

ESSENTIAL RUDIMENTS FOR SYMBOL ANALYSIS INSIDE LITERARY TEXTS

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Recommended citation || GARCÍA PEÑA, Lilia Leticia (2012): "Essential Rudiments for Symbol Analysis inside Literary Texts" [online article], 452°F. *Electronic journal of theory of literature and comparative literature*, 6, 124-138, [Consulted on: dd/mm/aa], <http://www.452f.com/pdf/numero06/06_452f-mis-lilia-leticia-garcia-peña-en.pdf>

Illustration || Laura Valle

Translation || Joel Gutiérrez

Article || Received on: 27/06/2011 | International Advisory Board's suitability: 15/11/2011 | Published on: 01/2012

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Abstract || The persistency and richness of the sense of symbols in the history of culture is undeniable, and one of the fundamental dimensions is its realization in the space of literary texts. In this article I intend to present a deployment of the theoretical categories that appear essential of the analysis of symbols in the scope of literary work. I also define each concept and try to show its competence in the work of symbol interpretation. As a theoretical basis I recover the contributions of the leading scholars and critics in the world of symbols as well, as my own experience.

Keywords || Literary Theory | Symbol | Myth.

0. Introduction

One of the literary text's basic dimensions, in regards to the sense's elaboration, is the symbolic dimension. The symbols are those little units who own a great meaningful concentrating energy capacity; they migrate from an age and context to another remaining amazingly constant throughout culture history and, at the same time, they adapt themselves to a vast and diverse possibility of semiotics contexts.

Our life is immerse into the world of symbols. We recognize the symbolic value of the white color, the sun, the water; consult the magnificent symbols dictionaries from Chevalier and Cirlot; we awake one day with the clarity of having noticed a symbol in our dreams images from the last night. In the speech space, when there is not a way to express an idea, we express it throughout the symbols in a conscious or unconscious way, verbally or not. The human being status is like this: symbolic.

Jung and Kerényi (2003:18) claim that before the symbolic language we just have to pay attention and let it speak. This looks like a truthful affirmation however to make such thing happen it is necessary to have the ability to identify and to distinguish the symbols from the other significance elements. Besides, the symbols cannot speak trough themselves: the symbols require certain interpretative promptness subsequent to their identification in order to have a plenty understanding.

1. Symbol Provenances and Definition

When do the symbols appear inside the human reality? We know the natural process of biologic evolution made the human being appear and only inside the human being appears a new and different skill: the faculty to use symbols. "La criatura del género *Hombre* se convierte en un ser humano sólo cuando es introducida en ese orden de fenómenos que es la cultura y participa de tal orden. La llave de este mundo y el medio de participar en él es el símbolo" (White, 1982: 55).

Although every symbol is universal evidence of human kind, there is no one that should not be interpreted in its specific incardination. Lotman (1993) warns us the symbol nature is double: on one hand acts in its invariable essence trough the recurrence and "por otra parte, el símbolo se correlaciona activamente con el contexto cultural, se transforma bajo su influencia y, a su vez, lo transforma". To the author, the symbol never belongs to a synchronic style but gets through to the culture from the past towards the future. Thus the symbol memory related to the cultural memory is always older than

the memory in its non-symbolic context and owns greater stability. This means that the symbol will always act as a messenger to the other cultural vectors (Lotman 1993).

Every symbol has to be analyzed in the space of culture. Here we give the term “culture” (following Peter Berger (2002:14)) the sense of “las creencias, valores y estilos de vida de las personas corrientes en su existencia cotidiana”.

The Lotman proposals enrich our notion about the culture with that which conceives it as a languages and texts system, as a container of the socialized information. Lotman defines culture as “la totalidad de la información no hereditaria y el modo de su organización y su conservación” (quoted by Zylko, 2005) since the culture is a semiotics systems framework historically formed.

Lotman (2001) called “semiosphere” that cultural space of the signification. The semiosphere is isolated from the outer space that surrounds it, here lays the great importance of the “limit” rudiment. The role of the limit (according to Zylko 2005) consists in acting like a filter or selective mechanism that let in or not those elements of information that do well in the human space.

You can say that the limit has a function of a “estrecho cuello de botella, es decir, mensajes desde fuera tienen que forzar su paso para convertirse en hechos de la semiósfera dada” (Zylko 2005).

We have talked about when do the symbols could have appear in the human experience and their origins but, What a symbol is? How can we define it? To analyze a symbol we need to be able to isolate it from other sense phenomena and to base on its particular existence. Surrounding the term “symbol” uncountable definitions have been enounced, nevertheless we can take as base a precise and indisputable one from Jung’s point (1983: 343): “Un símbolo real, a saber: la expresión de una entidad desconocida”.

Methodologically we can say that “el símbolo es un caso límite del conocimiento indirecto” (Durand, 1993: 18) this means (its concrete aspect) its sensitive appearance which expresses or epiphanises an absent meaning. The symbol refers, the symbol represents.

The word “symbol” comes from the Greek roots *syn* (together) and *ballo* (throw). A symbol is etymologically speaking a union which connects two impair elements in our minds. The symbol tends to link, to suture the area where a limit or fracture exists. Therefore “toda sutura es simbólica y todo símbolo ha de ser comprendido como vínculo o sutura” (Lanceros, 1997: 51). Beuchot emphasizes that the symbol councils and harmonizes the human nature edges:

“De alguna manera el símbolo alude tanto a la parte afectiva como a la parte cognoscitiva del hombre. Las une, las junta, las conecta, como es su labor hacer: la de conectar, es un conector, un mediador” (2004: 145).

A symbol essential quality is its non-conclusion. When we interpret symbols is necessary to assume that by definition we are dealing with an ambiguous entity, which never totally consumes its signification. We can aspire to an approximate lecture to harass it but never defines it.

According to Ricoeur the symbol is a double sense structure which owns a semantic and a non-semantic moment. The semantic moment is represented by the relation between the “literal [sense] y el sentido figurativo de una expresión metafórica” (2001: 67) this allows to prevent when a symbol works as “excedente de sentido” (2001: 68) respect to the literal sense: “el excedente de sentido es el residuo de la interpretación literal” (2001: 68). From this author’s perspective the comprehension of the literal sense is what allows us to see that a symbol projects more sense: “Sin embargo, para aquel que participa del sentido simbólico, realmente no hay dos sentidos, uno literal y el otro simbólico, sino más bien un solo movimiento, que lo transfiere de un nivel al otro y lo asimila a la segunda significación por medio del literal” (2001: 68).

The symbols are characterized for their tendency to the redundancy meanwhile the only meaningful is the repetition. It is also defined by what Jacques Vidal calls “pregnancia”, this means their nature is similar to an “laboratorio de energía” (1997: 1656) with a huge focus capacity of sense this allows to convert it in a “condensador semiótico” (Lotman, 1993).

2. Symbols and archetypes

We have traced a symbol definition. Now we will see that every time we work with symbols, sooner or later, the archetypes emerge. We found them beyond the symbol and I mean beyond because I think that what makes them different is a grade difference, not a nature one. In this sense, Frye (1991: 135) gives the “archetype” name just to “imagen típica o recurrente”. Jung distinguishes between “los contenidos de lo inconsciente personal [que] son en lo fundamental los llamados *Complejos de Carga Afectiva*, que forman parte de la intimidad de la vida anímica” (1994: 10) and the contents of the collective unconscious defined as archetypes. Furthermore, Jung emphasizes that an archetype nature exists as a symbolic model which rests in the profound of the collective unconscious and from him we can only perceive individual acts or reflexes: “Sólo indirectamente

puede aplicarse a las representaciones colectivas, ya que en verdad designa contenidos psíquicos no sometidos aún a elaboración consciente alguna, y representa entonces un dato psíquico todavía inmediato” (1994: 11) and emphasizes: “El arquetipo representa esencialmente un contenido inconsciente que al concienzializarse y ser percibido cambia de acuerdo con cada conciencia individual en que surge” (1994: 10-11).

We can say that the archetypes are paradigmatic symbols (the etymologic of the term reinforce this proposal: *arché*, which means “primitive” and *typos*, “brand, stamp, model”) and only the analyst could determine that value in a specific cultural context. Both (symbol and archetype) are fixed in the culture memory, in the collective forces of sense. Both share the same notes we already have explained: antiquity, ambiguity, recurrence, iconicity and “pregnancia” however the archetype distinguish itself for its emphasize eldership conformation, for its capacity to drag and condense the collective experience and as a consequence because of its temporal and spatial amplitude from which it derives the powerful representative force of its sense. Jung (1994: 44) exemplifies the *wise old man* as archetype of the meaning, the *anima* as the life one and the *shadow* as the archetype of the encounter with oneself.

3. Symbol Iconicity and analogical lecture

The above-mentioned qualities can help to determine the presence of a symbol in the context that we are analyzing but once you identify it, how can you read it? Another symbol characteristic is that one which can confirm us the key to its lecture: its tendency to the iconicity.

Every symbol tends to have an iconic relation in its way to represent the expressed content. Icon, from the Greek *eikon*: image, similarity, likeness, it is a representation that maintains a similarity relationship with the represented object. We can say that the icon is produced when a sign has similarity with its object.

The icon idea/notion, although revitalized for the semiotic studies from the XX century involves an antique tradition since it takes part of the rhetoric and classic grammar and it is profoundly related with the allegoric-symbolic literature from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance also in its variant of *imago*, Latin equivalent for the Greek term. Aragües defines *imago* or icon as “breve ilustración de un asunto o del aspecto de una persona por medio de una comparación visual” (2002: 82).

The icon is given “cuando existe semejanza parcial entre el representante y el representado, es decir, cuando existe una relación

de semejanza entre la estructura relacional del ícono y la estructura relacional del objeto representado” (Beristáin, 2001: 467). The visible side, perceptible to the symbol is that side which carries us to the other, the unknown, the limit where both of them are connected has an iconic nature. The iconicity is a way of semiosis which is built above the axis of the signification similarities. Peirce talks about the icon “cuando hay una similitud topológica entre un significante y su denotado” (Sebeok, 1996: 44). Then the symbol iconicity provides a representational capacity that passes through the senses and furthermore to express a concept, produces a sensual or sensorial image.

We have to insist in the fact that the iconicity is not only diminishing to the visual environment. Aristotle already “amplió desde ser una representación fundamentalmente visual hasta abarcar toda la experiencia cognitiva y epistemológica” (Sebeok, 1996: 44). Nevertheless inside the symbolic analysis we cannot omit the clear visual nuance of the icon. From my point of view, Greimas has explained that the semantic phenomenon of the iconization is the biggest contributor to the production of the referential illusion:

La iconización designa, dentro del recorrido generativo de los textos, la última etapa de la figurativización del discurso, en la que se distinguen dos fases: la figuración propiamente dicha que da cuenta de la conversión de temas en figuras, y la iconización que, al encargarse de las figuras ya constituidas, las dota de atributos [investissements] particularizantes, susceptibles de producir la ilusión referencial (Pimentel, 1998: 30).

We can state that every symbol contains an iconic gesture and, because of that, also an analogical nature since “la iconicidad es la representación (siempre analógica) de una cosa con base en sus cualidades, de modo que requiere buscar las semejanzas (que son cualitativas) y ser consciente de las diferencias (que son cualitativas también)” (Beuchot, 2004: 77).

Then methodologically is possible to declare/state that the analogical reading is the appropriate for the symbols. The analogy is the reasoning based on the existence of similar attributes in different entities or things. Comes from the Greek *analogos* (proportionate) and means “semejanza en ciertos aspectos de cosas distintas: griego: *analogía*: correspondencia, proporción matemática y, de *análogos*: proporcional, según una proporción” (Gómez de Silva, 1988: 57).

In the task of symbol reading and interpretation the analogical reading allows the relationships appreciation between the notorious sense (symbolizing) and the latent sense (symbolized). The analogical relation that the symbols demand, in virtue of its composition in two moments (semantic and non-semantic) and its iconic nature, is

essential to clear up the link which goes from the primary or literal meaning to the second meaning and from the semantic moment to the non-semantic of its fulfillment /achievement/ execution.

The analogical relation that Cirlot (2007: 46) calls “principio de identificación suficiente” could be considered as the core of the symbolic phenomenon: the symbolic image is an inner analogy as a “relación necesaria y constante”. Ricoeur points out that facing the symbol reading “el peligro [...] consiste en llegar demasiado aprisa, en perder la tensión, en diluirse en la riqueza simbólica, en la abundancia del sentido” (1999: 433). This way the analogical reading orients the interpretation, proceeding in a relational mode on the base of similarities and differences.

4. The Symbol and the Myth: The Myth-criticism Proposal

Rama suggests also the myths are an analogical phenomenon of sense:

Nacen espontáneamente en la intersección de dos redes de efectos: los efectos en la conciencia de las relaciones de los hombres entre sí y con la naturaleza, y los efectos del pensamiento sobre esos datos de representación a los que hace entrar en la maquinaria compleja de los razonamientos por analogía (1982: 291).

However, what is the relation between a symbol and a myth? Must they be simultaneously analyzed? Methodologically it is important to warn that the symbols could appear or not in a myth context. Not every symbol works like this, but every myth talks a symbolic language.

According to Durand, a myth is “un sistema dinámico de símbolos, arquetipos y esquemas; sistema dinámico que, bajo el impulso de un esquema, tiende a constituirse en relato” (2004: 64). We must emphasize that this author understands scheme as “una generalización dinámica y afectiva de la imagen” (2004: 62) that is personified by a concrete representation like the ascendant verticality scheme or the descent scheme.

The myth is the oldest way of conceptualization the reality and because of this, it owns a cognitive dimension. It is always a story that expresses itself in a symbolic language: every myth implies a virtual text actualized in concrete versions that are those we have access. The myth as a sense effect has a double structure: a superficial one with a narrative nature built by the speech thread and a deep one with a symbolic nature.

The myths are neither “lies” nor “fictions”, like the popular language uses the term; neither belong to the humanity prehistory by definition. In an excellent essay entitled *Pervivencias del mito y mitos enmascarados*, Eliade explains that the real sense of the myths “se encuentra más allá de la historia” (2000: 145), that they are stories whose essence is not located neither in the truth nor falseness but in the validity of its content, stories which accompany in the humanity path and survive until our days, remaking, gestating, unmythicizing and remythicizing themselves. Also points out that “ciertos comportamientos míticos perduran aún ante nuestros ojos. No se trata de ‘supervivencias’ de una mentalidad arcaica, sino que ciertos aspectos y funciones del pensamiento mítico son constitutivos del ser humano” (2000: 155). It is worth to remember that to Eliade (2000: 162) “la prosa narrativa, la novela especialmente, ha ocupado en las sociedades modernas, el lugar que tenía la recitación de los mitos y los cuentos en las sociedades tradicionales y populares”.

The term “myth-criticism” was conceived by Durand during the nineteen seventies, following the psycho-criticism proposal encouraged by Charles Mauron in 1949, to refer the use of a literary or artistic criticism method which locates the center of analysis in the inherent mythical story “a la significación de todo relato” (Durand 1993: 341). The myth-criticism adopts, as methodological premise that “los motivos redundantes u obsesivos” personified in a symbol must consider in a deeper cultural background than the personal biography in order to be a key element for the integration and organization of the speech.

It is important to mention that one of the most ambitious and fortunate systematizations from the symbolic images, is the one Durand (2004: 442-443) offers in *Las estructuras antropológicas del imaginario*, where he traces an isotopic classification based on two polarities or regimens: daytime and nocturne and in reference with those which considers three dominant reflexes in the human being: postural dominant, copulative dominant and digestive dominant. Beginning from these axes decides a teriomorphos, nictomorphos and catamorphos symbols deploy; ascensionals symbols, spectaculars and diaretics; symbols of the inversion descent and the intimacy also cyclic symbols.

Durnad points out that methodologically the mythical story approximation can be made in three stages that involve the mitemicos stratus. First a topic relation this means, the redundant motives; second the situations are examined, the subjects and the temporal-spatial coordinates and finally we do “la localización de las distintas lecciones del mito y de las correlaciones entre una lección de un mito con otros mitos de una época o de un espacio cultural bien determinado” (1993: 343). This way the myth-criticism allows

to evidence into a speech the rector myths and their meaningful versions, shows how a personal trait from the discursive subject contributes to the reaffirmation or transformation of the mythological dominant patterns: “Tiende a extrapolar el texto o el documento estudiado, a abarcar, más allá de la obra, la situación biográfica del autor, pero también a alcanzar las preocupaciones socio o histórico-culturales” (Durand, 1993: 347).

Therefore, to Durand “la mitocrítica reclama, pues, un ‘mitoanálisis’ que sea a un momento cultural y a un conjunto social determinado lo que el psicoanálisis es a la psique individual” (1993: 347). The myth-analysis tries to delimitate the big director myths from the historical moments and the group types and social relationships also make them emerge from the speech, sometimes the mythical level is not evident but latent and covered or masked. This way it demands a process by which it becomes transparent and explicit.

5. The symbol inside the imaginary, the cultural memory and the tradition

Methodologically it is important to emphasize that symbols, archetypes and myths are the expression means for the social imaginary and therefore they are conformed like images. Castoriadis (1988) states that “image” does not mean “copy” or “reflex” but it means radical imaginary operation as organizer and constituent scheme. The images cumulus conforms the imaginary, which is the expression of the cultural reality perception. This author points that the imaginary recurs to the symbolic to elaborate itself and, simultaneously, the symbolism presuppose the imaginary power which allows the perception of new senses: “El simbolismo supone la capacidad de poner entre dos términos un vínculo permanente de manera que uno ‘represente’ al otro” (2003: 220).

A representation is an image or an images system, which is located in the imaginary symbolic universe, throughout this remains materialized the way in which an individual looks at himself, and also how perceives and explains himself. The individuals —and the groups where they belong— are linked to the social reality through these social imaginary representations. The representations are the expression of a group of beliefs and share cultural conventions by a socio-cultural group. The individuals like the collective entities (groups, social classes, nations) are linked to the social reality through the social imaginary representations. The symbolic images are elaborated as an imagination exercise, they are linked to the representation through the sensitive data which constitute them and

to the memory because they recur to past experiences to create themselves.

The symbols are made by individual speeches, they mutate, they are personalized but they are tied to collective conformations to the cultural imaginary. This way we find another dimension, which methodologically, is important to understand: every symbol takes part in the cultural memory, the collective memory. According to Duch “esta dinámica de la memoria colectiva, creadora incesante de nuevas posibilidades en los trayectos históricos de los grupos humanos, es como tal, una función productora de la misma sociedad” (2002: 166). To this author inside the collective memory, you live, you recreate and express the living *continuum* of a specific tradition; that is why we can say that the collective memory is so much more a *constituent* memory than a *constituted* memory.

The cultural memory notion sets the path of the tradition, or better said, the traditions path: the actualization, reiteration and reinvention of the traditions are the cultural memory dynamics. The symbol exists before the given speech and independently from itself: becomes from the cultural memory profundity, resurge in the memory of the discursive subject and it materializes in the new text.

The tradition is a collective nature phenomenon where the heritage of experiences is transmitted generationally inside a human group. This way according to Pérez (2001) the thoughts and the individual experiences has always, in some way, a historical and social nature. This author explains that there are two big types of traditions: the factual (techniques, uses and costumes) and the verbal, oral or written. Either be one or the other way, in the tradition theory we can distinguish between “the tradition” and “the traditions”. This way the tradition is constitute by the system or cultural process and adopts different ways to historically appear like active tradition, besides, it has an abstract nature. Although the traditions has a historical nature: therefore the tradition only exists inside the traditions (2001: 59).

6. The symbol inside the social and discursive space

Besides being part of the traditions and cultural memory chain the symbols are always displayed in a social and discursive space. It is not possible, from my point of view, to interpret them or to make a reflection about its social orientation.

An illuminating perspective according to the social dimension of the symbols is the one Pierre Bourdieu exposes. This sociologist conceives the social representation as a space in which interior different fields are displayed:

El campo social se puede describir como un espacio pluridimensional de posiciones tal que toda posición actual puede ser definida en función de un sistema pluridimensional de coordenadas, cuyos valores corresponden a los de las diferentes variables pertinentes (1990: 283).

According to Bourdieu we cannot talk about social classes but in a methodological sense, if not about “agents” and “agents groups” which are located in the social space and are defined by their relative positions in such territory: “La posición de un agente determinado en el espacio social puede definirse entonces por la posición que ocupa en los diferentes campos, es decir, en la distribución de los poderes que actúan en cada uno de ellos” (Bourdieu, 1990: 283).

In the social space, like we said, it is possible to distinguish only methodologically *classes* defined as

conjuntos de agentes que ocupan posiciones semejantes y que, situados en condiciones semejantes y sometidos a condicionamientos semejantes, tienen todas las probabilidades de tener disposiciones e intereses semejantes y de producir, por lo tanto, prácticas y tomas de posición semejantes (Bourdieu, 1990: 284).

The power in the social space shows as the result of forces or capitals: economic capital, cultural capital, politic capital and it is important to emphasize that as a result of a review of the Marxist conception, Bourdieu overcomes the economics and the objectivism to expand the fights towards the symbolic dimension, which is recognized as another capital.

Following Bourdieu (1990: 285-287), the social space is then a “relationship space” where the agents are moving and mobilizing in function of their positions and capitals. The social identity is a construction that involves a “representation job”, which relates to the social world perception. The agents make of this space and social world a representation, a world vision that is conformed and expressed in symbolic terms.

Finally, we consider the discursive space where the symbol is made. If we can find symbols in all the human languages, here we focus ourselves in the verbal surround. In this sense, Bajtín is who shows us with more clarity how all the human activity spheres are related with the language use, this originates the countless range of discursive modes that exists because to each use of language sphere will correspond a different political speech: story, daily basis dialogue, letter, scientific speech, political speech and of course literary speech between an infinity and heterogeneity of possibilities: “Cada enunciado separado es, por supuesto, individual, pero cada esfera del uso de la lengua elabora sus tipos relativamente estables

de enunciados a los que denominamos *géneros discursivos*” (Bajtín, 1998: 248).

Every sentence of the discursive chain presents three moments: a thematic one (what you say) a stylistic one (how you say it) and a compositional one (how you organize what you say). The qualities of the three moments are determined by the nature of the sphere of communication to which belongs to the sentence.

A sentence is, in Bajtinian terms—different to the Saussurean linguistic perspective—a chain segment in the human communication, “unidad real de la comunicación discursiva” (Bajtín, 1998: 255) which borders are clearly marked by the discursive subjects change, this way the sentence can be a question of the daily basis talk but at the same time a political resource of its integrity or a novel, discursive events that as enunciates give place to an answer, immediate o mediate.

The Bajtín’s “discursive genre” notion allows thinking the symbol that is fulfilled in a verbal space within its heterogeneity and since the social interaction of the discursive subjects. In this sense, also allows analyzing the symbol which is displayed in the literary speech, as in its stylistic particularities like in its subject matters and compositional ones also in its generic stability while constituting itself—the discursive genres— like “correas de transmisión entre la historia de la sociedad y la historia de la lengua” (Bajtín, 1998: 254).

7. Conclusions

In this paper I have tried to cover the essential categories that support the symbol identification and interpretation. We have reflected about its cultural precedence, its ambiguity properties, non-conclusion and repetitiveness. I have proposed a specific reading of an analogical type based in the iconic nature of the symbol. We have discussed the relationship between the symbol and the archetype and between the symbol and the myth. We have proved that every analyzed symbol must be considered in virtue of its position in the cultural memory and the traditions. We have suggested a myth-critic method to discuss its study in the literary texts. And finally we concluded that every symbol must be read beyond the personal background of the subject who enounces it, in function of the social and discursive space where it is done. Every literary speech presents an inexhaustible richness of sense phenomena. The symbolic perspective is an enigmatic and suggestive entrance to the world of the human meanings.

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