

Symbolism

Symbolism is a literary and artistic movement that emerged in the late 19th century, primarily in France. It attempts to express the inexpressible, supernatural, and mysterious aspects of human experience through symbolic language and imagery. Unlike realism and naturalism, which focused on depicting the external world in a straightforward manner, symbolism emphasized the spiritual, the emotional, and the mystical.

Symbolism is a literary movement that emphasizes the use of symbolic imagery and metaphors to represent ideas and emotions. It focused on the inner experiences, dreams, and the mystical aspects of human existence, rather than depicting external reality.

History of Symbolism:

The roots of Symbolism can be traced to the poetry of Charles Baudelaire.

particularly his seminal work "Les Fleurs du mal" (The Flowers of Evil). His

innovative use of metaphor and synesthesia

laid the groundwork for the Symbolist

movement. The movement officially began in

the 1880s, with the publication of Jean

Moreas's "Symbolist Manifesto" in 1886.

This manifesto outlined the Symbolists' rejection

of naturalism and their embrace of symbolic

expression as a means to go beyond the

ordinary.

Symbolism soon spread beyond poetry to

other forms of literature, as well as to the

visual arts, theatre, and music.

Features / Tenets / Principles / Elements of Symbolism:

Key features of symbolism include:

(i) Symbolic language:

Symbolist writers believed that language could

not directly represent reality, but could only

symbolically allude to it. They attempted

to use words and images to evoke emotions

and suggest deeper, often mystical

(ii) Suggestiveness and Evocation:

Symbolists aimed to create an atmosphere of suggestiveness through use of rich and evocative language. They valued ambiguity, leaving room for interpretation and inviting readers to explore multiple meanings.

(iii) Mysticism and the Unconscious:

Symbolists were influenced by the ideas of mysticism and the concept of the unconscious mind, as popularized by Sigmund Freud. They explored dreamlike and surreal elements in their writings, often delving into the subconscious to reveal hidden truths.

(iv) Synesthesia:

Synesthesia is a key feature of Symbolism. Symbolist poets often aimed to create a sensory experience by blending different sensory perceptions. They might describe sounds in terms of color, or emotions in terms of tastes, creating a vivid and immersive reading experience.

(v) Individualism:

Symbolism focused on individualism and the unique artistic vision of each writer. They believed that each artist should create their own symbols and meanings rather than adhering to established norms.

(vi) Emphasis on Music & Visual Arts:

Symbolist writers drew inspiration from visual arts and music, seeking to promote their ability to convey emotions and meaning without relying on direct representation.

(vii) Emphasis on Subjectivity:

Symbolism focused on individual subjectivity and the inner world of the artist and the reader. It explored the inner thoughts, dreams, and fantasies of the human psyche. This emphasis on subjectivity was a reaction against objectivity and the realism.

(viii) Ambiguity and Impression:

Symbolists' works are known for their ambiguity and impressionistic quality.

Day: _____
They often leave readers with a sense of mystery and a feeling that there is more to the text than meets the eye.

(ix) Reaction against Naturalism and Realism:

Symbolism emerged as a reaction against the dominant literary trends of the time, such as naturalism and realism, which aimed for a precise depiction of everyday life. Symbolists tried to go beyond the ordinary and explore the transcendent.

(x) Influence on later Movements:

Symbolism had a profound impact on later movements, including surrealism, expressionism, and modernism. Many of the ideas & techniques developed by the symbolists laid the groundwork for the experimental and innovative literature of the 20th century.

Types of Symbolism

There are three (03) major types of symbolism which include:

- Archetypal Symbols
- Cultural Symbols
- Religious Symbols

(i) Archetypal Symbols:

Archetypal Symbols are universal, recurring symbols or motifs found in myths, stories, and literature across the world. These symbols hold deep, unconscious meanings and are shared by diverse societies throughout history.

Example:

1. The Hero represents the protagonist on a journey or quest.
2. The Mother symbolizes nurturing, caregiving, and protection.
3. The Shadow represents the darker, hidden aspects of the self that are often denied or repressed.

(ii) Cultural Symbols:

Cultural symbols are the tangible or intangible representations, objects, gestures, words, or concepts that hold significant meaning within a particular culture and society.

Example:

- National Symbols (Flags, anthems etc).
- Ceremonial and Ritual Symbols
- Traditional Foods and Cuisine.

(iii) Religious Symbols:

Religious symbols are visual or tangible representations that hold special significance and meaning within a particular religious tradition or belief system.

Examples:

- Cross represent the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Star and Crescent represents the moon and the star, which have religious significance in Islam.

Major Symbolists:

- Charles Baudelaire (Father of Symbolism)
- Stephane Mallarme
- Paul Verlaine
- Arthur Rimbaud
- Joris-Karl Huysmans
- Franz Kafka
- Emily Bronte

• Virginia Woolf

• T.S. Eliot

Major Symbolic Works:

- Les Fleurs du mal (The Flowers of Evil)
- Less Illuminations
- The metamorphosis
- The Wuthering Heights
- To the Lighthouse
- The Wasteland

Conclusion:

Symbolism represents a significant shift in the landscape of the 19th century literature and art, offering a counterpoint to the ~~was~~ prevailing trends of realism & naturalism. Symbolist artists and writers attempted to explore the mysteries of existence and the human soul. Charles Baudelaire's pioneering work earned him the title of the Father of Symbolism and ensuring his lasting impact on modern literature and art.