**Symbol and Symbolism in Literature .**

**مفهوم الرمز والرمزية في الأدب.**

**Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Mohamed Alfaki. Nile Valley University. Omdurman.**

**Instructor. Ahmed Yasir Dhain Dafar (Ph. D. Candidate). Faculty of Higher Studies, University of Gezira Faculty of Education. Hantoub.**

**Tel: 009647805997690**

**الأستاذ الدكتور. ابراهيم محمد الفكي- جامعة وادي النيل - ام درمان**

**المدرس. احمد ياسر ضعين دفار - طالب دكتوراه- جامعة الجزيرة - كلية التربية - حنتوب**

**ABSTRACT:**

This study is distinctively restricted to the study of symbolism which means representing things by symbols and its characteristics in literature. It aims to find out a multiple meaning of the symbol. Yeats's " Leda and the Swan " will explain as an example in this study. This study hypothesizes that the analysis of the symbol so as to get thorough information. It also shows symbolism as a literary movement. Finally, the study has reached some conclusions that verify the hypothesis of the study.

**المستخلص:**

توضح هذه الدراسة دراسة الرمزية التي تحتوي على الرموز ومميزاتها في الادب. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى إيجاد المعنى المضاعف للرمز. تشرح هذه الدراسة قصيدة ليدا والبجعة للشاعر ييتس كمثال وتفترض الدراسة تحليل الرمز من اجل الحصول على معلومات كافية. الرمزية لها دور كبير في الادب باعتبارها حركة أدبية. توصلت الدراسة أخيرا الى عدة استنتاجات تثبت فرضية الدراسة.

**Introduction**

Symbolists and critics define the term *symbol* in various ways. For instance, Cuddon, (2013:700) explains that the word "symbol" derives from the Greek verb symballein, ' to throw together'; and its noun symbolon, 'mark', 'emblem', 'token', or ' sign'. It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else. As Coleridge (1772-1834) put it, a symbol is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual. Abrams (2009:304) defines the term " symbol" as a word or a phrase that means an object or an event which means something, or proposes a range of reference, beyond itself. Symbolism means representing things by symbols. It admits an internal, psychological world having precedence over the material and can be expressed through symbols or linguistic analogies. Because the psychological domain is difficult to penetrate into, symbolist artists visualized the inner visions or thoughts. As one symbolist critic wrote in 1897: the world in which we live, which we declare real, is purely a creation of our soul. The mind cannot go outside itself, and the things it believes to be outside it are only its ideas.

* 1. **Symbol**

Tindall (1955:11-13) says, " the literary symbol is an analogy for something unstated that going beyond reference and the limits of discourse, embodies and offers a complex of feeling and thought." ColesNotes (1991:182) illustrates the importance of the word " flag" in its use as a symbol in literary texts. The literal meaning of a flag is a piece of coloured clothe while it symbolizes a country. Rene Wellek (1956:189) clarifies that the symbol " should be used in this sense: as an object which refers to another object but which demands attention also in its own right, as a presentation". It is necessary to review the wide range of meanings of the term symbol as used in modern literary criticism. For example, W.K. Wimsatt (1955:14) distinguishes between two basic symbols, between what he calls "thing-symbol" and "word-symbols", the first being " symbol as specially conceived and significant concrete object, or as name of such object", and the second being a " symbol as the creation or definition of reality in any expressive sign at all, and more especially in the verbal sign".

Cuddon (1999: 885) expresses that the various meanings of some words such as scales, for example, symbolize justice; the orb and scepter, monarchy and rule; a dove, peace; a goat, lust; the lion, strength; the rose, beauty; the lily, purity; the cross, Christianity. Actions and gestures are also symbolic. Beauty of the breast signifies remorse. Arms raised denote surrender. Hands clasped and raised suggest suppliance.Cuddon (2013:700) elucidates an example of a public or universal symbol is a journey into the underworld ( as in the work of Virgil, Dante and James Joyce) and a return from it. Such a journey may be an interpretation of a spiritual experience, a dark night of the soul and a kind of redemptive odyssey. Examples of private symbols are those that recur in the works of W. B. Yeats: the sun and moon, a tower, a mask, a tree, a winding stair and a hawk. ColesNotes (1991:182) refers to a Yorik's skull in Shakespeare's Hamlet that represents a man's mortality. Cuddon (2013:700) refers to Shakespeare's Hamlet in selecting some symbolic words such as weeds and disease symbolize corruption and decay. In Shakespeare's Macbeth, there is a recurrence of the blood image symbolizing guilt and violence. In Shakespeare's King Lear, clothes symbolize appearances and authority. The poetry of Blake and Shelley is heavily marked with symbols. The shooting of the albatross in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner i*s symbolic of all sin and stands for a lack of respect for life and for a proper humility towards the natural order. In his *Four Quartets*, T. S. Eliot makes frequent use of the symbols of fire and the rose. Langer(1953:27) asserts that there should be " some common logical form" between the object or the thing symbolized and the symbol. Urban (1939:403) says that " the object of a symbol is suggestion or insight rather than direct or literal interpretation.

**1.2.** **Symbolism**

Bell and Heiny, (1994:4) describes the beginning of the Symbolist Movement and its climax as follows:

The Symbolist School began to form about 1880 and

Reached its climax in the 1890's in a circle in Paris

Around its leading poets, Stephane Malarme and Paul

Verlaine.

To prove that symbolism is naturally universal, Yeats (1981:164) narrates an incident which happened to him on his excursion to Paris:

…When I sat for my portrait to a German symbolist in Paris,

Whose talk was all of his love for symbolism and his hatred

For allegory, his definitions were the same as William Blake's

Of whom he knew nothing.

The symbolist movement began in France, its high priest was Stephane Mallarme. Mallarme's religion was an austere worship of absolute beauty, which was to be reached by the rapt contemplation of symbols. His poetry is a poetry of suggestion from which all prosaic elements are banished. As Dr. Bowra writes:' All preliminaries, explanations, comparisons are omitted and the gain in concentration is enormous. The poetry is fully packed. It has some of the direct appeal of music". Unfortunately Mallarme had to create his own symbols, as the traditional symbols of religion and mythology were dulled and blunted in the France of his time. Mallarme's symbols are intelligible only to the initiated readers. Arthur Symons who introduced the theory of symbolism into England, dedicated his book Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899) to Yeats. Symons (1911:4) identified symbolism as "a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream". Micu (1984: 122) asserts that “Symbolism in the strict sense means, in the current specialized language, rare, strange sensations, morbid air, languorous musicality, elegiac tonality in a modern style, allusive speech, vaporous images, vagueness, inaccuracy, misty reverie, atmosphere”. The term 'symbolism' is used in a rather special sense to denote the characteristic methods and theories of the nineteenth century movement called French Symbolism. It shows that modern utilitarianism and science-mindedness were alien to the traditions, and aims of art, sought to create a verse which could rise "through scent, colours, and sound to raptures of the spirit". The essence of this movement is its insistence on a world of ideal beauty, and its conviction that this is realized through art. The ecstasies which religion claims for the devout through prayer and contemplation are claimed by the symbolist for the poet through the exercise of his craft. Intensity, concentrated richness, musical suggestiveness, evocativeness were the qualities especially valued by the symbolists and those whom they influenced. From their point of view, any image, any figure of speech, any literary or mythological or historical allusion, any turn of speech even, may be symbolic, carrying us toward a mystical realization beyond immediate experience.

**1.3. Characteristics of Symbolism**

Yeganeh, ( 2002:187-88) clarifies that symbolism as a literary movement has many important characteristics such as:

1-The symbolists attacked the descriptive tendencies of the Realist theatre and naturalistic novels because they believed in the individuality and free will of human being.

2-The symbolists wished to liberate poetry from its expository functions ( explanation and description) and oratory in order to describe the passing immediate sensations of men's inner life and experience.

3-They tried to communicate the hidden mystery of existence through a free and personal use of metaphors and images that, though lacking precise meaning, would convey the state of the poet's mind and hint at the dark and confused unity of an unexpressed reality.

4-Their goal was to create an art that would convey the poet's own inner dream. Poets like Verlaine and Rimbaud were greatly influenced by the poetry and thought of Charles Baudelaire, particularly by the poems in his *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857).

5-They adopted Baudelaire's concept of the correspondences between the senses (synesthesia) and combined it with the Wagnerian ideal of synthesis of arts to produce the musical qualities of poetry. Thus,the theme within a poem could be developed by the manipulation of harmonies, tones and colours of carefully chosen words.

6-Their attempt to emphasize the essential and innate qualities of poetry was based on their belief in the supremacy of art over other means of expression or knowledge. This was partly based on their idealistic presumption that under the materiality of the physical world was another reality whose essence could best be caught by the subjective emotional responses contributing to the work of art and generated by it as well.

7-In order to escape rigid material patterns and achieve freer poetic rhythms, many symbolist poets composed prose poems used free verse now becoming a chief form of contemporary poetry. Thus, when poetry was liberated from traditional metrical forms, it could develop thematic motifs freely.

8-The formal qualities and the suggestive power of language were stressed, images were presented in startling ways, and the device of synesthesia ( the suggestion of several sensations at one time) was employed to evoke the dark and confused unity (Baudelaire) of the unseen world. It was a difficult task because their medium.. words.. were shared with all those who speak the language for ordinary purposes.

9-In order to achieve their aim, they tried to disinfect grammar and vocabulary for poetry and art prose. They broke up cliché phrases, revived unusual words, used common words in archaic or etymological senses, bent syntax to allow for fresh juxtapositions from which new meanings emerged until the literary work created the desire new world. It was a difficult world to achieve but worth experience since all its parts were the symbols of a radiant reality.

10-The symbolist poets believed that the task of poetry was to create impressions in the mind of the reader, so they used sounds and images in unique new combinations.

**2. Yeats's Leda and the Swan: An**

Lall (2009: 174) states that *Leda and the Swan* is one of the most important poems in a volume *" The Tower"*. This poem shows one of the most ancient Greek mythologies. Zeus changed himself into a swan, raped the princess Leda. Of this union was born Helen whose elopement with Paris subsequently led to the Trojan war. This poem pictures three main things or themes: Zeus's rape of Leda, the fall of Troy, and the death of the Greek heroes.

Lall (2009: 177) states that the character of Zeus, in the shape of a huge swan, descending with great force upon Leda and taking hold of her in order to rape her. The swan sets its dark webs on her thighs in order to establish a close contact with her flesh. He holds her neck in his huge beak and allows his breast to rest upon hers. The whole action is sudden, and totally unexpected by Leda. That explains the sudden blow and the staggering.

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still,

Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed

By the dark webs, her rape caught in his bill,

He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push,

But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

Lall (2009: 174) states that The girl tries to push the bird away with her fingers, but her thighs are already yielding to his pressure. Her body, gripped tightly by the white bird, already feels, and responds to, the beating of the heart of that strange creature. Leda's fingers are vague because they are buried in the swan's feathers, and they are terrified, because she does not understand what is happening. The glory of Zeus who appeared in the shape of a bird, the sudden attack by the swan which has white feathers could yield things easily. The idea is that Leda, in spite of her shock and terror, is already yielding to the sexual pressure of the swan.

A shudder in the lions engenders there,

The broken wall, the burning roof and tower

And Agamemnon dead.

A shudder in Leda's lions is the sign of her orgasm. In other words, the climax of the sexual intercourse has been reached. At this moment of the climax, Leda conceives a child. This child will make history. The reference here is to Helen who, according to this myth, was born of Zeus's union with Leda. Helen was married to Menelaus, a Greek Warrior. Soon after her marriage, she ran away with a lover, prince Paris of Troy. The Greeks prepared a huge army which sailed to the city of Troy under the command of king Agamemnon who was Menelaus's brother. The city of Troy was besieged by the Greek forces, and the war continued for ten years.

Eventually, the city of Troy was sacked, and Helen restored to Menelaus during Agamemnon's absence, his wife, Clytemnestra, developed a love affair with Aegisthus and, when Agamemnon returned home, she murdered him with the help of her paramour. Thus Zeus's act in raping Leda meant the beginning of a whole new chapter in history. In other words, this incident marked the beginning of a new civilization.

Did she put on his knowledge with his power,

Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Lall (2009: 174) states that In this question, Leda tasted the vigour of the swan, but did she have any intellectual comprehension of the implications of the rape? Perhaps she did have a vague notion of the importance of this event.

Lall (2009: 175) states that in this poem, a " mythical incident," the ravishment of the girl Leda by the Greek god Zeus in the form of a swan, is brought to violent, sensuous life at the climate moment. The poem ends with the interesting question whether Leda, having been impregnated by the god with his power to create the future, had any awareness of how the future was now working through her.

This poem illustrates that Yeats states a symbol of the swan that is the god Zeus, becomes a violent divine force. He also emphasizes the physicality of the swan: the beating wings, the dark webbed feet, the long neck and beak. By rendering a well-known poetic symbol as violent and terrifying rather than idealized and beautiful, Yeats manipulates poetic conventions, an act of literary modernism, and adds to the power of the power.

Frazer (1965:277) shows that the poet develops the idea that a beautiful dancer's body cannot be separated from her dance. Thought kills the lady love, therefore, the cult of beauty is built up which has its power of sustaining her.

**Conclusion**

The symbol gives an easy and comprehensive understanding for the readers because the symbol shows some kind of simplicity but sometimes the symbol has some difficulty because of its multiple meaning clearly and properly to help the readers in understanding this kind of meaning. So the hypothesis of this study is accepted.

**References**

Abrams, M.H. and Harpham, G.G. (2009). A Handbook of Literary Terms. New Delhi: Saurabh.

Bell, Arthur, Heiny, D.W. and Dowas, L.H. (1994). English Literature: 1900 to the Present. U. S. A. Brown's Educational Series.

ColesNotes, ( 2001). Yeats' s Poetry: Notes. New Delhi: Rama Brothers.

Cuddon, J.A. (1999). A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory. London: Penguin Books.

Cuddon, J. A. ( 2013). A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

Frazer, G.S. ( 1965). W. B. Yeats. London: Longman, Green & Co. F. Miller & Sons.

Lall, Ramji. (2009). Studies in Poets: W. B. Yeats. Delhi: Rama Brothers.

Langer, S.K. (1953). Feeling and Form. London.

Micu, D., (1984). Romanian Modernism, I, From Macedonski to Bacovia, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest.

Symons, Arthur. (2011). The Symbolist Movement in Literature. London: Constable.

Tindall, W.Y. (1955). The Literary Symbol. New York.

Wimsatt, W.K. (1955). Two Meanings of Symbolism. New York: Longman.

Yeganesh, Farah. (2002). Literary Schools. Rahnama Press.

Yeats, W. B. (1981). A Vision. Malysia: Papermac.