



THE ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLIC SUBJECTS IN “ABSALOM, ABSALOM!”

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Abstract

William Faulkner is one of the America’s greatest modernist writers who won the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded in 1950. This article is devoted to analyze the usage of symbolism and symbols in the famous novel by a prominent writer William Faulkner “Absalom, Absalom!”. “Absalom, Absalom!” is a novel which depicts the details of the Thomas Sutpen’s story that was told by different characters, relationship with the people around him such as his sons, wife, Miss Rose and society where he was surrounded. The objective of the article is to describe some symbols used in the novel.

The use of symbolism occurs a great deal throughout the novel. Symbolism has a very deep and perceptive understanding of the novel “Absalom, Absalom!”. There are a wide range of various usual symbolic subjects, such as Miss Rose herself, her sister Ellen and Sutpen’s children. By analyzing these symbolic subjects, we can get a better comprehension of this novel. Each of the symbols helps the author to create a good story.

Keywords: symbol, character, novel, South, modernism, reality, style, direction

INTRODUCTION

Symbolism is the first literary and artistic direction of European modernism, which appeared at the end of the 19th century. In France, positivist naturalism (positivism is an empiricist philosophical theory that holds that all genuine knowledge is either true by definition or positive—meaning a posteriori facts derived by reason and logic from sensory experience) developed as an opposition to naturalists and their philosophical basis—positivism, in connection with the crisis of artistic ideology. According to Mallarmé a symbol is not an allegory or a myth, a symbol reveals the obscure. “The symbol arises when the image gives us the opportunity to guess the idea, to open it as if it were born inside us”.¹



A.F. Losev believes that "every symbol is 1) a living reflection of reality, 2) it is subjected to one or another mental processing, 3) it becomes the sharpest tool for remaking reality itself."² Among the Symbolists, the symbol was understood primarily as "a mystical reflection of the other world in every single object and creature of this world". There are at least two understandings of the term "symbol": 1) "secular" - a simple rhetorical device; 2) "spiritual" - a symbol as an earthly sign of unpredictable heavenly truths, a connection with religious themes³. The word is a symbol in the sense of an image, or unit of a verbal structure." Further, "in literature the sense of fact is subordinated to an ultimate intention of producing a pattern of words for its own sake"⁴

MATERIALS

American modernist writer William Faulkner, whose works contain symbolism, deeply acquainted with works of French symbolist -writers, and we can say that this motivated him to write in this genre. But Faulkner never wrote or said anything about his contribution to the symbolist genre. H. E. Richardson called Faulkner as "a wide-ranging regional writer", and we can consider this idea as an evidence of his creation in prose, symbolistic and other styles⁵.

"Absalom, Absalom!" is a novel written by William Faulkner in 1936, in it the author directly addresses the theme of the fall of the South, which is most exciting and painful for him. At the center of the novel is the tragedy of Thomas Sutpen, who spent his childhood among the inhabitants of distant mountains, where there was no private property and the dignity of a person was measured not by wealth, but by personal qualities. Finding himself in the plantation of the South, Thomas Sutpen learns the laws of a slave society: inequality, racism, social injustice, caste. Deciding to become the mighty of this world, the master, the head of the family thanks to his own work, energy and perseverance, he is forced to use slavery, respectable marriage, business fraud, that is, the laws and traditions of the South. He believes in their stability, in the established order, which must inevitably lead him to success. But all of Sutpen's illusions crumble to dust. The foundations of the "traditional society" are rotten from the inside. Guided by them, Sutpen destroys his own plan. He does not recognize his own son only because black blood flows in him, pushes his second son to fratricide, dooms his daughter to



loneliness, offends a faithful servant. Moreover, Sutpen, as it were, develops the vices of a slave-owning society, prepares the ground for future capitalist relations. He has no conscience, no pity, no guilt. Business, profit for him is more important than humanity, the goal is higher than the means, he sees only tools for the implementation of his plan in others. Therefore, the heroes who burst into the area of his influence have, as it were, paralyzed will and they act as Satpen expects from them. But each of them undergoes a fierce internal struggle between the duty imposed by society and the natural impulses of the soul. It is the disintegration of natural connections that leads the heroes to death.

This novel has a symbolic elements related to the the characters described in it. We can examine aspects of Symbolism as an example of “**blood**”, “**butterfly**” and “**Cassandra**”.

RESULTS

In one of prominent novels by William Faulkner, “Absalom, Absalom!”, the “blood” has two symbolic meanings. The first meaning is the **blood** spilled between brothers and sisters, which is a symbol of “death”, and the second, based on this social environment, the blood of white and black relatives, *mixed blood* is a symbol of “life”. The following statements are examples of it:

...I saw Henry repudiate his home and birthright and then return and practically fling the bloody corpse of his sister's sweetheart at the hem of her wedding gown;... (Absalom, Absalom! P 18);

Henry either but up at him as he stood there with even his teeth showing beneath his beard now and another Negro wiping the blood from his body with a tow sack. (A,A! P 30)

The following examples represent the symbol of consanguinity:

...for all she was blood kin to me, I did not understand and, if what my observation so foreign to me and to all that I was that we might have been not only of different races (which we were)... (A, A! P153) -this “blood” in the statement means the relationship of brothers and sisters that was mentioned above.

...who had not resented his black blood so much as he had denied the white,... (A, A! P 206)

Bon ever knew Sutpen was his father or not, whether he was trying to revenge his mother or not at first and only later fell in love, only later succumbed to the



current of retribution and fatality which Miss Rosa said Sutpen had started and had doomed all his blood to, black and white both. (A, A! p187)

Another symbolic image in the work is the analogy of one of the main characters in the novel, Miss Rosa is compared to **Cassandra** in Greek mythology.

In Greek mythology, Cassandra was one of the princesses of Troy, daughter of Priam and Hecuba. According to the Myth, Cassandra was astonishingly beautiful and blessed with the gift of foreseeing the future. Her curse was that no one believed her, a fact that weighed heavily on the destruction of Troy during the Trojan War.⁶

...In a grim mausoleum air of Puritan righteousness and outraged female vindictiveness Miss Rosa's childhood was passed, that aged and ancient and timeless absence of youth which consisted of a Cassandralike listening beyond closed doors, of lurking in dim halls filled with that presbyterian effluvium of lugubrious and vindictive anticipation,... (A,A! P60)

Also, it should be noted that Miss Rosa, like Cassandra, also has the ability to predict, so we can equate her to the symbol of Cassandra.

...Cassandralike and humorless and profoundly and sternly prophetic out of all proportion to the actual years even of a child who had never been young. ' (A,A p 22)

Another symbol in the novel is the symbol of **butterfly**. This symbol represents Ellen, Miss Rosa's sister, whose life was short and meaningless, the author describes that she came to life like a butterfly and then went out like a candle, and we will see this in the following examples:

-Ellen was dead two years now the butterfly, the moth caught in a gale and blown against a wall... (A, A! P 85)

-Ellen had lost some flesh of course, but it was as the butterfly itself enters dissolution by actually dissolving: the area of wing and body decreasing a little, the pattern of the spots drawing a little closer together, but with no wrinkle to show—the same smooth, almost girlish face on the pillow (though Miss Rosa now discovered that Ellen had been dyeing her hair evidently for years),... (A, A! P 85)

In the example above, through the words of Miss Rose, Ellen is shown on her deathbed, emphasizing that her life was short as a butterfly's.



-Then Ellen died, the butterfly of a forgotten summer two years defunctive now the substanceless shell, ... (A, A! P126) – this example states that Ellen is compared to summer butterfly and is forgotten in two years after her death, her sister is upset with it.

DISCUSSION

These elaborate statements give the readers of Faulkner an effect, an impression, rather than a realistic image; and it must be remembered that symbolism seeks not to describe, but to suggest and evoke in the mind of the reader feelings comparable to direct experience.

Thus, the story, which was initially incomprehensible, begins to have a clear meaning: the house is devoid of love; in the process, the passions of love are lost, and the results are: "the senseless passions of the owner's daughter; the suicide of the man who failed to protect the family honor; the drunken suicide of the owner of the house, the father; the sense of deprivation through material greed; the same in the granddaughter the emergence of adulterous passions; and the last image of the falling house seems to sum up the image of decay in a symbol.

CONCLUSION

William Faulkner is considered to be the greatest writer of fiction in modernism. In the novel "Absalom, Absalom!", Faulkner's one of his famous novels, there are many symbolic subjects. By analyzing them we are able have a more profound understanding of this story and William Faulkner's writing skills. Faulkner seeks the artistic writing style closely related to the real world. He brings the questions to the reader not only through a simple fact, but also in a complex form that always forces the reader to immerse themselves in his thought. He sometimes puts emphasis on reality, but on symbolic approach to literature in order to discover the truth of human heart. Faulkner shows the relationship among kinship through the symbols and this gives the readers of his books a great impression of his characters and the time.

He emphasizes the symbolic relationship among characters. His works are based on reality, but the typical method makes him distinctive from the realists. Due to the use of symbolism, each of his work unfolds the history of



universal interest, especially the novel "Absalom, Absalom!". In this sense, he has the ability to attract the reader's attention to his point.

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