

Julia Kristeva's the Semiotic and the Symbolic Reading of Adrienne Rich's "*Planetarium*" and Carol Ann Duffy's "*Havisham*"

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Abstract

This paper sets itself the task of approaching Adrienne Rich's "Planetarium" from Kristeva's perspective of semiotics. It is intended here to show dynamics of signifying language as propounded by Kristeva. The study tries to reveal the hidden and neglected aspect of the poem or in Kristeva's notion, the semiotic aspect. In Kristeva's terms, language can be expressed through two realms: the symbolic and the semiotic aspects. "Planetarium" is considered a voice of feminist attitude, oppressed voice by the patriarchal society, which in its turn corresponds to the semiotic or the genotext. It is similar in a sense of oppression how women are oppressed and killed. The genotext is also covered by the potentiality of the symbolic aspect. The genotext appears in the form of tone, repetition, rhythm and even spaces as in "Planetarium." Here in the poem of "Planetarium," the kristevian writing is shown in the heavy use of semiotic aspect as a method of revolution towards the patriarchal structures, which are typified in the symbolic aspect of language. The paper concluded that language is not only means of communicating thoughts; an underlying layer of meaning and intentions might be elicited.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kristeva with her famous approach of semanalysis, she brought back the body into language by arguing that the logic of signification is already present in the maternal body and bodily drives make their way into language. This is one of her major contributions as a feminist psychoanalyst. The other contribution introduced by Kristeva is *The Subject in Process* in which she delineated her interests in semiotic. She further describes the process of signifying as "pre-verbal drives and semiotic operations" (Festić, 2016).

Kristeva is concerned with the formation of identity through language. She sees that language, and its manifestations can formulate the subject and its subjectivity implicitly and explicitly (Sadehi, 2012). In her famous poem, "Planetarium" Adrienne Rich presents Caroline Herschel, famous astronomer woman suffering from and manipulating under the flagship of men power through semiotic aspect of language.

Femininity is introduced as a source of life amid darkness of patriarchal structure. Therefore, the feminine subjectivity and inner drives are formulated through her language and semiotics. This is applicable and true to other famous poem, "Havisham" written by Carol Ann Duffy. This poem presents to us a very chaotic and disturbed woman, who is willing to take her revenge from her would be husband. The man has jilted her in the day of their wedding, and turn her into a desiring killing machine. The paper is intended to employ Kristeva's theory of Semiotic and Symbolic to study these poems, and show how these women characters use language to reach a kind of self-fulfillment, identity –formation and recovering their true self through language.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kristeva with her famous approach of semanalysis, she brought back the body into language by arguing that the logic of signification is already present in the maternal body and bodily drives make their way into language. This is one of her major contributions as a feminist psychoanalyst. The other contribution introduced by Kristeva is *The Subject in Process* in which she delineated her interests and semiotic, theoretical, and analytical stances, further describing the process of signifying as “pre-verbal drives and semiotic operations” (Festić, 2016).

Camelia Talebian Sadehi (2012) wrote a paper entitled "Beloved and Julia Kristeva's The Semiotic and The Symbolic" discussing the layers of meaning observed in a novel of **Beloved**. She noticed through figures of speech like rhythm, repetition, metaphor and color imagery, Toni Morrison was able to expose the racism, inequality and suffering of the blacks at the hands of the whites. The repetition of certain words like skin, blood, lynch, as well as the dark color imagery, the novelist was able to convey the underlying message of brutality slightly.

The realm of language is known as the symbolic and to be separated from the semiotic in that it is associated with the patriarchal structure and the law. Kristeva has her method of withdrawing from Lacan's thought that even subsequent to entering the symbolic; the talking subject keeps on fluctuating between the semiotic and the symbolic. The subject is for all time in cycle. Since female youngsters keep on distinguishing somewhat with the mother figure, they are probably going to hold a nearby association with the semiotic. Kristeva believes that the semiotic and the symbolic are two modalities of the signifying process that are never experienced as separate, but are theoretically separable as two tendencies within signification. The semiotic and the symbolic aspects are in symbiotic relationship (Keltner, 2011).

Part of her defying to the patriarchal structures, Kristeva introduces the term "Chora." It is a psychoanalytic term developed by Julia Kristeva to describe a space, or a stage before the child's acquiring language and even to Lacan's proposed mirror stage. Kristeva acquires the term from Plato's *Timaeus* to explain the most punctual stage in psychosexual turn of events and the manners by which a newborn child is arranged to its mom's body. The Chora, as a term, signifies a phase before the infant creates boundaries of character and understands that it is both separate from and reliant on the mother. "Semiotic Chora" was utilized by Kristeva to portray the manners by which an infant utilizes various articulations to deliver energy, for example, cooing, without realizing that they can communicate something (Cudden, 2013).

For Kristeva, the process of signifying can be achieved through two mechanisms: the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic elements in the signifying process are the drives, which are discharged into language realm, and are associated with rhythm and tone. It is a subterranean element, which does not signify. It corresponds to the “*genotext*” which is the very foundation of language. In simple and brief words, it is any aspect that can be counted as beyond or trans or beneath the linguistic context (Jones, 1984).

The symbolic, on the other hand, is the element of meaning that actually signifies the syntax and grammar. This symbolic parallels to the level of the “*phenotext*” which is the

language of communication, the level at which we normally read when seeking meaning. The verge of the symbolic is the "thetic phase", the point at which the subject takes up a position and identification/identity. The genotext and phenotext together constitute the signifying process (Jones, 1984).

Kristeva propounds that these two aspects of semiotic and symbolic are fighting each other over the primacy of signifying process. They are engaged in what she calls dialectic oscillation. The process of symbolizing is oscillating between semiotic rejection and symbolic identity. The entire process of signifying cannot be attained by one aspect rather than the other. Having only the symbolic, we end up in an incoherent and jumbled language. Employing only the semiotic rather than of symbolic, we fall into a broken and empty language. It is this relation between rejection of semiotic and stasis and symbolization of symbolic that produces the speaking subject. That is why it is called a *subject-in-process*. So, the notion of semiotic is involved with a discharge of feeling or emotion through non-verbal, less visible ways if I dare to say; whereas the symbolic is expressions of clear and orderly meaning through the use of logical terms. The concept of semiotics can be seen as a respond to Lacanian notion of castration and its affiliation to the Father. Semiotics is closely related to the infantile pre-Oedipal experience. Kristeva tries to subvert the symbolic order of language, paternal authority and the law. In Lacanian terms, the moment of entering the Mirror Stage, the child learns to distinguish between self and other, the moment of seeing his image, and enters the realm of shared cultural meaning, known as the symbolic. Kristeva visualizes the symbolic order as the place in which the evolving of language permits the child to become a "speaking subject," and to develop a sense of identity separate from the mother (Smith, 1992).

3. METHOD

This study employed a semanalytic approach, which is descriptive, qualitative in nature. This comes up with descriptive examples and new perspectives in the discussion and results.

3.1.Data

The data used in this study is taken from two different modern poets. This first poem is Adrienne Rich's "Planetarium", which is a free verse explaining the suffering of woman and dominating role of men through astronomy imagery, that constitutes her identity. The second poem is "Havisham" by Carol Ann Duffy. This poem shows how anger, vengeance, and suffering re-formulates her identity after being deserted by her fiancé.

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

4.1. Adrienne Rich's "Planetarium"

Adrienne Rich's poem "planetarium" talks about Caroline Herschel who was a German astronomer and a pioneer in the field of astronomy. She was the first woman to have received a salary as a scientist. She was awarded many prizes for her discoveries in the field of astronomy. Caroline has discovered many comets, which brought her immediate fame in the astronomy community at that time (Nysewander, 1998):

An eye,

‘virile, precise and absolutely certain’
from the mad webs of Uranusborg

encountering the NOVA (Rich, 2016).

The first thing that might pigeonholed under the umbrella of Kristeva's semiotics is the form of the poem. The poem is filled with incoherent and confusing spaces that reflects the mind of disturbed speaker. One can see a line of words followed by break and then new line starts. The breakage of narrating signify the agony of the poet who is feminist. It also points out the disorder that has been brought forth into the symbolic form, which represents the patriarchal order, the syntax. This aspect of breaking and distorted form challenges the symbolic aspect. From the outset, we are introduced into a regular well-arranged form (symbolic) only later, we see lines are disarranged and distorted (semiotic). It brings disorder to order system. The poem ends with prevailing form of symbolic aspect where order is regained:

She whom the moon ruled
like us
levitating into the night sky
riding the polished lenses (Rich, 2016).

Rich imagines Herschel riding on her telescope (phallic symbol) and flying into the sky like an evil woman riding a broom. She holds the power and dominion over the telescope. It is the same telescope whereby she can observe and expose the cruelty of patriarchal system. "Galaxies of women, there / doing penance for impetuosity"(Rich, lines 13-14).

Semiotically speaking, the speaker asserts, throughout the poem, to use and connect feminine aspects with astrology, galaxies, and skies not only because Herschel is astronomer, but also to denote how the problems, sufferings, and cruelties of women as big and wide as the skies. In the mentality of feminists, including Rich, believed that society's demands and expectations are too much to stomach them. That is why Rich categorizes women's experience as hell-like, rib-chilling suffering.

One of the beautiful images is the comparison of women with the NOVA. Scientifically speaking, NOVA is a type of star that expands in light and gets bigger and bigger and shines much before the star die or fade away. Here, the speaker concerns herself not only with being similar with star, but also the power of exploding of that light (women power):

every impulse of light exploding
from the core
as life flies out of us (Rich, 2016).

Kristeva articulates the chora in terms of a pre-signifying state, as the non-verbal semiotic articulation of the process. It is like the essence where life begins. It is feminine life source and Rich mentions it literally, from the core. Here the speaker shows that women explode and they are life givers. They will redefine the terms of life on their own terms. The idea of spacing is also observable, and reflects women need to subvert life shackles and denotes the challenge of the semiotic for the symbolic (the father or the patriarch):

The light that shrivels a mountain
and leaves a man alive
Heartbeat of the pulsar
heart sweating through my body (Rich, 2016).

After comparing, the speaker begins to connect the living and the non-living and the animate and inanimate. Semiotically speaking, she brings the image of lightening (woman or life) that penetrates a mountain (phallic symbol). What is important is that the poet mentions lightening rather than light, to denote the ongoing process of life giving like the heartbeat.

Rich gives the sense of center when she aligns women with the pulsar. It is a highly magnetized rotating compact star that emits rapid radio waves. Here the pulsar (women) is not only life giver and source and it is gravitational. In a sense, the whole life and men revolve around women because they are the source and they are core. The rest (men) are the peripheries that circle around the core. The poet carries a powerful and potential source of energy when she says "sweating through my body" (Rich, 2016):

The radio impulse
pouring in from Taurus
I am bombarded yet I stand
I have been standing all my life in the
direct path of a battery of signals
the most accurately transmitted most
untranslatable language in the universe (Rich, 2016).

The expectations and regulations that a society places on women are like the strong radio signals from the Taurus. Rich becomes the voice of all women. She has been attacked all her life with these biased orders. However, these orders (battery of signals) begin to lose strength and energy that is why it is untranslatable language. Battery is running out (men power). The speaker insinuates into a kind of sexual inference when she says the radio impulse pouring in from Taurus (dissemination). This reading can be proved with reference to the last the three lines: "I am an instrument in the shape /of a woman trying to translate pulsations into images" (Rich, 2016).

4.2.Havisham

The poem's title is taken from a character of Dickens's novel, "Great Expectations." In this novel, we are introduced into a female character by a name Miss Havisham. She was deserted in her wedding day, and all the clocks are stopped when she heard that her fiancé was not coming. Ever since she was wearing her wedding dress and one shoe for decades as a sign of falling from grace. She is abnormal, isolated woman, who was deserted and cheated by her life partner on her marriage day. She has raised and spoon-fed the adopted, beautiful Estella to get payback on all men including Pip who expects to be that Miss Havisham is his benefactress. She turns her repressed anger inside herself and other through Estella (Bloom, 2010). In chapter eight, Miss Havisham demands Estella to literally kill and revenge "I thought I overheard Miss Havisham answer—only it seemed so unlikely? You can break his heart." (Dickens, 2001). In other incident, Miss Havisham urges the adopted girl "Estella, take him down. Let him have something to eat, and let him roam and look about him while he eats." (Dickens, 85). The very reformulation of the character again in the poem gives the chance for Miss Havisham to exact her revenge upon her former fiancé. Simultaneously, the entire poem can be taken collectively a form of resistance and revenge against the patriarchal mindset. In a sense, the poet shall present the hidden part of Miss Havisham's psyche, the troubled, disordered mentality that she went through and the residual part that left from Dickens in his novel would be introduced once more from a feminist perspective.

From the first stanza, we are introduced with conflicting and hatred emotions of Miss Havisham "Beloved sweetheart bastard." It is not a love poem in true sense of the word as we can see the contradictory notions between beloved and bastard:

Not a day since then

I haven't wished him dead. Prayed for it
so hard I've dark green pebbles for eyes,
ropes on the back of my hands I could strangle with (Duffy, 2015).

She expresses her vengeful wish for former fiancé in a form of praying. Every day she does her prayers for his death. Her eyes turned into pebbles and green that she is jealous and pebbles point out the cold-hearted sentiments and repressed desire of murdering. Her vision is blurry, she does not see as she did. Not only her eyes are impacted, but also her hands are handcuffed with ropes. Her femininity attitude is shackled by the patriarchal but her murderous desire of killing is floating all over her disturbed mind:

Spinster. I stink and remember. Whole days
in bed cawing Nooooo at the wall; the dress
yellowing, trembling if I open the wardrobe;
the slewed mirror, full-length, her, myself, who did this (Duffy, 2015).

The speaker goes on describing her state as spinster, unmarried woman that is always associated with old age which is applicable to Miss Havisham for years. Her body as well as the dress stink when she remains years in bed, isolating herself. She avoids the communication with anybody. "cawing Nooooo," it is here the semiotic aspect of language seeps into the surface as if it wants to assume primacy over the symbolic aspect of language in which the repetition of sound ooooo five times to show the deep agony. Her voice is likened to cawing, probably of crow. It makes a loud harsh sound is directed at the wall suggesting madness. Her dress is described as being yellowing. Semiotically speaking, the color yellow denotes sick, age, decaying in state of continuing and progressing (-ing), it sounds no end for her case of yellowing. The yellowing dress stands for Miss Havisham. It is synecdoche where one part represents the whole. Her distorted image is typically reflected in slanted mirror wondering murdered her beauty! The act of watching herself in the mirror shows the mirror register as pointed out by Lacan where Miss Havisham develops and discovers the true present identity of herself. The rhetorical question, who did this? Reveals the contradictory feelings develop within her, she does not know whether her former fiancé who did this or her isolation sitting in her bed for years not forgetting her spinsterhood:

to me? Puce curses that are sounds not words.
Some nights better, the lost body over me,
my fluent tongue in its mouth in its ear
then down till I suddenly bite awake. Love's (Duffy, 2015).

The speaker transits from the second to the third stanza without stopping indicates the sense of incoherence and disorder which can be taken under the umbrella of semiotic aspect of language. I believe the language jumping between the stanzas two and three constitute the failure of communication which reflect the mindset of Miss Havisham and increase of confusion. This confusion and meaninglessness can be viewed in curses that take shape of sounds rather than words. To our unfamiliarity, we see that curses are preceded by Puce, dark purple colour. Some days were better probably when she was able to communicate. The speaker imagines the lost body of her former lover over her in objectifying him as it rather than him. She is described as vampire who sucks blood who takes bite. Probably she was dreaming erotically about his body placing her tongue in her mouth and ears. In her essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Hélène Cixous incorporates the myth of Medusa, hideous figure of woman with a snake-haired like and a gaze which could transform anyone into a stone. Miss. Havisham, in this stanza, is turned into terrific female character who takes bite and turns his lover into a kind of an object like

Medusa turned men into stones. Miss. Havisham using her tongue and body is a way of writing her identity to overcome and battle with the patriarchal structure, past, symbolic aspect of language as prescribed by men. It sounds sexual image as well as bodily derives writing. Cixous shows how the female body is closely associated to female authorship. Miss. Havisham, symbolically, echoes the laugh of the Medusa, her tongue terrifying men but it is liberating for women:

hate behind a white veil; a red balloon bursting
in my face. Bang. I stabbed at a wedding-cake.
Give me a male corpse for a long slow honeymoon.
Don't think it's only the heart that b-b-b-breaks. (Duffy, 2015).

The notion of hatred and murderous design is carried on from the third stanza to the fourth without interruption, enjambment, even incompatible words delineate disorder and chaos. Love's hate is oxymoron where there is clear antithesis. She hates her former lover because he was accustomed to love him. Red balloon might refer to broken heart that is filled with blood. She, for moment, visualizes a wedding cake as if in normal wedding but here only she is going to cut cake furiously. The speaker deliberately used the word stabbed to create a sense of murder. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, explain how the women the 19th century were represented either as angelic or monstrous in the fiction. They delineate how the female author is at war against her male precursor's reading of her. She is not competing with him but instead struggling to break free of the limitations he created for her. Here the poem, Miss. Havisham is battling against her former image of servitude to her fiancé or in Freudian terms, Miss. Havisham uses displacement when she starts stabbing the cake directing her anger from her former lover to the cake, to a less threatening object. The speaker outlets her sentiments of necrophilia in demanding dead body to take revenge. That dead body of a man, any man would suffice her to exact her revenge that would include her former fiancé, Pip. Only her heart is broken but also her mind is broken. She went mad exceeding in her revenge against former lover to include all men. In the amidst of her vengeful feelings, the semiotic aspect of language once more time seeped into the symbolic aspect by the repetition in b-b-b-breaks. As in the Kristeva earlier suggested that the non-verbal semiotic aspect of language every now and then resurfaces trying to make meaning together with the verbal symbolic aspect of language.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Krsiteva and Adrienne Rich are feminists who believe through using language they might fight back and survive the patriarchal system. Rich employs spaces and repetition as a form of semiotic that tries to defy the symbolic. The semiotic endeavors to bring disorder to the order of symbolic, here the symbolic stands for the concept of fatherhood and patriarchal system. The question that this paper tries to answer is that neither the symbolic nor the semiotic can work alone to convey meaning. The complete circle of meaning fulfills itself when the semiotic and symbolic work together to give the full picture of interpretation. Here, the researcher, to his best knowledge, the symbolic and semiotic stand for the men and women, and how women are source of life. Women are life givers who shine men's life like NOVA, big star that extends in light as much as extends in life in material world. This sourcing of life as depicted in the poem as NOVA and galaxies is akin to Kristeva's idea of Chora, where she denotes the pre-lingual state of speaking subject, the early development of the child, which is in a sense the early development of life. It is this regard Kristeva's Chora and Rich's superstars, NOVA are related as life gives and protectors. "Havisham" as a poem is filled with feminist mechanisms that derive Miss. Havisham to express her anger, revenge and hateful mentality towards not only her former lover, but also against men in general. Her anger and chaotic

mentality are channeled through symbolic as well as the semiotic aspects of language. The non-stoppable transition between stanzas, the repetition of sounds, the cuts between the words as in b-b-b-breaks, color usage (yellowing, red, green, and purple) semiotically indicate the hatred, revenge, old age, chaotic fantasies. Finally, Miss. Havisam's character metamorphosed into a vengeful creature like Medusa relishing in her tormenting her dead bodies after turning them into an object.

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