

Interpreting the Poem ‘The Sick Rose’, by William Blake from the Structuralist Point of View

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Abstract: *Structuralism is an extremely useful and well organized approach to literary and culturally text. It doesn't interpret the sequence of events or try to find out what they mean. Language is a composed 'system' of signs. The relations of these elements are inseparable.*

Keywords: Structuralism, cultural Arte-facts, Textuality, Autotelic Text, The New Criticism, Terry Eagleton, Ferdinand De Saussure, Arbitrariness

1. Introduction

Structuralism is an extension of **New Criticism**. Because **Derrida** in his **Deconstruction** was talking about the traces of the text, which means every text carries the traces of other text and an end of the book means not an end of author's writings. When we will read to the text may come to an infinite, openness, and unpredictability. This we called 'textuality' (the process of reading). Hence before I am going to talk about structuralism I have to speak about language and its history. How language and its history would become one and each other. In 1660s there was **Port-Royal philosophers** group associated with **Arnauld**, and **Lancelot**. In their book, **The Port Royal Philosophers Grammar (1975)** was saying language is a reflection of human thoughts. They believed that it is a fundamentally rationale. This was the traditional notion about language. In the 19th Century, the linguists have explained the current state of the language. They believed that 'Sanskrit' as the sacred and ancient language of India, which works link between all languages. Hence the language and its history came together. John Crowe Ransom in his essay '**The New Criticism**' (1941) was coined this term. It associated with William Empson, I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks. They believed that the new criticism has given more importance to the text rather than an author, because the meaning generated by the language, style and features of the text. An '**Autotelic Text**' was introduced by new critics, which means when we are talking about an author, should not consider the background in order to understanding a text. Hence they say that the social, cultural, political, sexual, gender, racial, religious factors are not irrelevant to understanding an author's writings. Here new critics paid their close attention to the text. Moreover they showed their interest in poetry, the structure, syntax, image, metaphors and etc.

Structuralism has been introduced by a **Swiss** linguist **Ferdinand De Saussure**, in his **A Course in General Linguistics, (1915)**. Structuralism sometimes has been regarded as **Romantic, Symbolist, Neo-positivist, A Sinister euphemism for a political device, the tool new and secret power** etc. **Roland Barthes** the most (in) famous of the high structuralist in literary criticism, once characterized structuralism as a "certain modes of analysis of **cultural artefacts**". (S. Wenginger. P.1-2). Here I have to speak about the **Terry Eagleton**, in his '**Introduction to**

Literary Theory, says that as structuralism developed it as broke down the structure of the language. For example the 'father' and 'son' could be replaced by the 'mother' and 'daughter'. The **Homer** is different as if now but whereas in the middle ages **Homer** was different. Here it's called close reading of text. As we developed the way understanding it's different from periods. He has been studied the language as a system of signs. Hence it is the study of the structure of the language. Here Saussure says that the '**speech is a palpable form writing**'. The preeminence helps to him delineate the felicitous object for linguist probe. Sometimes unconsciously we have used so many words in our day to day life. For example, she looks so glamorous. What image comes into our mind? May be she looks good, beautiful, pretty, awesome. But we may not aware of those words what it exactly means, the word glamorous used to describe the witches during middle ages. Saussure was talking about two components of language. They are French terms **langue**, and **parole**, which means language and speech. When the community speaks or convey something to us it's called language and when use words in particular context it may call an individual speech. The words and their meaning are created but not naturally conveyed. We have to give the name to 'Dog' to it. Humans have given the name to 'Dog' to it. Here the word 'signifier' is connected to the meaning or concept of the 'signified'. The differences between words "eat" and "tea" is different but the words contain the same sounds. Though they are different but belong to same system. The word 'sister', 'mister' and 'cistern' are all the words in the system of language. They are related each other because they make sense only in being a different from each other. Derrida named it as 'mere presence of absence'. The language is constituted a sign and that sign is made of 'signifier' and 'signified'. Here the sign which can generate meaning and it may include visuals, words, sounds and etc. The signifier refers to a sound or word, and the signified refers to concept or concept behind the word. When words acquire a meaning over a period of time is called **diachronic and** when words acquire a meaning within a limited period it's called **synchronic**. Saussure was talking about the three views of language. The **arbitrariness** here conveys that words don't have real connection. We created the meaning, hence the language is constructed. The word **relationality** conveys us to that words are linked to each other. The concept **systematicity** assures that the language is always changing. It may different from culture to culture or

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community to community. In language the words are existed in two kinds of relationship they are **syntagmatic** and **paradigmatic**.

The relationship doesn't exist between two noun verbs or pronouns. Syntagmatic are crucial to the definition of the word. The words are like, Flees, moves, and runs. If a word lost some relationships or gained others it would be lose its formal identity. If there were no word 'flee' the word 'flow' would become a subtly different word- paradigmatic. Saussurian model of language could be applied, with greater or lesser modification, in their two ways within a paradigmatic or within a syntagmatic one. (Philip Petti-29).

Language is composed a system of signs. The signs are sounds, words, or visuals, and these elements are inseparable, because they represent themselves in the language is called 'system'.

Interpreting the poem 'The Sick Rose', by William Blake, from structuralist point of view:

Basically the structuralist sees nothing, but signifiers and relation between signified. When we are looking at different meaning of words in the poem, it gives various interpretations. Hence interpretation of words can promote meaning of the poem. The use of words could be influenced by cultural background, political belief, socio-economic position in a society, nationality, religious beliefs. The meter, stress, syntax, repetitions are structure of the poem. Syntax can change the word form into a different meaning.

Blake as a romantic poet was asking questions of morality in his works. In the poem the "Sick Rose", it could have many interpretations, common meaning 'a flower; Rose can be red in colour, and as a part of fertility during the 18th century in France. Red Rose refers which were referring to the monarchs of England in 14th and 15th centuries. The rose is associated with the girls because it represents the chastity, purity or virginity. It links to sex and death, because the rose is indicating the human love and beauty and it blooms, smells and then dies.

The other word "Worm" is associated with death and decay, and here dead bodies are food to the worms. In medieval English the 'worm' was also used refer to a snake or serpent. It therefore may allude the image of the snake /serpent, as the seducer of Eve in the story of the fall of humankind (In Genesis, chapter-3). In the 18th century terminology, worm has been referred to colonization process. Here I would like to say that **the worm represents 'an occident' and the rose represents an 'orient.'** This is my own interpretation regarding the colonization process, in this poem. Even now I would like to mention here about **ShashiTaroor**, who wrote **Inglorious Empire**, and talks about the colonization. He delivered long lecture at **UK** and was asking them to pay for India, because they ruled us 200 years. The worm clearly gains control of political institution. It is also referred to a moral character or virtue of a person. The word night means the time between dusk and dawn and ghosts can appear in the night. The 'howling' is defined as wailing cry. The "storm" is referred as heavy fall of rain, hail, or snow as a violent or noisy. The word "bed" is here about the sex and the place where humans and animals are dwelling. The

other word "crimson" is a purple colour and which refers to blood, and the "dark "is about the absence of light or night, or an immoral or wicked , cruel character of a dark person.

The diction of this poem is simple and direct address. May our ideas come from the diction of the poem

The rhyming ABCB of two quatrains and the lines 2-8 are in one sentence. It emphasises that the situation is unified as one. The rhyme scheme changes in the last stanza to AABB. It helps to give the conclusion argument and is that the logic does not follow through. The image of Fly is referred to the **Duke of Gloucester in King Lear**. Flies live not a long period. They are very easily carried off (killed). They are symbol of natural life. Blake maybe inferring to the human condition by the **Duke of Gloucester in King Lear**:

We can interpret the poem in many ways. It depends on persons view. Because every person has different notion and this may not the same. There is no mandatory rule for this.

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