

Symbols as a Media of Reflecting Theme in Paolini's *Inheritance: Eragon*

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Abstract

In the writers' opinion, there are two types of novel: those which are made for fun and leisure, and those which are compiled to deliver an idea(s). Based on that, the writers think that the novel used in this study, *Eragon*, is a novel which belongs to both types above. The adventure and fantasy story in this novel is such an attractive one to keep up with, beside that there are many lessons about life intended to deliver. It is a remarkable effort for Christopher Paolini to write such values-filled novel in the age of fifteen. This paper discusses the symbols in Paolini's *Inheritance: Eragon*. There are two main points that this paper attempts to answer: 1) what the symbols used in this novel, and 2) how the theme is reflected by the symbols. Although there are many standpoints to observe the novel, this paper only focuses on the work itself and internal characteristics that build the story.

Key words: symbol, theme, setting

Introduction

Eragon is the debut novel of Christopher Paolini. He began to write it at the age of fifteen with his parents urging. Four years later the manuscript was sent to press and the novel arrived. The publication of the book at first was held by his family publishing company, paolini International LLC. Paolini, who was home schooled in Montana, promoted his book from schools to libraries, dressing in medieval costume.

When a Florida writer, Carl Hiassen, visited Montana on a family fishing trip, his son picked up a copy of *Eragon* and loved it. An impressed Hiassen brought the book to the attention of his publisher – Alfred A Knopf. Knopf subsequently acquired the raights to publish *Eragon* and the rest of the trilogy. The success of *Eragon* was remarkable. Since October 2002, Knopf admitted that *Eragon* has been printed not less than 250.000 exemplars worldwide. The total selling amount reached 400.000 by the end of 2003, and more than 10% of it belongs to Paolini as royalty.

Eragon is chosen to be analyzed in this paper because it has many symbols and figirative languages. As one aspect in loterary work, much or less, symbols

have an essential contribution to the story, symbols can be interpreted differently, as long as there are strong evidences to support them. What is more, symbols can be used to implicitly suggest value, ideas, and attitude, not excluded, to deliver the theme of the story.

Theoretical Review

Theory of Symbol

Kirzner and Mandell (2000: 254) define symbol as “a person, object, action, place, or event that, in addition to its literal meaning, suggest a more complex meaning or range of meaning.” While according to Kennedy, as ymbol is a thing that suggests more than its literal meaning, it generally does not stand for any one meaning (Kennedy, 1973: 113).

Symbol can be classified into several catagories. According to Mc Kenzie (1978: 56), there are two types of symbol: created/contextual and conventional/universal symbol. A created symbol is a symbol which achieves its suggestiveness from traditional association. In “The Girl who sang with the Beatles,” the headphone is a created symbols. For the characters themselves, the headphone is only electronic tool, an extension of the television and stereo set. However, in the story the headphone is a symbol of Chyntia and Larry’s relationship. Initially, the headphones serve as emblematic of their separateness, but then they become a strange symbol of unity at the conclusion of the story. Such menaing only appears in this particular story, however, if it exists in another context, it will have different meaning. While conventuonal symbol is a symbol that has customary effects on the readers, provoking common responses to items that the readers share in common. As examples, the black cat that crosses a person’s path brings bad luck, snake as temtation and evil, etc.

In *Fiction’s Journey*, Mc Kenzie (1978: 550) states that through specific, concrete description of people and objects in the visiblle worl, symbolism provides the writer with many ways of suggestion abstract qualities, attitudes, a nd ideas. By applying the symbolic potential of the elemnets of fictions, the writer can imply a theme without making explicit statements.

The ability to recognize and interpret symbols requires experience in literary readings, tact, and perception. In order to identify symbols, several cautions should be observed. (1) A symbol nearly always has a sign through emphasis, repetition, or position. In the absence of such signals, an idea probably is not symbolical, (2) The meaning of a literary symbol must be established by the whole context of the story. Means, the meaning of a symbol is inside, not outside the story. (3) A symbol suggest a meaning different in kind from its literal meaning; a symbol is more than just a class or type's representative. As an instance, Riabovitch is a shy, timid young man. As his story is successful, he comes to stand for shy, timid young man everywhere. However, one ought not to say Riabovitch as a symbol of a shy, timid young man. Rather than using the phrase "is a symbol of," one can easily use "is," or "is an example of." (4) The maning of symbol is may more than one. But this does not mean that a symbol can suggest meaning whatever one wants.

Theory of Theme

According to Brooks and Warren (1943: 608). Theme is the point or meaning of a story or a novel. While in Rosenheim's idea (1960: 91), theme is a topic or problem which is found in the action and which seems both authentic and significant in our experience with the world of reality. It is, as well, to relate what appears in the fictional narrative, and what appears significantly within life itself.

Kirzner and Mandell (2000: 300) state that "the theme should be general truth that extends beyond the story and applies the world outside fiction." For more understanding, they give example:

Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" is about a man who loses his humanity because of his obsessive desire to avenge himself on Fortunato.

Poe's "The Cask of Amotillado" suggests when the desire for revenge becomes obsessive, it can deprive individuals of all that makes them human.

The first statement merely tells what the story is about; the second states the story's theme, a general observation of humanity. In brief, whatever central generalization about life arises from a context of story constitutes theme.

Sometimes the theme of a story can be found easily as it is stated explicitly by the author or characters somewhere in the story. Nevertheless, more often a theme is seldom so obvious, or is implied. This explanation is supported by Kennedy (1979: 91). He states that some stories may have theme so slight and tenuous that there seems just little point to find them. Still, if a story leaves us with many things to think about, then perhaps it has a theme worth trying to state.

In revealing theme, Duckart and Perrine suggest some principles. (1) The expression of theme is in a phrase form, like *the futility of envy*, it must be converted to sentence form *envy is futile*. (2) One must not rely on the character's name, place, or events. (3) The theme must not be a generalization larger than the story's terms justify. One should avoid using *every*, *all*, *always*, and better to apply *some*, *sometimes*, *may*. (4) Theme is a central concept that unifies in a story. Therefore, it must account for all major details. And if there is any detail in the story contradicts the theme. Maybe the statement is defective. (5) Theme can be stated in many different ways. 960 The last principle is theme should not be stated in a cliché or familiar saying, such as *you can't judge a book by its cover*, or *a stitch in time saves nine*. Although such a statement may suggest the theme accurately, it decreases the essential meaning of the story.

Analysis

1. Symbol

Symbol analyzed in this paper are chosen since they are repeatedly mentioned in the story. These symbols are reflected through the name of the main characters, the setting of place, and the object.

a. Symbol Reflected through the Name of the Main Characters

i) Eragon

Eragon is the main protagonist of the novel, which also becomes its title. It is interesting to note that the name Eragon is quite similar with the word *dragon* (D comes before the letter E). this brings the suggestion of intimate relationship between Eragon and Saphira-the dragon. When Eragon touches the little dragon for the first time, a silvery white oval is formed in the middle of his hand palm (p. 39). The mark appears since he has touched a hatching dragon. Yet, not every

person who does the same will also get that mark, since a dragon egg will only hatch if the person destined to be its Rider comes into its presence (p. 112).

The relationship is also suggested by the mentally contact between Eragon and Saphira. This enables him to feel and know what his dragon thinks, and also communicate with it. Even from the very first time when Saphira has just hatched and she is hungry, Eragon somehow feels a terrible hunger either.

Something brushed against his consciousness, like a finger trailing over his skin ... it solidified into a tendril of thought through which he could feel a growing curiosity ... Again the tendril touched his mind, but this time, instead of curiosity, he sensed an overpowering, ravenous hunger (p.39).

The mentally communication is getting stronger each day, as well as whenever there is spare time of his work hour, Eragon goes to the forest in where he hides the dragon and brings some food for it (p. 58 – 62).

ii) Saphira

Saphira hatches from one of three dragon eggs left over after the slaughtering of the Dragon Riders. It is called so because her scales and eyes are deep sapphire blue, the same color as the egg (p. 38). Nevertheless, it symbolizes the reverence and worthiness of a dragon-something amazing always happen around a dragon.

“Dragon will constantly amaze you. Things ... happen around them, mysterious things that are impossible anywhere else. Even though the Riders worked with dragons for centuries, they never completely understood their abilities ...” (p. 103)

It happens when Saphira touches Brom’s tomb with the tip of her nose-which is previously a sandstone tomb made by Eragon-and changes it into a visible sparkling gemstone vault (p. 284).

Beside their long life-even for hundreds of year-dragons are as clever as human (p. 72). This stresses the fact that the Riders can do great things with the dragons.

“... For some people praise everything the Riders did, yet ignore the dragons, assuming that they were nothing more than an exotic means to get from one town to another. They weren’t. the Riders’ great deeds were only possible because of the dragons ...” (p. 54)

Dragons are so adorable, so that losing a dragon might make its rider feels horrible. Galbatorix, the king of Alagaësia who also is a Dargon Rider, loses his dragon during a fight, and becomes half mad and hopeless. His madeness is getting worse when the council of Dragon Riders rejects his deman for a new dragon. Due to the denial, the mad Galbatorix comes to believe it is the Riders' fault his dragon has died, and he then formulates a plan to exact revenge (p. 32 – 33). Brom's last message to Eragon also reveals the value of dragons.

“... After all this time, I still grieve for my Saphira ... Don't let that happen to you. Don't! Guard Saphira with your life, for without her it's hardly woth living.” (p. 274 – 275)

b. Symbols Reflected throug the Setting of Place

i) The Mountains

It can be seen that throughout the whole story, the setting of mountanious range is quite dominant. At the beginning of the novel, there is a range of mountains called Spine. It is the untamed mountain where Eragon finds the dragon egg. The Spine symbolizes for life difficulty or barrier. It is told that the Spine is fulfilled with stange stories believed to bring bad luck; an area which is out of King Galbatorix's authority since half of his infantry mysteriously disappear when doing a campaign there.

The name Spine itself is symbolical. According to *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*,

Spine is the row o f bones along the back of humans and some animals; any of the sharp parts like needles on certain plants and animals' the part of the cover of a book where the apges are joined together (1995: 1145).

It can be interpreted that it is called Spine because it is the place which unites Eragon with Saphira-the dragon – which then makes him face many problems in his life. The position of Spine which extends almost all along. Alagaësia stresses that during Eragon's journey from a city to another through the Spine is not smooth at all; the difficulties he faces often endanger his life.

Another setting of mountainous range is Beor Mountains; it is a giant and the tallest one in Alagaësia which bcomes the hiding place of the Varden. This

symbolizes that the life difficulties Eragone has during the previous journey are getting closer toward ending.

ii) Helgrind

Helgrind is located several miles east from Dras-Leona. It is a mountain of bare rock with spires and columns soar high to the sky. Helgrind is the reason Dras-Leona was originally built, since people are fascinated by it although it is malevolent (p. 247). It brings the suggestion of darkness and evil. Eragon and Brom's investigation leads to Helgrind as the Rzac's hiding place.

In Dras-Leona, there is a cathedral which is strikingly similar to Helgrind. It is described as the highest building in the city, and a gripping place.

... Snarling gargoyles crouched along the eaves. Fantastic beasts writhed on the wall ... The entire building sent a shiver down Eragon's spine. There was something menacing about it, as if it were a predator crouched in the city, waiting for its next victim ... the silence of a forgotten tomb filled the empty cathedral. The air was chill and dry ... Stained-glass windows depicted scenes of anger, hate, and remorse peered through the walls ... (p. 257)

The cathedral functions as a place to worship Helgrind. The people profess a cruel religion. They drink human blood and make flesh offerings, due to the belief that the more bone and sinew they give up, the less they are attached to the mortal world (p. 248).

The wickedness of Helgrind is represented by the cathedral's condition and the religion the people practice. Moreover, this is supported by the situation of the city. Dras-Leona itself is a messy city with many ramshackle buildings, crooked streets, and dirty, pale yellow walls of daubed mud (p. 282). The streets are filthy, and stinky smell like a sewer fills the air. The city inhabitants are poor and neglected, and there is still slave trading there.

A few times after their arriving, Brom gets news that the evil king Galbatorix will visit the city within the week. Surely Ra'zac is there too, since they have to prepare for the king's arrival. The next day when Eragon alone comes in the cathedral, somehow two Ra'zacs find and then chase him. Eragon and Brom run out from Dras-Leona. However, just like its meaning – The Gates of Death – Eragon, Brom, and Saphira are ambushed by Ra'zac near the Helgrind, and that makes Brom is wounded which then leads him to death (p. 258-277).

c. Symbols Reflected through the Objects

i) Zar'roc

Zar'roc is the name of sword Brom gives to Eragon, which later in the next chapter revealed as Morzan's sword who betrayed the Dragon Riders for Galbatorix. It symbolizes the responsibility and duty placed upon Eragon's shoulder are hard and heavy. This is shown throughout the novel that whenever and wherever he is, dangers follow him. Sometimes the dangers bring death to his beloved people. Garrow, his uncle, is killed by Ra'zac during their seeking of the dragon egg Eragon found (p. 71 – 91). Brom, his master and friend, dies because the old man tries to save him of being stabbed by Ra'zac's dagger (p. 266 – 277).

His long and far journey, dangerous situations, dead and grief, often makes Eragon feels tired even from the very beginning. He often thinks if he has a chance to get his previous life back – before he discovered the egg – and live normally as an ordinary boy just like other people.

I will see this place again ... Eragon insited to himself, looking at the ruined buildings. This can not, will not, be a permanent exile. Someday when it's safe, I'll return ... (p. 111)

He felt a wave of confusion, I don't want to leave Teirm, he suddenly realized. The time I've spent time here has been almost normal. What I would give not to keep uprooting myself. To stay here and be like evveryone else would be wonderful (p. 211)

Zar'roc is a beautiful sword. Its pommel is made of teradrop-shaped gold with the side cut away to reveal a ruby inside of a small egg, silver ware wrap its hilt and gleam like starlight, the sheath is wine red and smooth as glass (p. 101 – 102). Yet, behind its excellent appearance. Zar'roc has a dark history, just like its meaning – misery. It is the sword of a man who once killed many dragons and riders. It can be interpreted tha behind the proud of being a rider, which many people would die for, there are many dangers and bitterness eragon has to deal with.

ii) Dream

It is told that twice during his journey, dream comes to Eragon when he is sleeping. The dreams function as symbols of reflection of self conscience or

innerself. In those two dreams, Eragon sees the same vision: a powerless young woman who is chained in a cold and hard cell.

It is interesting to note that those two dreams only come as Eragon's feeling is horrible. He first dreams of being in Teirm. A wave of confusion overwhelms him; he wants a normal life like he had before finding the dragon egg, on the other side that will never be realized when Saphira is around. Then soon after those thoughts rage through him, Eragon dreams of the woman in prison.

The second dream comes in the night after Brom's death. Eragon senses a horrible loss with the death. The sense is getting worse probably since Brom is wounded when trying to save him, and he cannot do anything but to see the grievous wound sap the old man's strength till he dies (p. 268 – 276).

After the dreams come, Eragon feels that the woman is precious and he has to find her. The feeling that he cannot endure seeing another person die encourages him to continue the journey, try to find this woman and save her.

2. Theme

The entire symbol mentioned above helps to convey the minor or sub theme of the story. First, the symbol of Eragon, which gives description about the intimate relationship Eragon has with the dragon; therefore Eragon is able to survive during the journey; with Saphira beside him, he can do many things that are impossible to do alone. It suggests the minor theme that the supports and encourages from someone else whom he loves may make oneself more resolute and stronger when problems rage through, rather than if one faces problems all by himself he may be dropped and desperate.

The symbol of Saphira – the dragon – helps to strengthen the fact that dragons are great and adorable creatures; dragons are worthy more than what ordinary people assume them as mere transporting means to get from one place to another. It implies the sub theme that sometimes one does not know what he got until it is gone; or specifically, sometimes one does not aware that there is something or someone essential around him, but when it is gone or taken away from his side then he just realizes that its existence is worthy and he needs it.

The symbol of the Spine delivers the idea that even from the very beginning Eragon finds the egg; problem has begun to emerge that is the untamed environment of the forest in the Spine; he has to be very carefully hunting into it, because persistent vigilance and sharp reflexes are needed if he does not want any accidents feel on him.

The symbols of Deor Mountains and Helgrind emphasize more on the difficulties and jeopardy Eragon deals with during the journey. They suggest that as time runs, often oneself deals with problems during his life; the problems and responsibilities one has are getting bigger and harder as well as he grows up.

The symbol of Zar'roc helps to convey the idea that the journey Eragon endures is hard. What is more, because of him, his two beloved men die. Whereas the symbol of Dream, it strengthens the fact of the ability of self conscience in helping Eragon in dealing with a dilemma. They help the readers to get the minor theme, that is as oneself feels that enduring a responsibility is a hard and exhausting work to do, he may decides to stop his efforts, moreover if someone else is sacrificed because of his efforts in implementing the responsibility; in that time his conscience may talks and gives amusing; if he listens carefully to its words he may get the best solution and stabilization in achieving what he wants.

The sub themes mentioned before can be formulated into a major or main theme. From the symbol of Eragon, Saphira, the Spine, Helgrind, Gil'ead, Tronjheim, Zar'roc, and Dream, it can be argued that the major or main theme of this story is oneself may deal with problems and responsibilities during his life, and often behind those hard situations, there is something worthy and valuable lesson can be taken.

Conclusion

The interrelation of the symbols with other intrinsic elements in this novel – like the main characters, the setting of place, and objects – helps to convey the story's main theme, that is oneself may deal with problems and responsibilities during his life, and often behind those hard situations, there is something worthy and valuable lesson can be taken. The symbols of setting, shown by the mountains and Helgrind, give a clear description of the problems and bigger responsibilities.

While the symbols of the main characters and the objects, help the readers to realize of what can help oneself in coping with conflicts and what stands behind those hard situations. Therefore, it can be concluded that symbols are highly significant in delivering the themes.

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