



SYMBOLISM CONTAINED IN *THE SECRET GARDEN* BY FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

Andreas Fernando Ringgus Aryunianto¹

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Communication
State University of Bina Sarana Informatika

email: Andreasfernando@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims at indentifying the kinds of Symbols and finding the dominant of the Symbols that are found in *The Secret Garden* novel. What type of symbols in *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett and the meaning of symbols found. This research uses descriptive qualitative method by taking sources from a book by Frances Hodgson Burnett entitled *The Secret Garden*, looking for and describing in detail the symbols that exist. Data in the novel is analyzed using the theory of Symbols. The results of this study show that there 9 kinds of symbols; green, black, earth, water, sun, bird, seeds, rose, and garden which has different meaning. The symbols that appear are Frances' views in interpreting an object, so that it can be understood in her literary works. The dominant Symbols found in *The Secret Garden* novel are Garden. The garden is the main theme in the novel which has a symbol as affection. In analyzing it, the first thing to do is to read the entire novel and understand which ones have symbols in them. The advice from future researchers is to understand the symbols contained in several classifications to distinguish, so be careful in concluding the meaning of symbols in the novel with same interpretation. This study is important to know the message or meaning that the author wants to convey in Frances work.

Key words: Literature, Symbols, Novel, The Secret Garden

A. INTRODUCTION

Literature is an essential part of life and is a written language full of creativity. It has become second nature for authors to express what they feel and modify their literary work to convey their motives. Literature serves as a mirror of the culture and society in which it is produced. Through literature, we can learn and understand various aspects of human life such as values, conflicts, daily life, aspirations, and challenges faced by individuals and society. According to

¹ English Department, Faculty of Languages and Communication of State University of Bina Sarana Informatika



Ogundokun “Although literature is manmade, it can well reflect the prevailing day-to-day events and occurrences. Orally or in written form, literature offers a special mode of encountering past and contemporary realities”. (Ogundokun, 2021)

“Literature is an artistic expression of the best that is known and thought in world. It is a fine record of man’s ideas and ideals, aspirations and ambitions, joys and sorrows and experiences and excitements.” (Thomson, 2014) from here it can be seen that, the expression that comes from what the writers can will be poured into the literary work in the form of ideas and emotions.

In literature there are also methods, one of the methods found in literature is symbolism. It emerged through the adaptation of the literary method and became an influence on the development of literature. Symbols are tropological language in erudite workshop. Symbolism also plays a veritably important part in literature. “Symbolism is one of the most important aspects of serious imaginative literature” (McMahan, 1986). The author uses the symbol for can be recognized more deeply that it addresses what purpose and adds an aesthetic impression in its use.

Symbols in real life interpret an idea or object directly or indirectly. The interpretation of the meaning of the symbol lies with the reader to determine based on the atmosphere in which the writer creates. Symbolism is an important part of modern literature. Writers use and embrace symbolism in their writing. “Symbolism in poetry is a technique of using linguistic symbols to represent ideas and objects. Symbolism is also is the practice or art of making use of an object or a word to be representational of an abstract idea. An action, person, place, word, or object can all have a symbolic meaning in terms of suggesting an idea which is not directly mentioned”. (Veerasingam & Sumith Dananjaya, 2019)

Symbolism can also be seen as a forefront of modernism, which developed new and often abstract ways of expressing psychological truths and the idea that beyond the physical world lies a spiritual reality. In many contemporary literary texts in English and other languages, the use of symbolism is common. Symbolism, in fact, was used by many writers to vary their writings. The use of symbolism can be traced back to the 19th century when it was widely applied in writing by various French poets, but two centuries later this style is still relevant and important to English writers. “The main themes and motives introduced by symbolists are: urban nature, solitude, evasion, chromatics, some protesting attitude, the city, the sense of death, everything that is difficult to define: mystery, silence, wandering, melancholy, vices, the eulogy of logos.” (Pedersen, 2015)

Overall, symbols are words that have their own meaning, something that has meaning in a literary work, and its application is influenced by the author's interaction with reality. As mentioned Ananda Coomaraswamy in his book entitled *The door in the sky* that “Words are signs of things, they can also be read as symbols of what these things themselves imply.” And according to traditional symbols apply "poetic imagination" or symbols and technical rules of spiritual language that transcend all language confusion and are not unique to one time or place. For example a rose in English or Chinese has a sweet smell, or considered as a symbol may have a constant meaning. but it should be so depending on the assumption that there is a truly analogy reality at different reference levels. In addition Ananda defines symbols as what has meaning according to the reality of the author and his

correlation with others. “Adequate symbolism may be defined as the representation of a reality on a certain level of reference by a corresponding reality on another”(Coomaraswamy, 2020)

Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* chosen because it is notorious transnational bestseller. This technique was very important in literature. Frances Hodgson Burnett was a well-known writer, so the researcher chose to analyze *The Secret Garden*. It was published in 1911 because the novel met the requirements of this study.

In a word, there is a lot of symbolic meaning in the novel. Frances uses various symbolism to make the story more beautiful. Symbolism can express meaning as words, animals, and natural elements. The role of symbolism in this novel is to make the reader more excited to read the whole chapter of *The Secret Garden*.

Based on this explanation, this study is interested in analyzing both literal and symbolic symbolism used or found in a novel entitled *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Therefore, the writer is interested in conducting and analyzing a research entitled **Symbolism contained in *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett**

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The method used is qualitative methods by taking sources from a book by Frances Hodgson Burnett entitled *The Secret Garden*, looking for and describing in detail the symbols that exist. (Campbell, 2005) defined qualitative as “Some of the characteristics of qualitative research include taking place in a natural setting, using multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, emerging data rather than prefigured data, and being fundamentally interpretive”. (Campbell, 2005) explain Five strategies have been identified as qualitative research methods. They include ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research and narrative research.

Data collection use non-numerical narrative research based on book. The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and interpret issues or phenomena systematically from the point of view of the individual or population being studied, and to generate new concepts and theories (MOHAJAN, 2018). Data analysis using the theory according to (Alam, 2016) divided the symbol category into 9 : green, black, earth, water, sun, bird, seed, rose, and garden.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Green

In addition, according to (Frye, 1976, p. 102) green may symbolize hope or vegetable nature or a go sign in traffic or Irish patriotism as easily as jealousy. The green color contained in the novel symbolizes hope. When winter, plants show green color although just a little but they have it. Here are some of the symbols green colors found:

The color green appears when Dickon was cleaning the roots, cutting off the dead ones and leaving one alive if they still green in it. It signifies that hope was in the color green. It can be seen in the following monologue: “*He was very strong and clever with his knife and knew how to cut the dry and dead wood away, and could tell when an unpromising bough or twig had still **green** life in it.*” (Page 125)

Mary was so excited that she came to the secret garden in spring and was greeted with plants full of green. It can be seen in the following monologue: “*she was standing on the grass, which seemed to have turned **green**.*” (Page 181)

b. Black

Black Especially in Gothic literature from the West, a black color choice constantly represents death, bad, grief, and depression. The black color was very dominant and the symbol of evil or death. (Alam, 2016, p. 5) The black symbols in the novel are expressed as a depression where someone who was going through a difficult and dark time. Black symbols can be found as the following:

Mary met Martha's mother and Dickon sitting together around the fire. Martha also asked Mary to tell her story before she lived in uncle Archibald Craven's house, and Martha called it black because it is filled with depression about the difficulties she faced. It can be seen in the following dialogue: “*Eh! they did like to hear about you,*” said Martha. “*They wanted to know all about th' **blacks** an' about th' ship you came in. I couldn't tell 'em enough.*” (Page 85)

As Mr. Archibald Craven traveled back to Yorkshire, at the time he thought of his son and when his wife died, leaving him and his son behind and giving him hard times. It can be seen in the following monologue: “*He remembered the **black** days when he had raved like a madman because the child was alive and the mother was dead.*” (Page 332)

c. Earth

Earth is often associated with stability, presence, and a solid foundation. Earth symbols in literature can symbolize strength, resilience, and a solid foundation. Earth are also often considered the source of life and fertility. Earth symbols in literature can symbolize prosperity, growth, and abundance. Earthly images move high to the spiritual. (Smajli, 2013) Earth in the novel was intended as a symbol of fertility where all plants can grow well. All plants felt very alive with good soil fertility. The following earth symbols in the novel are found:

Mary dug up the soil and cleared the garden, at which point she smelled the rich odor of fertility. It can be seen in the following dialogue: “*There's naught as nice as th' smell o' good clean **earth**, except th' smell o' fresh growin' things when th' rain falls on 'em.*” (Page 126)

Mary told Colin what she knew about Dickon. She said that Dickon always looked at things from the good side, like something that would grow out of the fertile ground. It can be seen in the following dialogue: “*looking down at the **earth** to see something growing.*” (Page 172).

d. Water

Water is often associated with freedom and dynamic movement. Water symbols in literature can symbolize the changes, transitions, and transformations that occur in life or in a character's journey. Another the symbolic representation of water is source of life, as creation, sexual or artistic. (Starr, 1972, p. 159) The symbol of water in the novel interprets the changes that occur. Usually something from bad to better. The following are the water symbol found:

When Mary woke up she found that the storm had passed and resulted in clear skies. It can be seen in the following dialogue: *“Like the **waters** of some lovely bottomless lake.”* (Page 74)

Colin ordered Mr. Roach that whenever he went out no gardener should be seen working around the garden. It can be seen in the following dialogue: *“wondering if rolled in he was to receive instructions to fell all the oaks in the park or to transform the orchards into **water-gardens**.”* (Page 240)

e. The sun

The sun symbol is one of the most frequently used symbols in literature. The sun often represents various meanings and ideas that include life, brightness, strength, power, awakening, and illumination. The sun symbol is also often associated with energy, warmth, and wisdom. The sun is a source of warmth, regeneration, and resilience in the face of oppression (Neimneh, 2017). In her novel Frances gives the sun symbols as energy and warmth the sun shines on everything in the garden and gives it to all beings. Here are the sun symbols contained in the novel:

Mary loved her secret garden where she was free to run around the garden. The sun shone warmly into the garden. It can be seen in the following monologue: *“**The sun** could get at them and warm them, and when the rain came down it could reach them at once, so they began to feel very much alive.”* (Page 108)

Similar to the previous example, the sun provides warmth and energy for the plants in the garden. It can be seen in the following monologue: *“It is **the sun** shining on the rain and the rain falling on the sunshine, and things pushing up and working under the earth.”* (Page 155-156)

f. Bird

Frances also gives an animal symbol in her work, which the symbol of bird. Birds in the novel have the definition of wise, gentle nature-part and also curiosity. Bird is Symbol of resurrection, immortality, and transformation. Bird is believed to regenerate from the ashes and symbolizes positive change and awakening from adversity.” Bird is the symbol of artist and the work of art, as it is known the bird is the ancient image of spiritual.” (Smajli, 2013) The bird symbol in novel appears

as a curiosity for something. Animals that have human-like feelings and personalities. The following are the bird symbol contained in the novel:

When Mary asked what bird was pecking at the branch, Martha explained that it was a redbreast bird that was friendly and curious like humans. It can be seen in the following dialogue: *“He’s a Robin redbreast an’ they’re th’ friendliest, curiosest **bird** alive. They’re almost as friendly as dogs-if you know how to get on with ‘em. Watch him peckin’ about there an’ lookin’ round at us now an’ again. He knows we’re talkin’ about him.”* (Page 50-51)

Mary and Dickon met robin the bird and she asked robin a question. Robin chirped as if answering Mary's question. It can be seen in the following dialogue: *“Do you understand everything **birds** say?”* (Page 119)

g. Rose

The rose symbol is one that appears frequently in literature. Roses are often used as symbols in literary works to represent a variety of meanings that include love, beauty, tenderness, and sometimes also contrasted with thorns that symbolize hardship or suffering. Roses are widely used even today as a symbol of affection and beauty, valued for its shape and fragrance (Kandeler & Ullrich, 2009). The symbols rose interpreted as affection in the novel. And the most visible is the love given by the mother to her child. Here are the rose symbols in the novel that mostly found:

Ben Weatherstaff was once ordered to look after Colin's mother's roses. Mrs. Craven took care of the roses and raised them like her own children and when she couldn't, Ben was ordered to look after them. It can be seen in the following dialogue: *“if ever I'm ill or if I go away you must take care of my **roses**,”* (Page 265) Ben Weatherstaff prepared a hole for the rose to grow in during spring. It can be seen in the following monologue: *“Iris and white lilies **rose** out of the grass in sheaves”* (Page 271)

h. Seeds

Seed symbols in literature can be interpreted as initial or forerunner symbols that carry meanings that will develop or evolve over the course of the story. “Seeds might first be interpreted as a symbol of fertility.” (Mendonca de Carvalho, 2011, p. 6) Seeds show a symbol to start a new life like flower seeds that are planted over time will grow into new flowers.

The seed symbol was shown when Mary wanted to plant some seeds to change a garden that looked dead and asked Martha if she had any. It can be seen in the following dialogue: *“If I have **seeds** and can make flowers grow the garden won't be dead at all—it will come alive.”* (Page 103)

Mary asked her uncle Mr. Archibald Craven if she could have some land in the garden to plant seeds in to make it feel more alive. It can be seen in the following

dialogue: *"To plant seeds in-to make things grow-to see them come alive."* (Page 140)

i. Garden

Garden symbols are elements that are often used in literature to represent various meanings and ideas. Gardens can reflect sanctuary, beauty, peace, or fertility. Garden symbolism is often used to convey deeper messages about life, personal development, and the human condition. In her article, Ratih found that the garden is a symbol of healing for Mary. (Putri, 2022) The symbols garden in the novel functions as a guardian that protects and nurtures what is within it. Like the role of a mother who looks after a child. The following are the garden symbol found in the novel:

Colin hoped that Susan Sowerby was his mother because she looked after him, but Susan said that she believed Colin's mother also looked after him through the garden. It can be seen in the following dialogue: *"Thy own mother's in this 'ere very garden, I do believe. She couldna' keep out of it."* (Page 332)

The first time Colin entered the secret garden he felt protected by the garden itself. It can be seen in the following dialogue: *"And it was like that with Colin when he first saw and heard and felt the Springtime inside the four high walls of a hidden garden."* (Page 248)

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

From the above research is found that there is symbols in the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett in the research with 9 types of data divided into green, black, earth, water, sun, bird, seeds, rose, and garden. But the most dominant is the symbol of place type, which is garden. The garden symbol in the novel represents a symbol of protector. Mary and Colin are both motherless and have to mother themselves. The garden keeps them secure, just as a nest keeps baby birds secure, and they venture out at their own pace as they explore the world and develop their growing selves. From what writer finds, we can conclude that Frances gives a different take on symbols in her work, in line with her theme. She expresses what she thinks about things in an interesting way. In the novel, she often gives the meaning of life from the main setting, the garden. It is undeniable that the use of symbol types from Alam theory is very helpful for researcher in analyzing the symbols contained in the novel *"The Secret Garden"* by Frances Hudgson Burnett. This research is expected to help the meaning of symbols in novels is different. The first thing to do is to read the entire novel and understand which ones have symbols in them. Researchers can compare with the definition of symbols that have been found by experts as a benchmark in finding which symbols have meaning in them and adequate variables. Expand the scope of insight into the meaning of each symbol classification obtained and give it in accordance with the general symbols in the novel. After that it can be said that the meaning comes from the overall

meaning of the symbols for each word found. The advice from future researchers is to understand the symbols contained in several classifications to distinguish, so be careful in concluding the meaning of symbols in the novel with same interpretation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alam, M. Z. (2016). *Symbolism: Theory, Function, Characteristics and Dimension*. 1–23.
- Campbell, S. (2005). What is qualitative research? *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(7), 859–860. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305279135>
- Coomaraswamy, A. (2020). Literary Symbolism. In *The Door in the Sky* (pp. 184–191). Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv15r5ddt.14>
- Frye, N. (1976). *Anatomy of Criticism, with a new foreword by Harold Bloom*.
- Kandeler, R., & Ullrich, W. R. (2009). Symbolism of plants: Examples from European-Mediterranean culture presented with biology and history of art. *Journal of Experimental Botany*, 60(13), 3611–3613. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jxb/erp215>
- Mendonca de Carvalho, L. M. (2011). The symbolic uses of plants. *Ethnobiology*, 1987, 351–369.
- Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 7(1), 23. <https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v7i1.571>
- Neimneh, S. S. (2017). The Symbolism of the Sun in Ghassan Kanafani's Fiction: A Political Critique. *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies*, 5(3), 67. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijclts.v.5n.3p.67>
- Ogundokun, S. A. (2021). Functions Of Literature: A New Reading Of Six Francophone African Novels. *Journal for Foreign Languages*, 13(1), 281–295. <https://doi.org/10.4312/VESTNIK.13.281-295>
- Pedersen, E. G. (2015). Symbolism, the Beginning of Modern Poetry. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 180, 593–599. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.02.165>
- Putri, R. P. (2022). Natural Healing In Frances Hodgson Burnett ' S The Secret Garden Ratih Pelangi Putri. *Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 10(1).
- Smajli, B. (2013). Sailing to Byzantium and Byzantium of W. B. Yeats – A Symbolical Viewpoint According to the Creation of Primal Elements.

Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies.
<https://doi.org/10.5901/ajis.2012.v2n4p223>

Starr, W. T. (1972). Water symbols in the novels of Romain Rolland. *Neophilologus*, 56(2), 146–161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01515372>

Thomson, A. (2014). What is literature? *The Edinburgh Introduction to Studying English Literature: Second Edition*, 3–15. <https://doi.org/10.5840/thought1941161208>

Veerasingam, E. B., & Sumith Dananjaya, W. M. (2019). Significance of Symbols in Poetry Titles: A Study on A. E. Houseman’s “Farewell to Barn and Stack and Tree.” *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications (IJSRP)*, 9(11), p9583. <https://doi.org/10.29322/ij srp.9.11.2019.p9584>

