



Symbolic and Didactic Appraisal of Lenrie Peters “The Panic of Growing Older

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Abstract

This paper conveys a legitimate role of poetry to society. The introductory background conveys the role of poetry in society. The students' languages learning process for improvement of understanding and decoding of the symbiotic relationships of diction and literary art are made bare. It further portrays the importance and significance of poetry to students and society. The set objectives manifest a better scrutiny of poetry in unavailing the inner perimeters of poetry analysis; the use of appropriate diction, symbols and the moral lessons attached to poems and other literary art. Based on Barthes symbiotic theory, the paper digresses the connotative and denotative use of language in Lenrie Peters' poem 'The Panic of Growing Older'. Though the theory's major focus is on symbolism and didactic meaning of work of art, how best such diction and symbols can be helpful in the interpretation of a poem are brought to bear in the analysis and discussions in this paper. The analysis of the poem translates the serious stages of man's life on earth. The discussion does not only interpret what is indicated by the poet but relay them to the knowledge of the irreversible ageing features to set a tone for awareness and expected domain one finds himself or herself at that stage of life as described by the Lenrie Petters. Certainly, the paper gears towards the lessons shared in the poem to direct the upcoming youth on expectant challenges to be prepared for as on keeps growing which is inevitable. The brilliant use of diction to denote the intention of the poet is also discussed.

Keywords: Symbolic, Didactic, Connotative, Poetry

INTRODUCTION

The best literary form, poetry, is a great tool for teaching language. Students have a great opportunity to learn the four fundamental moral principles through the use of poetry.

Poets and poetesses use symbolic signs to give their poetry a more artistic and ethereal appearance. Signs are anything that could be seen as significantly replacing something else (Sendera, Yakin, & Totu, 2014). Additionally, it aids in the development of pupils' language skills in areas like grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. "In general, it is a source material for the development of literacy abilities and the basic language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening," according to Ezenandu (2012). Farah & Al-Bakri (2022) adds that "...it (poetry) enhances learners' skills of the language along with their personalities as they become more confident to share their thoughts with others."

Anindita et al. (2017:40) said that poetry is a form of language expression that can produce sound and rhyme in its imagination and intellectual experience. Similarly, Hermita (2020) said that poetry is one of the literary works that interprets the feeling and expresses the sadness and happiness of the poet. Yuana et al. (2023) said that poetry is a literary work that uses a condensed language that is shortened and given a unified rhythm and sound, and it uses words that contain beauty and poetic.

Another popular and universal form of human expression is poetry. Poetry is the use of words, symbols, and gestures to convey thoughts, feelings, wants, and wishes. Poetry "offers opportunities for students to project their feelings and emotions, thus fostering personal involvement in learners" since it addresses universal themes and human issues (Heath, 2013). Poetry employs Semiotics in exploring signs and interpretive process, finding the occasion between the signifier and signified, and focusing on the systematic study of all the factors involved in the production and interpretation of signs and the whole process (Viensen, 2020).

Poetry is also one of the best ways to transmit cultural knowledge from one country to another. It functions as a mirror that reflects society's reality as well as its culture. Poetry opens pupils' eyes to a new world and aids in their understanding of various cultures, ideas, and social behaviours. "Poems also give students an insight into developing cross-cultural awareness, and this, in turn, will help them acquire fluency in the target language," suggests Lazar (1996). Poetry is significant because it stimulates human imagination and thought. It provides a fresh perspective on how to live in various cultural environments and learn about cultural values. Learning a new language entail learning about a new culture, including its values, linguistic conventions, customs, and artistic expressions. Poetry in general may therefore help to promote a discourse of tolerance and lessen cultural distinctions for both the teacher and the students.

Modernist literature has been greatly influenced by symbolism, which gives authors a potent means of expressing difficult concepts and feelings. Dissecting the layers of symbolism in modernist literature has become a fascinating and successful project in the field of literary criticism. With a particular focus on the writings of well-known authors like Roland Barthes and T.S. Eliot, this critical study seeks to explore the depths of symbolism within the framework of modernist literature. By examining their writings, we can learn more about how symbolism operates as a means of expressing profound and often elusive themes (Jackson, 2023).

Modernist authors like Eliot used symbols to subvert social norms and reveal the underlying structures of society, as demonstrated by Barthes' investigation of symbolism as a process of cultural signification. Davis (2024). By examining the symbolism in modernist literature, Garcia and Lopez (2022) uncover the many levels of meaning that are present in these pieces. Through this analysis, we are able to delve deeper than the text's surface level

and interact with the complex web of symbols that form the story. This essay uses a semiotic technique to examine the symbolic and didactic evaluation of Lenrie Peters' "The Panic of Growing Older."

Although symbolism has yielded insightful information, a more thorough and nuanced analysis of the intricate and varied aspects of this symbolic language is required to illuminate the instructional character of the poet's connotative expression's hidden meaning. In "The Panic of Growing Older," by Lenrie Peters, the stages and associated hardships of human life are projected using a variety of language from various contexts. We can better understand the intricate relationship between symbols, culture, and meaning in modernist writing by analysing Roland Barthes' semiotic theories and Lenrie Peters' evocative symbolic diction.

Objectives of the Study

1. To decode the symbolic meaning in the diction of Lenrie Peters "The Panic of Growing Older".
2. To project the didactic interpretation in the diction of Lenrie Peters "The Panic of Growing Older".

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Barthes's Semiotics Theory

Barthes opines that there are only connotative expressions in the language of poetry (Budiman, 1999). Barthes uses the denotative and connotative 'levels of meanings' to analyze the signs in visual objects. Barthes distinguished the analysis of the signs into two, that is, the verbal and non-verbal signs. The title, the performers' names, the film's release date, and many other details are vocal cues that are similar to texts: at a particular period, are there traces of influence on the composition? The pictures that accompany the spoken signs are known as nonverbal signs. "Connotation is itself a system that comprises signifier, signified, and the process that unites the former to the latter," according to Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1968). Barthes' denotative and connotative "levels of meanings" in literary analysis are most appropriate to support this study since it turns to disseminate Lenrie Peters' "The Panic of Growing Older" in a connotative manner.

Symbolism in Modernist Literature

Early 20th-century modernist literature saw a break from conventional literary devices and an embracing of creative storytelling strategies. One of the main characteristics of modernist writing is symbolism, which enables writers to go beyond literal interpretations to explore further. Complex concepts and feelings can be expressed through symbolic components, including objects, locations, people, and events (Waham, 2023). According to Thompson (2023), symbolism serves as a conduit between the conscious and unconscious mind in modernist literature, enabling readers to explore the depths of human experience. Readers decipher the layers of meaning as they interact with symbols, creating connections between seemingly unrelated ideas and developing their own interpretations.

The fluid nature of symbolism in modernist literature underscores the richness and complexity of this literary movement. In effect, modernists induce the ideas of realism, which open the gate for a student or reader of poetry to gain moral guidance in relation to real-life situations.

Connotation

Connotation can be defined as the wide collection of positive and negative associations that most words carry with them; it is also when a word means something else, the additional meaning or sense value contained in a word (Zuhdah and Alfain, 2020). For instance, the terms "family," "comfort," and "love." Connotation is the subjective component of meaning, the feelings that a word evokes. Because people share experiences, connotations vary depending on the individual. Some words have shared connotations; a word is said to have a connotative meaning if it has a taste value, both positive and negative; if it has no taste value, it is said to have no connotation (Kreidler, 2002). Connotation, also known as figurative language or figure of speech, can be defined as a notion that can be linked to a word, suggesting that a word has one or more interpretations. Notwithstanding, there are universal connotatives that cannot be compromised: youthful exuberance and ageing weakening are natural connotations no mind can revert.

According to Leech (1974), connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content. It will be clear if people are talking about connotation; we are in fact talking about the "real-world experience." It is something that goes beyond the mere referent of a word and hints at its attributes in the real world. It is something more than the dictionary meaning. When someone hears and uses an expression, they become associated with it. Comparing connotative and denotative meanings reveals that the former are more erratic, meaning they differ greatly depending on the society, historical era, and personal experience of the individual. Despite the fact that every speaker of a given language uses the same conceptual framework, each person really perceives words differently. Like our knowledge and beliefs about the universe, connotative meaning is open-ended and indefinite. The language of literature, politics, advertising, and greeting cards is heavily influenced by connotations.

Connotative meaning uses words to add further complications to any theorising about meanings, especially their uses in metaphoric and poetic language, according to Wardhaugh (1977). Any comprehension of poetic language, metaphor, and connotation must be predicated on an awareness of what could be referred to as the "normal use of language." Connotation is more complex than denotation, and when individuals discuss connotations, it is crucial to keep in mind that affective and expressive factors are involved. Connotation meaning can also occur in a statement; often, context helps people understand a sentence's true meaning. The phrase "please give him envelope, to make his business easier" is an example of connotative meaning, which is more challenging than denotative meaning. Connotatively, the word "envelope," in that context, refers to money or bribery. The environment defines meaning since the word "envelope" in that sentence has a different meaning and occasionally has a connection to characters and objects.

Raeske (1966) also opines that connotation is one of the various implications or associations that a word carries. A poet uses the connotation of a word for his own purpose and advantage. It means that the poet's good intentions are available to readers. Connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content, and its meaning can embrace the putative properties of the referent due to the viewpoint adopted by an individual or a group of people or a whole society. People may observe that connotative meaning is not exclusive to language but is conveyed by other communicative systems, such as visual art and music, which supports the idea that connotative meaning is somehow incidental to language rather than an inherent component of it. Discussing connotation—that is, the "real world"

experience that one connects with an expression while using or hearing it will become evident.

In contrast to a term's fixed and widely recognised meaning, Goddard (2011) claims that connotative are shifting and idiosyncratic associations that a word may hold for some speakers but not for others. Connotation is sometimes known as emotive meaning or evaluative meaning, according to Keraf in Nugroho (2007:10). Connotative meaning is a type of meaning that has emotional significance and is crucial to song language. Connotation is the grouping of feelings that are combined in a term that is learned from the environment. Connotative is somewhat erratic and can change significantly depending on the culture, time period, and personal experience of the individual.

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature. Ratna (Santosa, 2015) claims that qualitative research is a subset of social science research that uses nonnumerical data with the goal of interpreting the significance of the information gathered. This study design is suitable for literary research, which analyses and presents data solely through description rather than numerical analysis. Using a semiotic method, this study aims to critically analyse symbolism in modernist literature, with a particular focus on Lenrie Peters' "The Panic of Growing Older." The objective is to disentangle the poet's layers of didacticism and symbolism and analyse their relevance in the larger framework of modernist literature. By closely reading the poem, a thorough note was made in order to choose symbolic and multi-meaning words. To learn more about the symbolism of these pieces, also look at the scholarly analyses and critical interpretations. According to Ratna (quoted in Santosa, 2015), content analysis is an analytical technique used to examine a document and its significance. To be more precise, the researcher will use a number of techniques when analysing data, including:

- A. Then, using secondary material, such as writing that details multiple incidents in Lenrie Peters' "The Panic of Growing Older," the researcher examines the symbols to determine their potential meaning.
- B. The researcher analyses the data by connecting the data to the poetry after determining the meaning of the symbols. This allows the researcher to accurately derive the didactic meaning and connotative meaning from the symbolic dictions

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main focus of the analysis of the poem 'The Panic of Growing Older' by Lenrie Peters is on the moral guidance based on chronological stages in life. Though as stated above, the use of diction, symbolism, and connotative are aligned to the interpretation of the poem. Nonetheless, the essential elements of poetry as a portrayal of expressed experience, opinion, and emotional delicacies are captured as well.

Synopsis of the Poem

Lenrie Peters' free verse poem "The Panic of Growing Older" traces the phases of life from youth to old age through a chronological framework. It is distinguished by its straightforward language and emphasizes the waning hopes and fears that come with aging by using metaphors, symbols, and repetition. Lenrie Peters' "The Panic of Growing Older" is a poem that projects the struggles and aspirations of man through different phases of his life. It is a reflection of the anxieties one predicates his life on as one ages. The poem probes

into the inner struggles of man in relation to the social obstacles he grapples with in the course of realizing his lofty dreams. Burdened by responsibilities, he transitions from being a potential to being an ordinary person with no achievements to show the world.

Symbolic Analysis of the Poem

The poem relies on a chronological stage of man's life on earth- from birth to death. Some social activists refer to this as the dash (-) between one's date of birth and date of death on the obituary poster. It highlights the situation, physical and psychological, at every stage of the life journey. The poet further reveals the expectations of the one living his life as well as societal expectations. The poem ends on the note that whatever happens to you during your time on earth, it's the society that tells your success or failure: 'From now on the world has you' (L.32) in the judgement 'box' to be accessed and tagged.

At the onset, the poet reveals the 'panic' of every man who is well aware of expectations of what makes a man in this earthly life. The ageing of man has been metamorphosized to that of 'fluttering winds.' This is an apt description to indicate that as long as the flutter continues, life grows on and on. In simple words, when the flutter stops, then a fall (death) emerges; otherwise, the journey of a growing life continues 'year by year' (L.4). During the toddler and teen ages, less is expected of you till you get to your own realization of what life has in store for you, and the expectations emerge upon your self-realization.

Interestingly, the poet swings to an essential decision-making point in life. Within which massive actualization and decisions emerge:

'At twenty
Stilled by hope
of gigantic success
time and exploration ' (L.5-8).

The desire for good living based on the teenage training sessions uploads a quick alert as to where the wish to become a great personality lies. The 'exploration' to divert gained knowledge prompts man to foresee the line he is towing. It is at this point that if care is not taken, the youthful mind may seek quick and unscrupulous means of seeking success by any means necessary. Very crucial is this stage, but the poet simplifies it as 'exploration' into real-life living. He, the poet, indicates 'time' to place emphasis on the importance of this crucial or critical period of life for decision-making. Though expectations from society are minimal at this stage, man assumes responsibility for living his own life on his own (independently). The poet symbolically used the phrase "at twenty" to signal a stage in the growth process where one thinks that he/she has got time and growth under control. This stanza is in sharp contrast with the first stanza. While the poet in the first stanza points to the continuous nature of the fear of growing old "from year to year" (line 4), the second stanza, on the other hand, introduces a pause ("stilled"—line 6) in fear "at twenty stilled by hope of gigantic success, time, and exploration." At age twenty, one feels he/she has had ample time to figure out things. As a result, one embraces worldly things. And instead of setting priorities right and charting paths to prosperity and stability, one rather spends this period dreaming of fantasies and trying one's hand at different things, all together. While at it, little does one know that "at 30," another stage of life beckons closer than one imagined.

The stuck reality of life at "at thirty" is worsened by restrictions in stanza four: "Legs cribbed in domesticity allow no sudden leaps at noon now." The poet metaphorically compares prison movement to domestic responsibilities. Everything and anything come at

you at this stage. One's life is embroiled in responsibilities. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to, feeding, accommodation, jobs, health bills, school fees, marriage, and care for parents, among others. Just like a prison, these domestic responsibilities, "domesticity," confine one's progress as a result of overburdens. The most assessment of life's credibility, where evaluation begins, is from thirty years onwards. The poet exemplifies the expansion of society on the basis of child-bearing: 'Three children perhaps/ the world expects' (L.21/22). These lines are preceded with signs describing the physical weakening, great expectations, and many counts of failure.

'...sudden throb of
pain. Laboratory tests
have nothing to show
Legs cribbed
in domesticity allow
no sudden leaps
at the noon now...'

The above from the poem indicates a flip into times in life where weakness and sickness set in in such a way that one seems to stay at home (domesticated) instead of the usual outing to meet friends here and there. With the children and family made, responsibilities heighten not only on housekeeping but also on health issues. In reality, the 'laboratory test' may never be able to provide answers to one's psychological and physical health challenges. Unfortunately, this stage is when failure in life shows its signs. 'Copybook bisected/in red ink and failure' portrays the significance of self-evaluation at this point in time. Tough as it may seem, 'science' may not erode the mistakes for the failures but indicates that as long as there is life, there is hope for progress. The stanza re-echoes the persona's disdain, frustration, and disappointment. In a Ghanaian educational setting, one uses my first copybook to learn how to write by tracing already written alphabets and words. In line with this, it suggests that the persona has done his possible best to chart already existing paths to success but is met with failures and nothing to show for "nothing to show the world." The persona's trials and failures are compared to a student's book that has many red pen marks.

Hope that should not be seen as just 'a grain of sand'- little because there may be more time to live your life; '...of twice three score/ and ten.'

The poem ends on the note of helplessness and hopelessness at the final stage of life where

'Inner satisfaction
dwindles in sharp
blades of expectation.'

Hopes at this stage fade with the strength of youthfulness and the zeal to move on with the enthusiasm for progress and prospect. When the earlier expectations prick up in the mind, it is as hurtful as 'sharp blades' cutting through the skin. This stage of life is where one gets to the peak of life, awaiting their passing, as there will be less strength and reflection of failed attempts and mistakes indicated with the 'red ink' that is indelible in the evaluation of life by oneself, and what society's judgment speaks of them.

Not only is Lenrie Peters' choice of diction relatable and properly used in the context of the poem, but it can also be celebrated for symbolism. Beyond the connotative meaning of his choice of words, there are deeper meanings associated with some of the words. In

line 3, for instance, the poet's use of 'fluttering' symbolizes the uncontrolled nature of aging/growing. Growing ceases only when one dies. Lenrie Peters' use of 'at twenty' in line 5 and 'at thirty' in line 9 is also symbolic. The aforementioned ages represent stages in the growth of humans. While 'at twenty' symbolizes determination and the start of adult life, 'at thirty,' on the other hand, represents a life stage of frustration, sweat, struggles, and disappointments. In line 13, 'legs' symbolize humans and movement. It is the leg that carries the upper part of the body "to and fro." Lenrie Peters' diction of copybook – in line 17, intensifies the symbol of different phases of life, which has been characterized by 'red ink'-actions, results, and failures. Similarly, 'three children' metamorphose into the standard or yardstick according to society when it comes to childbirth.

Didactic Analogy from the Poem

The poet throws a challenge to the up-and-coming youth on the stages of life, which neither bounce back for a restart nor provide an opportunity for corrections on mistakes made in life as we grow. Growing old alerts most people of tiny mistakes they might have committed earlier in life that will keep hunting them in life if hope is not restored.

The poet cautions us to be circumspect in managing societal expectations. It is of interest to note that many marriages have collapsed, and many youths have gotten involved in get-rich-quick schemes, where lives are lost due to societal expectations. Today's society breeds fake people who live fake lives. As a human, the poet personified the world to have control over those who cannot manage their expectations. They risk being slaves to undue societal pressure.

The strength and energy one has at his youthful age are not forever. Many rounds of outings and parties will be a thing of the past at one stage in life if one reaches the stage where family life and health issues consume you. A lot of invitations may be on your table, but you cannot honour all, if not none, due to health or financial constraints.

One's life expectations of himself have limits, after which frustration and hopelessness set in. Yet, with the realization of a little hope to urge one on, amends can restore a better life as long as one has life and health.

Another moral lesson presented in "Panic of Growing Older" is that old age comes with weaknesses, thereby admonishing young people to make hay while the sun shines. The poem points out that one only has the strength to achieve things when still young. At this stage, there is both time and energy such that those who really know what direction to channel these youthful resources will eventually come to the end of their lives filled with feelings of fulfilment and joy.

The aged, on the contrary, the persona so truly and relatedly observes, are weak and can hardly do anything other than sit and reminisce about the things they have done. At this point, the poetic persona loudly proclaims that "... the world now has you." Since the poem itself does not shy away from its biblical allusions, it would not be bad to conclude with a biblical note: "I must do the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can do any work."

The poem, generally, speaks of an irreversible life span that keeps growing if there is no stoppage until the end. One should take advantage of each stage and deal with it accordingly. Though if there is life, there is hope; an opportunity missed at a stage in life may never come our way again.

CONCLUSION

Man has a journey in life to make, with each stage of the journey unique. If you are a child, your faults may be considered due to bad training at home or school, with less blame on you. At a stage when you begin to mature, 'At twenty', you realize what you want to become and what society demands of you. If things go on well at this stage, there will be less difficulty because you will be prepared to meet the thirty and above years when family and societal expectations become the benchmark of your success or failure. Some of these expectations include childbearing and staying at home to take responsibility for your house and health, but not hovering around for pleasure and holidaying. At the end of one's life, it is society that tells the world of one's success or failure in life, not you. This poem is a good reflection of the journey of life, which cannot be reversed. The poet's sequence of ideas and use of diction and symbols with a specific year group aligned with its physical, psychological, and emotional expectancy make the poem a ladder for societal knowledge of preparedness.

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