

COMBINATIONS OF MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Motif is a recurring idea, theme or conventional situation or incident in folklore, fiction or drama. For example, quest is a basic motif in much literature. The motif of quest or search has been used time and again in epics like the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Ramayana and so on. It is a particular, dominant element or pattern that runs through a work of art, literature or music. In James Joyce's Ulysses, there is the motif of one-legged sailor. In Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, there are striking clocks as motifs. The motif of imperishability of art runs through the work of Shakespeare, Keats, Yeats and many other writers. We discuss Motifs and Symbols in Herzog through this article in English literature. However symbols in literature are different in the sense that they appeal in context and have to be understood that way. There are two broad types of symbols in literature. Firstly There are symbols that are used widely in literature. They have universal suggestions. For example, ocean and land suggest eternity, voyage or journey suggest life. Secondly There are certain symbols which are used in unique ways by some writers. For example, in Farewell to Arms by Hemingway, rain becomes the symbol of death. In Herman Melville's Moby Dick, symbols of voyage, land and ocean are used in various contexts with various meanings. Symbols are often taken from specific areas of knowledge like Freudian psychology. Sometimes, the entire work becomes symbolic. For example, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner symbolises the universal journey into depths of despair and sin and back to spiritual stability and redemption.

KEYWORDS – literature ,philosophy , psychology, symbol , spiritual ,modernity and antiquity.

INTRODUCTION

In Herzog, Saul Bellow has used several motifs such as letters, philosophy and psychology and women and sex. Herzog, the protagonist of the novel is an intellectual in confused state of mind. He tries to seek balance between the chaotic and violent world outside and his idealism. His own state of mind is not free from chaos. He resorts to the spree of writing imaginary letters that he is not going to send. He writes letters to friends, relatives, newspapers, people in public life and even to the dead. Letters are repeated motifs in Herzog and they appear in every chapter of the novel.

Letters written by Moses Herzog are his attempt to put the world around him in some kind of order. He talks and writes letters trying to iron out contradictions that exist in philosophy, his life, the lives of other people and in society. Moses is a scholar: well-read and profoundly contemplative. He has read many great philosophers of the East and the West. He is not happy with modern nihilistic tendencies, absurdist literature and despairing existential thinking. He thinks that modern man tries to seek short-term, instant pleasure in disparable fashions, ideas and equipments.

Moses's attempt of sorting these contradictions by writing letters seems to work well at least for him. At the end of the novel, he feels at peace with himself. He has accepted the realities around him. He has nothing else to say now-"Not a single word." This silence is at least for the time being is an experience that brings him peace and reconciliation. He has not actually created order or stability through letter writing but more importantly, he has allowed himself to come to an understanding of 'himself.' He also realizes the fact that stability is not a goal to seek. Stability is always elusive and hence to seek it is an illusion.

Another motif in the novel is the use of philosophy and psychology. Moses constantly makes references to philosophical concepts of great thinkers both eastern and western. He refers to the latest scholars also. He does not agree to most of them as he has his own philosophy. However, there is a lot of ambiguity in his philosophy. For him, philosophy becomes a kind of religion. At the end, he finds that his personal philosophy is a mixture of philosophies. He has not been able to satisfy himself with his own philosophy. However, he does not agree to modern existentialism, absurdist ideology and pleasure-seeking craze of modern times. Moses has consulted a psychiatrist for his mental distress and there are references to the ideas of psychology also. However, psychology serves as an object of satire in the novel.

Women and sex are also a recurrent motif in the novel. Moses has not succeeded in his relationship with women. He has found no joy in marriage. His wives have given him pain. His casual love has also given him boredom and disgust. He tries to seek escape in sex but he does not succeed in it. He seeks stability in marriage but he achieves no stability in it. On the contrary, he remains a rejected husband in case of Madeline who loves Gersbach. He is in relationship with Ramona but he tries to run away from it. At the end, he begins to think in a new way in regards to women. He decides not to seek comfort and short term pleasure in sex. He also stops thinking of marriage as an easy solution to his personal problems. He decides to change his own attitude to women and sex at the end of the novel. The symbol is derived from Greek word 'symballein' meaning 'to put together'. It can also be translated as 'sign' or 'mark'. According to Alex Pelinger, "This term in literary usage refers most specifically to a manner of representation in which what is shown, normally referring to something material, means by virtue of association, something more or normally referring to something immaterial." something else Thus literary symbol unites (the analogy) and an idea or conception (the subject) which that image suggests or evokes According to R. G. Hagger, a symbol is a recognizable equivalent or type of some person, objects, or abstract idea by means of features associated in the popular mind with that person, object or abstract idea. For example, a simple piece of cloth with a certain kind of mark becomes a flag which is the symbol of a country, suggesting the identity of the country. Symbol is different from ordinary 'sign' as sign has one specific meaning while symbol is quite complex and is often rooted in culture, history, religion and traditions. For example, a cross is a symbol of christianity, the hammer and sickle of communism and so on. In fact, all languages are also symbolic in a sense. There are many objects that we use as symbols in our day-to-day life.

Saul Bellow has used some symbols in Herzog very effectively. Flowers are used as symbols in the novel. Ramona owns a flower shop whom Herzog loves. Flowers often surround the houses of the characters in the novel. They symbolise beauty amidst chaos. Moses's house in the countryside is also full of flowers and plants. At last, Moses is restored to sanity and understanding that life is beautiful inspite of anarchy and chaos.

Clock is another symbol used in the novel. Ramona's aunt owns a beautiful clock. It symbolizes the stability and organization that Moses wants to have in his life. Like many objects and ideas in the novel, the clock is also a contradiction as it symbolizes both modernity and antiquity.

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