

SYMBOLIC IMAGERY IN CRANE'S THE BLUE HOTEL

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Abstrak

Untuk menganalisis sebuah karya sastra diperlukan mengidentifikasi bagian-bagian terpisah untuk menentukan hubungan antara bagian-bagiannya untuk menemukan hubungan bagian tersebut dengan karya sastranya (Kenney, 1966:5). Novel adalah salah satu contoh prosa fiksi yang menggambarkan karakter dan memperkenalkan lebih dari satu kesan, efek atau emosi digambarkan sebagai cerita lama untuk menulis dalam sebuah buku.

Karakter merupakan salah satu aspek penting, ia membawa berita dari penulis yang dapat membawa berbagai nilai dalam kehidupan manusia seperti moralitas, pendidikan dan banyak lainnya dan sebuah karya sastra yang dibuat berdasarkan imajinasi penulis dan umumnya mencerminkan kondisi sosial, yang menggunakan lingkungan sosial di sekitarnya sebagai dasar. Wellek dan Warren (1973:39) menyatakan bahwa karya sastra itu sendiri membenarkan semua kepentingan kita dalam kehidupan seorang penulis, dalam lingkungan sosial dan seluruh proses sastra.

The Blue Hotel adalah judul sebuah cerita pendek yang ditulis oleh Stephan Crane, seorang penulis Amerika. Dalam hidupnya yang singkat, Crane menulis karya penting dalam bentuk aliran Realisme serta contoh awal Amerika dalam aliran Naturalisme dan Impresionisme. Dia diakui oleh para kritikus modern sebagai salah satu penulis paling inovatif dari generasinya.

Deskripsi yang aneh dari hotel yang diceritakan dalam The Blue Hotel memberikan pembacanya suatu sensasi bahwa ada makna tersembunyi yang belum ditemukan. Crane memulai dengan deskripsi yang menyenangkan tetapi juga menjemukan dari The Palace Hotel. Dia menggunakan deskripsi yang penuh misteri mengenai hotel ini dengan menyatakan hotel ini selalu berteriak dan melolong dan Crane melanjutkan dengan menggambarkan adegan yang menakutkan dengan membandingkan ruang utama kecil di hotel ini bagaikan gedung pengapian yang berisi kompor besar yang selalu berdengung seperti suara orang mengeram. Crane juga menciptakan suatu kontrol atas pembaca ketika mereka mulai melibatkan diri dan memperhatikan penjelasan dalam cerita yang ditulisnya.

Kata kunci: tamu, misteri, pembunuhan.

1. Background of the Study

Kenney in his book *How to Analyze Fiction*, describes that a work of fiction deals with events that occurs in temporal sequence – that is, one after another. The story of a man's life for example, will include his birth, his growing up, his marriage, his growing old, and his death (1966: 12 – 13).

In literature, there are many things that can be analysed both intrinsically and extrinsically, there are elements to study such as theme, setting, character, plot, point of view, style and tone, structure and technique, and so forth. Extrinsically it can be concerned with the author's life, social and cultural status, personal experience with life and language, moral values, and so forth.

In this study, a story entitled *The Blue Hotel* written by Stephan Crane was selected to be analysed. Concerning a symbolic imagery, this is a story about human vanities and delusions. In this story, Crane does a remarkable job of creating between his characters a struggle through fear and the overpowering need to be in control of their environment and experiences. It is interesting to point out that Crane intentionally connects the reader to the characters.

The Blue Hotel, uses the elements of fear and control to transport the reader from the beginning to end. It does not only show how these characters react to each other but also how individuals react toward their own disturbing feelings of fear, anticipation, and need for control. Each character is placed in a situation which causes the characters' feelings of fear, anticipation, and the need for control; however, each individual reacts differently.

2. Problem of the Study

Based on the background mentioned above, the focus of this study is limited to the study of three characters. The problems then appear in this story are:

1. How are the characters analysed to find out the symbolic imagery in *The Blue Hotel* ?
2. What message does the writer, Stephan Crane want to convey?

3. Aims of the Study

This study is intended to fulfil three aims: the general, specific, and academic aims.

The general aim of this writing is to apply theories related to novella in order to get better understanding of Crane's writing entitled *The Blue Hotel*.

Meanwhile the specific aim of this writing is to find out the metaphorical meaning of the story and what message the writer wants to convey.

The last is an academic aim that is to apply the theory of literature studied in the English Department to write a scientific work which gives contribution to this department, so this writing can be used as a reference to help the student who writes the same topic.

4. Research Method

There are three aspects of the research in this study; they consist of data source, data collection and data analysis.

4.1. Data Source

The data were collected from the story entitled *The Blue Hotel* by Stephan Crane (cited in <http://sharksshortstoryreviews.blogspot.com/2011/05/blue-hotel-stephen-crane.html>) *The Blue Hotel* was chosen to be analysed and it was published in 1953.

4.2. Method and Technique of Collecting Data

The data is the object of the study. The method that was applied in this study was library research because this method is reliable and relevant to the process of collecting the data. The important one was to get some books in the library and some articles on internet as data sources and references in order to find out more data related to the topic of study.

4.3. Method and Technique of Analysing Data

The analysis correlates to the problems that were formulated. The method used for analyzing the data was descriptive. The data were collected from the above data source and were analyzed by using the theory proposed by William Kenney. 1978. *How to Analyze Fiction*, and theory of Warren and Wellek entitled *Theory of Literature* written in 1962.

5. Analysis

Combining symbolic imagery with naturalistic detail, it is an existential tale about human vanities and delusions. As the story opens, three visitors find shelter from a blizzard at Pat Scully's hotel in Fort Romper, Neb.: a nervous New Yorker known as the Swede, a rambunctious Westerner named Bill, and a reserved Easterner called Mr. Blanc. The Swede becomes increasingly drunk, defensive, and reckless. He beats Scully's son, Johnnie, in a fight after accusing him of cheating at cards. When the Swede accosts a patron of a bar, he is stabbed and killed. The story ends ambiguously at a point several months later, when timid Mr. Blanc confesses to Bill that he feels somewhat responsible for the Swede's death because he failed to act when he saw that Johnnie was indeed cheating at cards. One of original players explains to another that he noticed that Johnnie was cheating and failed to speak up; he takes partial responsibility for the Swede's death and explains that all of the men had a role in the tragedy.

Scully, the proprietor of the hotel, is the first character introduced to the reader. Crane explains that it is Scully's habit to meet the local train and to use his "*seductions upon any man that he might see wavering, gripsack in hand*" (Chapter 1: 2). As the story gathers momentum, Scully tries to control the situation that is brewing between Johnnie and the Swede. The Swede declares he is leaving before he is killed, but Scully protests that he will not leave until he understands what has happened. When readers are first introduced to the Swede, they find themselves faced with a man who

seems very out of sorts with the other characters. The Swede does not seem to be paying attention to the actual

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events around him. He misconstrues other characters intentions and meanings as he seems to be playing out his own private version of what is happening.

This misconception causes the Swede to become panicked and fearful for his life. In the company of the other men, the Swede sat nervously and let out a shrill laughter that seemed inappropriate to the other men. A further example of the Swede creating his own version of the situation is when he looked at Johnnie and said, "*I suppose there has been a good many men killed in this room.*" (Chapter 2: 5). This statement further sets the Swede apart from the other characters as they are perplexed and even annoyed by his irrational behavior.

The story takes an unexpected turn when Scully loses his control over the Swede after sharing his whiskey with him. Once back in the main room with the other characters, we find the Swede has altered in behavior significantly. He no longer appeared nervous and timid; he was now domineering, loud and bullish as he tramped back into the room and took over the entire interaction with the other characters. Crane states that the Swede "*began to talk; he talked arrogantly, profanely, angrily.*" "*He seemed to have grown suddenly taller; he gazed brutally disdainful, into every face. His voice rang through the room.*" (Chapter 3: 10) The almost immediate alteration of the Swede's behavior catches the reader off guard. Due to the suddenness, readers struggle not to stumble as they try to fathom what is happening now. Crane continues to conjure up this startling change in the Swede with menacing words such as wolfish glare, demoniac, savage and flame-lit eyes.

The gambler is brought to light towards the end of the story. He comes into view quickly and is depicted within moments as someone who is clever, talented, respectful, generous and understanding. He does not seem like the image that would normally be conjured up when thinking of a professional gambler and hustler. However, by painting such a wonderful and polite image of this gambler, Crane has helped set up the reader's point of view towards him. Once the Swede comes into the saloon in his loud and drunken state, the reader concludes that there is going to be a confrontation of

some kind. The Swede tries to control the gambler in this scene by grasping "*the gambler frenziedly at the throat, and was*

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dragging him from his chair." (Chapter 8: 28). Within moments the gambler takes control of the Swede by thrusting a knife into him. At this point, Crane does not talk of the Swede but instead gives this image, "*It shot forward, and a human body, this citadel of virtue, wisdom, power, was pierced as easily as if it had been a melon.*" (Chapter 8: 28). This crime is not literally about the death of the Swede, but is a reflection of the true demons that lie within each of us despite the outward appearance we portray to the world. At what point, do we as human beings, lose control of ourselves when faced with a difficult decision?

From outward appearances it seems that the men are secure. They are gathered around a hot potbellied stove, and they are constantly reassured by their host that all is well. Then, a discordant note is struck. The Swede suddenly becomes alarmed and wildly asserts that he will be murdered in the hotel that night.

The Swede's peculiar behavior is a puzzle to everyone except the Easterner. He understands that the poor foreigner's view of the West has been distorted by dime novels (a usually paperback melodramatic novel). The Swede refuses to believe that he is in a respectable hotel, and Scully's attempt to calm his nerves with a drink of whiskey results in his getting drunk and becoming even more belligerent.

The whole story is told in a detached style that is full of scrupulous, symbolic details. Crane is working out a deeply skeptical, naturalistic theme: man's inability to perceive the world clearly. The whole tragic web of misunderstanding is caused by each character's distortion of reality. In an atmosphere that should have provided security from the wild external forces of nature, there was something internal, in the heart of man, that was, ironically, an even more lethal threat to survival than the raging storm outside. The blue color of the hotel serves as a chromatic symbol or a symbol which relates to color of the sad human situation.

Crane's use of vivid colors is one of his trademarks, and literary critics have debated the meaning of the hotel's heron-blue paint as well as the saloon's beckoning red light. They obviously are contrasting focal points, beacons as well

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as advertising gimmicks. The tranquillity and purity of the blue seem out of place; that is its charm. The red lamp, turning the snow the color of blood, is a warning signal that the Swede ignored. The meaning of these symbols remains mysterious, in keeping with the philosophical skepticism or the doctrine that knowledge in particular area is uncertain that runs throughout all of Crane's published writings.

Almost certainly there is one set of meanings centered on the Swede's misconception of what the "West" is like. He assumes that there is a lot of renegade actions and gunplay, and what he finds there does not match with his preconceptions.

There is a clear message of the self-fulfilling prophecy. If the Swede hadn't been so dogmatic about what was going to happen, and so obnoxious to all, he probably wouldn't have come to the end that he did.

Finally, another whole twist is put on the story by a sort of epilogue where the Easterner confirms that Johnnie was cheating and suggests to the cowboy that they all hold a certain level of responsibility for the fate of the Swede.

A part of me would like the blue hotel building to be symbolic of the world in general, but then the Swede leaves and moves the action to a different location. To carry this analogy along, Patrick Scully would need to be God, and the bar some sort of purgatory where the Swede receives his final judgment. Perhaps that does work!

There is a message that we are all pretty normal inside despite outward appearances. The hotel is painted a garish blue to make it stand out and attract customers, but then it is clearly quite a normal establishment once we see inside. Is this also a message about the true character of the Swede?

Clearly, that things are not what they appear to be is a strong theme. The gambler at the bar is more than a professional gambler, but also a family man and frequent participant in the local group of men who simply pass the time in discussing

various topics of interest. Yet, he turns out to be the one who deals with the Swede in an unexpected way. In any case, *The Blue Hotel* will give the readers plenty to think about.

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6. Conclusion

"The Blue Hotel" deals with man's vanities and illusions, which are absurd but, ironically, necessary for survival. Stephen Crane's naturalistic tale presents a view of the world as beyond comprehension and indifferent to the inconsequential matters of mankind. According to the author, people are like lice clinging to "a whirling, fire-smitten, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb."

Although *"The Blue Hotel"* is steeped in irony, Crane explores the puzzle between fate and moral choice. The story is elusive on whether human beings share moral responsibility for the consequences of their actions. The Swede's fate is tragic and of his own making, yet who is to say whether it was the whiskey, given to him by the well-intentioned Scully, which turned him into a reckless fool? On one thing Crane is clear: Life is fragile.

Whether the Swede is trapped by his fixed idea about the environment or whether it is the environment that traps him, his death comes as quickly and easily as the slicing of a melon. The motto on the cash register implies that he deserves his fate, but, ironically, the message comes too late to save him, as his eyes are already glazed over by the shadow of death.

In *"The Blue Hotel"*, Crane does a remarkable job of creating between his characters a struggle through fear and the overpowering need to be in control of their environment and experiences. It is interesting to point out that Crane wittingly connected the reader to the characters. Through his skilful manipulation of his characters, the reader became weary of the Swede. His character Johnnie and even the gambler seemed more appealing and likeable than the Swede himself. During the escalated scenes, the reader finds themselves wanting the Swede to go away and maybe even killed. Through his employment of techniques, Crane draws the reader into the

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position of being partly "responsible" for the Swede's death in order to show how the character's guilt is also society's guilt.

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