

Symbolism in D.H Lawrence's "the Virgin and the Gipsy"

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Abstract

The early years of the twentieth century were considered as the most significant years in the history of England. Many changes took place. There was a rapid advance in science and technology, education expanded, and the state of women improved a great deal. Yet, on the other hand, England also witnessed the break out of two devastating world wars, World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945).

One of the major literary figures of this period is David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930). He is a prolific writer, with his output of novels, short stories, poems, plays, essays, translations and travel books. In his work he has reflected his ideas, beliefs and philosophy. "The Virgin and the Gipsy" is one of his well known novels. It deals with a virgin's affection for a gipsy. In this novel Lawrence has used many symbols to convey his beliefs.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to shed the light on the major symbols that Lawrence has used and the purpose of using them.

The research contains an introduction in which the term "symbolism" is defined. Whereas, the body of the research deals with Lawrence's major symbols in "The Virgin and the Gipsy". The conclusion will sum up the findings of the research.

المخلص

يعتبر النصف الاول من القرن العشرين ذو اهمية كبيرة في تاريخ انكلترا. اذ حدثت خلاله العديد من التغيرات. كان هناك تقدم سريع في العلوم والتكنولوجيا، توسع التعليم ووضع المرأة تقدم في المجتمع. من جهة اخرى، شهدت انكلترا حربين عالميتين مدمرة، الحرب العالمية الاولى (١٩١٤-١٩١٨) والحرب العالمية الثانية (١٩٣٩-١٩٤٥).

احد ابرز الشخصيات الادبية في هذا العصر هو ديفيد هيربيرت لورينس (١٨٨٥-١٩٣٠) له كتابات كثيرة في الرواية، القصة القصيرة، الشعر، المسرحية، المقالة، الخ. حيث عكس في اعماله فلسفة وافكاره ومعتقداته. "العذراء والعجري" هي من ابرز رواياته المعروفة التي تدور حول اعجاب العذراء بالعجري. في هذه الرواية استخدم لورينس الرموز لاطهار معتقداته.

لهذا، فان هدف البحث هو تسليط الضوء على ابرز الرموز التي استخدمها لورينس في هذه الرواية والغرض من استخدامها.

البحث يتضمن مقدمة فيها تعريف للرمزية ، بينما متن البحث يتضمن ابرز الرموز التي استخدمها لورينس في "العذراء والعجري" والخاتمة تلخص نتائج البحث.

Introduction

The word 'symbol' is originally derived from the Greek verb "Symballein", which means "to put together" and the related noun "Symbolon" which means "mark", "take", or "sign" ⁱ. whereas the term "symbol" refers to an object, person, place or action that has a meaning in itself and also stands for something larger than itself, such as a quality, an attitude, a belief, or a valueⁱⁱ. As D.H Lawrence has said:

You can't give a great symbol " a meaning", any more than you can give a cat a "meaning". Symbols are organic units of consciousness with a life of their own, and you can never explain them any way, because their value is dynamic, emotional, belonging to the Sense-consciousness of the body and soul, and not simply mentalⁱⁱⁱ....

Symbolism, on the other hand, refers to a literary movement that originated in France in the last half of the nineteenth century with Rimbaud, Mallarme and others^{iv}. They used symbols to express a higher invisible world other than the world of concrete phenomena. As Baudelaire, one of the principle forerunners of the movement said, " human beings live in a forest of symbols, which results from the fact that the materiality and individuality of the physical world dissolve into the dark and confused unity of the unseen world"^v. The movement was a revolt against realism and naturalism. British writers were influenced by the movement later on and it became a dominant force in the twentieth century literature.

Symbolism in D.H.Lawrence's "The Virgin and the Gipsy"

1. Virginitv:

Virginitv is one of the main symbols in the novel. It symbolizes purity and innocence. It is applied to the characteristics of Yvette who is young, naïve and inexperienced in life^{vi}. As a child, she doesn't take other people into consideration, which is what aunt Cissie cannot stand about her. When Yvette takes the money from Cissie's Window Fund, she does not steal it because she doesn't see her action as involving anyone else. Lucille accuses her of stupidity for not taking care to better conceal her crime.

*Where you're so silly, Yvette...is that you give
yourself away at them all. You might know they'd find
Out... But you never will think before hand where your
actions are going to land You^{vii}.*

If Yvette thought about the consequences of taking the money then she would be stealing because this indicates a realization that it belongs to someone else and her action is wrong. But Yvette doesn't think this way. She just sees money that she needs and takes it, not needing anyone else's interest. Yvette shows the same lack of understanding of her sense of entitlement when Lucille asserts herself generosity in helping Yvette on her day off. She says to Lucille that she didn't ask her to sew the dress for her. Lucille replies, "as if I didn't know what you meant, when you started sighing and flouncing about^{viii}". Yvette is surprised at the description of her behavior. Her demands for attention are unconscious.

Yvette also lacks the power of expressing her own will, which keeps her under the domination of others. This condition can be seen when Yvette meets her grandmother after she comes home with her sister and their friends after they have finished their year in Lausanne school. The event is described as the following:

*It was a mercy when the friends departed. But by
that time the two girls were haggard-eyed. And
it was then that Yvette, Looking around suddenly saw
the stony, implacable will- to power in the old and
motherly seeming Granny^{ix}.*

In this case it is her grandmother's will that she feels has intimidated her from expressing her own will. When her grandmother finds that Yvette and her friends are going to Bonsall Head, she tries to force her own will by asking them to send her a message to Lady Louth, even if they don't go that way. Although Yvette does not want to do what her grandmother asks her, yet she feels intimidated by her grandmother and unable to express her own will.

Yvette is also under the domination of her father. When he finds out that she befriends with the Eastwoods, he forbids her to see them,

*"you know them if you wish "he sneered. "But you must
not expect to associate with your Granny, and your Aunt
Cissie, and Lucille, if you do.I cannot have them
contaminated*

*Your Granny was a faithful mother,If ever one existed. She
has
already had one shock of shame and abomination to endure.
She shall never be exposed to another^x.*

From the quotation above, it shows that the rector has Yvette under his will. He makes her obey his will and deny her own will. In saying his order, it is the same like if Yvette continues to see the Eastwoods anymore, she must leave her home. This is a very effective threat on Yvette because despite that she doesn't like what her father tells her to, she has no other choice than to obey it, *"I can send a note and say you disapprove"*^{xi} the reason for her obedience is that she does not have enough power to her own will to confront her father who forces his own will on her.

Another example of Yvette's virginity is that when she meets the gipsy man for the first time, she senses the strength of the will from him and realizes that she is weaker than him:

*She met his dark eyes for a second, their level search,
their insolence, their complete indifference to people like
Bob and Leo, and something took fire in her breast. She
thought: "He is stronger than I am! He doesn't care!"*^{xii}

The fire that Yvette feels in her breast is a new passion that comes as a result of her response to the will of desire from the gipsy man. Even though it is for the first time that Yvette meets the gipsy, she can feel the power of passionate will from him. By her response toward the will of the gipsy, she feels that his will is stronger than hers. She also thinks that the gipsy is like her who does not care for the likes of her friends such as Bob and Leo, who are different. The will she feels from the gipsy is the same

like her, which comes from the passion they feel for each other and their dislike to other people from Yvette's social class. The gipsy asks whether she and her friends want to hear their fortunes and thought, at first she doesn't know what she wants, but she follows him anyway. So she feels intimidated and defeated by the powerful will of the gipsy who she thinks is stronger than hers.

When the flood takes place, Yvette is no longer under the spell of the gipsy's desire. She does not love him. His desire only functioned to serve her sense of pride and affirm the hidden part of herself. When water comes rushing at her, it is a powerful force and she is once again paralyzed in the power of an opposing will. Though she has learned wisdom, she has not learned to control her will. After a while, her basic will to live asserts itself and she manages to get herself blindly to the bedroom. What finally allows Yvette and the gipsy to come together is just this will to life. Her will to direct her life has been paralyzed, but now she must assert will to preserve her life. The gipsy can keep her alive and, for the first time, she asserts herself and asks of him- she does not wait for him to take over. When they finally come together, it is not physically but vital. It is a sharing and preserving of life-force, something beyond all physical desires they have had for each other. Yvette does not tell anyone the real story, the physical nakedness and embrace that she shares with the gipsy, because she is now wise to how the so-called moral world would interpret it as depravity.

And Yvette, lying in bed moaned in her heart" Oh.

I love him! I love him! The grief over him kept prostrate.

Her young soul knew the wisdom of it^{xiii}.

2 .The Rectory:

The rectory symbolizes prison. It is oppressive and lifeless. It is built of stone which is cold, hard and harsh material. It is very impersonal. Stone gives an impression of the old and bleak. Tradition and convention is also implied by stone. Things are said to be set in stone. The whole area around the rectory is grey and stony. The colour grey relates to stone because it is drab, dull and bleak. Things are said to be set in stone. The people living inside the rectory are also very important. They are what Lawrence calls "*Life Unbelievers*", people who believe in convention and being conservative^{xiv}. He disapproves of them. He considers the "*moral unbelievers*" to be correct. These people did not hold with traditional values such as the rector's ex-wife, she-who-was-Cynthia, who ran away with another man^{xv}. Granny is the main life unbeliever, besides the rector and aunt Cissie.

With the life unbelievers, there seems to be a sense of staleness and stiffing. The house is sterile, but it is emotionally sterile as well as being unclean^{xvi}. There is also stability but it is the type of stability that 'one could perish safely in'. It is not nice stability. Lawrence sees stability as a main part of the life unbelievers lives. It is seen to be a rotting and decaying stability. When Yvette opens the window to let fresh air come in, the rector closes it immediately^{xvii}. The rectory is quite simply airless and lifeless.

3. The Toad:

Toads are traditionally negative symbols, they are commonly viewed as demonic creatures, often magical yet evil^{xviii}. According to Lawrence the toad symbolizes Granny. She resembles the toad first of all

because of her old age. As toads live longer than most of the other frogs, this reasonable usage of age issue can be thought in perspective of being the owner of the throne, therefore the main authority in the family^{xix}. Granny is so old that she cannot do much more than sitting beside the fire and telling others to do their job. Aunt Cissie is more than a daughter to her but actually a servant. Granny rules the family with her help. It is also interesting that although she is so old, she keeps putting her nose into all other business in the house. The way in which she talks about she-who-was-Cynthia, "*we don't come of half-depraved stock*"^{xx}, makes the girls angry, especially Lucille. As a result while keeping her hand on everything she also makes them worse. She drives the situation into a deeper level that it would not be easy to get back to sunlight and presence.

On the other hand, her power is not sufficient nor enough to make the girls behave in the way she wishes although she has the most powerful figure in the family. The new generation gets more and more away from the older ones to live their own lives in complete freedom. Before the girls set off to their trip with the boys, Granny wants them to take a message to Lady Louth; however, they refuse to do so. The influence of the master on the others has not been so affective this time.

Also Yvette hears the gardener grumbling after killing the toad: "*Appen the art good for th'snails- But tha'rt none goin'ter emp'y th'bee'-ive into thy guts*"^{xxi}, what the gardener here is saying is that he will not let the toad eat the bee after the snails. He smashes it with a stone and kills it, which symbolizes granny's death at the end.

4 .The Rector:

The rector symbolizes corrupted authority. Although he still is the rector and makes the last decisions about the town, his authority in the house does not seem strong enough. It is actually ineffective, that he could not prevent she-who-was-Cynthia from running away. He adored her for a long time. "*Let the white snowflower bloom inaccessible on the heights of the past.*"^{xxii} Clearly shows how important she used to be for him by that time, his ability to contravene with her was weakened because of the great love he felt for her. He should not have made himself that weak against her.

This important mistake was the beginning the process of his authority's collapse and break up. People respect him only because of his rank. However, now as a rector, he does not have any power in the house, on the nonchalant behaviour of his daughters and any effect on their lives. This authority, which is ruined quality, of the rector, who seems ruined in character, show what the position of this kind of a father is in this type of a family.

5. The worm:

The worm is a symbol of rotting and decay. "*Aunt Cissie... was gnawed by an inward worm.*"^{xxiii} The worm is convention eating away at Cissie's inside. The rector also "*knew his heart's core was a fat, awful worm.*"^{xxiv} He sees that convention has got the better of him. It has rotted him from the inside. Like a worm the life unbelievers are blind to reality. But even more symbolic is the fact that granny is blind. It is not literal blindness, but a blindness to life. In other words she is the worm eating away at others.

6 .The Gipsy:

The gipsy is a symbol of freedom and liberty. He has no roots. He wanders around the natural country, having a nomadic way of life. He has no class or hierarchy. According to Oscar Munoz, he is the "*noble savage*"^{xxv}. Whereas Yvette finds his life to be a revolt and rebellion against society. He represents the antithesis of the rectory with its base self love, its fear of life, its stagnation and its nullity^{xxvi}. That so far as it goes is true:

Only she lay there and wished She were a gipsy.....she hated the rectory, and everything it implied. The whole stagnant, Sewerage sort of life, where Sewerage is never mentioned but where it seems to smell from the center to every two-legged inmate, from granny to the Servant, was foul. If gypsies had no bathrooms, at least they had no sewerage. There was fresh air. In the rectory there was never fresh air. And in the souls of people, the air was Stale till it stank^{xxvii}.

The gipsy also stands for fertility and life^{xxviii}. He is the father of five children, and he saved the life of his superior, Major Eastwood during the war. The craftsmanship with which he works bronze, distancing him from the traditional reputation of idleness that is usually associated with gypsies^{xxix}. More than that he creates things with the skill of an expert, which brings him still closer to the idea of creativeness and, therefore, to fertility. He lives a life closer to nature, with a culture linked to ancient rituals, still untouched by the stigma of civilization as Munoz says^{xxx}.

He assists Yvette in finding her inner self. He teaches her where her real power lies and shows her how to be a woman. He also teaches her to see herself and others as human beings, showing once again where the true power of a woman lies.

7. Fire:

Fire has many symbolic meanings in this novel. In the Saywell's house, it symbolizes hell^{xxxvi}. It is like a furnace. It does not give out any enjoyable heat. According to John B. Human, it is not a good fire except in the sense of being hot^{xxxvii}. It is actually unhealthy: *"It's stifling! It's unbearable. No wonder we've all of us always got colds."*^{xxxviii}. The unhealthiness, Humma asserts, comes from its being hoarded, as it were, not let out, warming no one but the family^{xxxix}.

Whereas, the gypsies' fire symbolizes life. It consumes, warms and illuminates^{xl}. *"Fire is everybody's"* as the gipsy tells Mrs. Fawcett. Yvette, who finds it difficult to keep her hands warm, is warmed by the gypsies' fire. Mrs. Fawcett and Major Eastwood are also warmed by the gypsies' fire as they stop by their camp.

Fire is a symbol of love and desire^{xli}. Yvette's heart is kindled by the gipsy for the first time in her life. He has started her inner fire and the thirst for life. As the gipsy woman has said to her: *"the dark man will blow the one spark up into fire again, good fire, you will see what good fire"*^{xlii}.

Fire is also a symbol of purification. According to Munoz, fire with which Yvette and the gipsy try to keep warm is a purifying element. It removes from Yvette the corruption of socialization and restores her links with nature^{xliii}.

8. Water:

Water is a symbol of life^{xxxix}. According to Christianity, Christians are baptized in water, symbolizing a purification of the soul and an admission into faith^{xl}. However, water can also be destructive (as in the biblical flood which only Noah and his family escaped). Water drowns and erodes, wearing away even the densest of stones given enough time^{xli}.

In "The Virgin and the Gipsy" water is a symbol of purity. It washes away all undesirable events, adventures and feelings that Yvette has experienced throughout her life. The terrifying assault of water, "*advancing like a wall of lions,*"^{xlii} destroys the house and kills Granny. Yvette's getting into water and out of it is a kind of "rebirth", according to Munoz^{xliii}. Water washes away all her fantasy, her narrow understanding of life and gives place to a new, mature and more independent woman. She has learned about facing the difficulties of life and fighting against them. As it was said in the prophecy "*be brave in your body, or your luck will leave you. Listen for the voice of water*"^{xliv}.

Although the flood took Granny, yet it has given Yvette a lot more. It has made her much mature, prepared in mind and disposition to face the difficulties of life. As aunt Cissie has said "*let the old be taken and the young be spared I can't cry for the Mater now Yvette is spared*"^{xlv}.

9. The Dam:

The dam is a symbol of civilization. It is smashed to pieces by the natural force of water. The accident occurs because under the dam there were a number of very ancient tunnels that hadn't been discovered. The destruction of civilization is significantly caused by a return of the old relationship between man and nature represented by the ancient tunnels.

Conclusion

The symbols used in "The Virgin and the Gipsy" reveal the conflict between conventions and natural instincts. Symbols related to life unbelievers, who live in conventions and whom Lawrence disapproves of, represent death and decay. Whereas symbols related to moral unbelievers, who are true to their heart and nature, represent freedom and vitality.

Yvette, who is unlike her family, has some of her mother's 'free-spirit' as her father suspects. Having no experience or knowledge, she undergoes a conflict between religious convention and her desire. She is confused, because her religious upbringing denies and contradicts her natural instincts of love and passion that she has for the gipsy. But, the gipsy assists her in realizing her natural and true feeling. She loses the fantasy that she has had for him, as a fairy tale prince. He finally materializes into a real flesh and blood man: Joe Boswell.

In this novel, Lawrence claims a return to the ancient relationships between man and nature. He attacks the foundations and conventions of the bourgeois society. He believes that, "most of our thinking is barren because it is based on conventional opinions and second-hand knowledge"^{xlvi}. For him natural instincts are real knowledge.

*We ignore the flame of life within us, and are obsessed
with ideas about the outer world; with ideal rather
than real, knowledge^{xlvii}.*

Notes

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- ⁱ Edgar V. Roberts, Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing, (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc, 2007), p.380.
- ⁱⁱ Thomas R. Arp, Literature, Sound and Sense, (Mexico: Heinle and Heinle, 2001), p. 291.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sylvan Barnet, An Introduction to Literature (Boston: Brown and company, 1961), p. 45.
- ^{iv} C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York: Macmillan publishing company, 1986), p. 495.
- ^v Ibid.
- ^{vi} F.R. Leavis, D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, (London: Penguin Books LTD, 1955), p. 304.
- ^{vii} D.H. Lawrence, The Virgin and the Gipsy (Berkeley: York press, 1996), p. 32.
- ^{viii} Ibid, p. 36.
- ^{ix} Ibid, p. 14.
- ^x Ibid, p. 12-13.
- ^{xi} Ibid, p. 93.
- ^{xii} Ibid, p. 94.
- ^{xiii} Ibid, p. 19.
- ^{xiv} Ibid, p. 86.
- ^{xv} Leavis, p. 301.
- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Lawrence, p. 7.
- ^{xviii} Ibid., p.10.
- ^{xix} Michael Feber, A Dictionary of Literary symbols, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- ^{xx} Lawrence, p. 5.
- ^{xxi} Ibid., p. 34.
- ^{xxii} Ibid., p. 15.
- ^{xxiii} Ibid., p.3.
- ^{xxiv} Ibid., p. 2.
- ^{xxv} Ibid., p. 27.

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- ^{xxvi} Oscar Ibanez Munoz, From Romance to Ritual: Myth, Ritual and Subversion in D.H. Lawrence's the Virgin and the Gipsy, (Epos, XVI, 2000), p.365.
- ^{xxvii} Leavis, p.305.
- ^{xxviii} Lawrence, p.30.
- ^{xxix} Munoz, p. 365.
- ^{xxx} Ibid.
- ^{xxxi} Ibid.
- ^{xxxii} Feber.
- ^{xxxiii} John B. Humma, Metaphor and Meaning in D.H. Lawrence's Later Novels, (Columbia:University of Missouri press, 1990), p. 81.
- ^{xxxiv} Lawrence, p. 10.
- ^{xxxv} Humma, p.81.
- ^{xxxvi} Feber.
- ^{xxxvii} Ibid.
- ^{xxxviii} Lawrence, p.30.
- ^{xxxix} Munoz, p.368.
- ^{xl} Feber.
- ^{xli} Ibid.
- ^{xlii} Ibid.
- ^{xliii} Lawrence, p.72.
- ^{xliv} Munoz, p.368.
- ^{xlvi} Lawrence, p. 72.
- ^{xlvi} Ibid., p.85.
- ^{xlvi} Pinion, p.66.

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