge base. That simply means that

most, if not all, readers will have the possibility of unique insights into a piece of literature. That goes counter, of course, to those critics who consider literary works as having a single, correct meaning or that the only accurate way to comprehend a literary work is by solely studying its symbolic structure, motifs, language, etc (Totten, 1999, p. 3).

Central to the reader response theory is Louise Rosenblatt (Gladdys, 1997, p. 71; Hirvela, 1996, p. 129) who first academically formulated this theory in 1938 (Anderson, 2012, p. 8). Bleich, Holland, Iser, Rosenblatt, and even Fish explained not only that readers make meaning but also how they make it (Harkin, 2005, p. 422). Rosenblatt, in particular, makes the case for a reader having varying responses and interpretations of the same text in different temporal or situated contexts (Anderson, 2012, p. 16). One of the crucial advantages of Rosenblatt's reader-response theory is its focus on the experience of a reader with a text, drawing attention to how a reader's belief system is constituted by, and constitutes reading (Connell, 1996, p. 397).

The later reader-response critics claim that meaning is a consequence of being in a particular situation in the world (Tompkins, 1991). Reader-response theorists share two beliefs: The first one is that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from the understanding of literature and the second belief is that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature. This second belief suggests that different readers may read the same text quite differently

(Tyson, 2006, p. 170). Reader-response theory focuses on reader's rather than the author's text (Hirvela, 1996, p. 132). This theory carries an intrinsic or a readerly invitation to the readers (Muhammad, 2013, p. 84). According Harfitt and Chu (2011), the texts that has a greater potential for provoking varied responses in the minds of readers would be most suitable for reading (p. 96).

The reader response theory celebrates a sense of meaning as a very personal experience to be revealed through reading. Similar to new criticism, this approach is not interested in the fallacies attributed to the author's intentions (Fadila, p. 30). According to Linda (1994), a reader-response interpretation tries to explain how a text works with the probable knowledge, expectations, or motives of the reader. Authorial intention to produce a certain reading experience is sometimes inferred. What binds together the intention and anticipated response is shared knowledge of cultural conventions and the invocation of probable strategies of reading (p. 463). The reader and the text are interwoven into a dynamic process in which the reader brings into interpretations of the text his/her linguistic and experiential background knowledge that work on the symbols, images, and plot of the text so that to produce meaning (Ghaith & Madi, 2008, p. 15).

Statement of Problem

In present research, the text of Tevisan's fiction: ``The Vampire of Curitiba`` is focused to investigate about his personal

symbols of sexuality used in it. The words or phrases that depict the symbols of sexuality will be extracted for analysis.

Methodology

The textual analysis of the fiction *‘The Vampire of Curitiba’* is conducted to explore about sexual symbolism. The analysis is based on reader-response method where a reader decides about the meaning of a text. In recent scenario, the researcher performed the role of a reader. Specific words, phrases and sometimes complete sentences of the fiction are selected as a sample. The inter-text relationship of the meaning is also considered.

Discussion

‘‘The way it’s asking to be kissed- a virgin’s kiss is the bite of a hairy caterpillar’’ (p. 383). In this sentence, the simile of ‘‘the bite of a hairy caterpillar’’ with ‘‘a virgin’s kiss’’ emphasized its sexual symbolism. The ‘‘virgin’s kiss’’ itself is also a symbol of sexuality. ‘‘Why did God make woman a sigh in young man and the whirlpool of the old’’ (p. 383). In this sentence, woman- a sigh in young man, reflects the symbolism of sexuality. ‘‘Maybe my moustache will charm her’’ (p. 383). The word ‘‘charm’’ gives a hidden message of sexuality. It is a sexual symbol. ‘‘She looks right through me and reads the movie poster on the wall’’ (p. 383). She looks right through him to encline him for sex. It is another place of symbolism of sexuality. ‘‘She doesn’t know that it’s like to moan with love’’ (p. 383). ‘‘To moan with

love’’ has a clue of sex. The phrase expresses the alternative meaning of sex. ‘‘If they don’t want to, why they show off what they’ve got instead of hiding it?’’ (p. 383). Women usually cover some sensitive parts of their bodies and the author says about those parts of body. The symbolism of sexuality is obvious in this statement.

‘‘Under every son of a good family there’s a vampire sleeping- don’t let him get the taste of blood’’ (p. 383). The ‘‘vampire’’ is a bird-like animal, a kind of bat, that sucks the blood of other animal. In this context, it is a symbol of ‘‘penis’’ whom a boy of a good family or a bad family has. Instead of it, a boy of a good family does not let him get the taste of blood. It means he is forbidden to exercise sex with other. ‘‘Oh, if I only could have been a eunuch! Castrated at the age of five’’ (p. 383). It is an optative statement expressing the hidden ambition for sex. As eunuch is a she-male, having no penis, the author prefers to be castrated at the age of five. The sexual symbolism is portrayed in this way. ‘‘It makes me suffer so much to look at a pretty girl- and there are so many of them’’ (p. 383).

‘‘Oh, let me, my flower. Just a little, Just a little kiss. One more, just one more. One more’’ (p. 383). Flower is a symbol of love and beauty. And love and beauty are two paths leading sometimes towards a sexuality. ‘‘Veiled eyes that beg and flee, why can’t I face them?’’ (p. 383). Covered eyes of a girl beg for sex. It is a symbolic sentence of sex. ‘‘They’re always making up, painting themselves, worshiping themselves in their pocket mirror. It’s not in order to get some poor soul all aroused, what’s it for, then?’’ (p. 383). All these practices of them are for sexual attraction. ‘‘That one there’s one of

the lascivious kind who like to scratch themselves. I can hear her nails scratching on the silk stocking from here. I wish she'd scratch me all over and draw blood on my chest. Every thing in front of me looks red` (p. 383). The last sentence points towards Rorschach Inkblot Test in which some ambiguous pictures are shown to a test-taker and a sexist person always perceives sexual signs in them. `She is the kind who amuse themselves by seducing adolescents` (p. 384). Here, `seducing adolescents` is a symbol of sexuality.

`Some [widows] would, take up with the milkman or the baker` (p. 384). It tells about widows who commit sex with milkman or baker. `Oh, Sad and solitary nights, rolling over their double beds, fanning themselves, reeking with valerian. Other put on cook's clothes to go out into the streets hunting for soldiers` (p. 384). Double bed is a symbol of two sex-partners. At solitary night, a person rolling over his/her double bed has an extensive ambition of sex. `But look at her short skirt, she amuses herself by pulling it up above her knees. Ah the knees... Nice and round, with softer curves than a ripe peach` (p. 384). Short skirt pulled up over her nice and round knees presents a symbol of sexual attraction. As skirt covers sexual organs of female, it creates a picture of sexuality in the mind of a reader. `Some of them attract poor boys to go to bed with their wives. All they wanted to do is watch beside the bed...` (p. 384). Here, the sentence works like a pornography. `To go to bed with their wives` and `watch beside the bed` are symbols of sexuality. `Some of them even prefer the boy- would I be capable of that? God save me, it's a sin even to think about it.

Kissing another man, all the worse if he's got a moustache...` (p. 384). This passage is related to homosexuality. `Kissing another man` is a clear symbol of a gay.

`Oh, smooth and naked plump little arm- if they don't want don't want to, why do they show them off instead of hiding them?- draw an obscene tattoo on it with the point of a needle` (p. 384). `Smooth and naked plump little arm` and `obscene tattoo` are symbols of sexuality. `If I could only find that famous brothel. All dressed in blue and white uniforms...` (p. 384). `Brothel` is a house of prostitution where people come to engage in a sexual activity, usually with strangers. It is also a symbol of sexuality. `Every family has a virgin burning up in her room` (p. 385). `Virgin` is a person who has not experienced sexual intercourse (The Free Dictionary). She is burning up in her room for the fulfillment of her sexual desires. It is another symbol of sexuality pictorialized by the author.

`I already saw the blonde: a corn-field waving under the weight of ripe tassels. She's bleached, her eyebrows are too dark- how can I stop from chewing my nails` (p. 385). `Blonde` is a person, especially a woman, having light-coloured hair and skin (The Free Dictionary). The author portrayed her symbolize sexuality. `...I know that she gets fun out of looking up dirty words in the dictionary...She moves long with a resolute step that brings sparks out of the cobblestone...She is a regular Attila's mare...` (p. 385). Looking up dirty words in the dictionary means searching for sexy words in the dictionary. The metaphor `mare` points to a beautiful girl. This

passage also depicts the sexual features of a girl.

Conclusion

The abundance of the words and phrases of the Trevisan's fiction is full of sexual symbols. The symbolism of sexuality is also evident from the inter-textual connections of the fiction. Through the researcher's point of view, the text of "The Vampire of Curitiba" leads a reader on several steps towards the symbolized concepts of sexuality. But the same meanings cannot be extracted from it by every reader as different people have different mindsets. Readers catch up the recognition of those symbols, a comprehension of what the words mean within the given social and historical context (Kurland, 2000, para. 6). Reader-response theory asserts that there is no fixed or single meaning of the text and every reader interprets the same text with distinct connotation. Finally, the researcher concluded that the symbolism of sexuality could be derived from a large number of phrases and words of the Trevisan's fiction.

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