

WEIRD IMAGINATION AS EXPLICATED IN THE WORLD LITERATURE

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A.L. Katonis
Thessaloniki University, Greece
Greek Chair, JNU, New Delhi

Comparative Literature is an academic field dealing with the study of literature and cultural expression across linguistic, national and disciplinary boundaries. Archetypes, C.G. Jung, C. Kerényi and psychology seem to be next but do not go as far as that. Although more engaged in Comparative Philology, I venture to say a few words on Khushwant Singh and his fellow literati: a comparison is always always challenging.

The American school of comparative literature was more closely aligned with the original internationalist visions of Goethe and Posnett (a pioneer in the field) looking for examples of universal human truths based on the literary archetypes that appeared throughout literatures from all times and places. After studying the works of Khushwant Singh one feels to realize that human anxieties and anguishes can be found in any form of literature written anywhere in the world.

The anxieties and anguishes of a human being living in present turbulent world is well delineated in Khushwant Singh’s short stories. For instance, in his short story ‘Posthumous’ he narrated a strange experience. He gave up his life in order to detect and discover the true faith and affection shown by his friends and relatives. He felt sad for not having given adequate importance in the obituary notices after his death. He expected a great reaction after the

announcement of his death. His friend Qadir too attended his daily work rather than consoling his friend's wife. His other friend Khosla also did not pay visit to his house. But he went to the court as usual. Another friend who happened to be a professor just handed over the book the 'Gita' to his wife. He said that it would give her needed comfort. According to him human life is as momentary as a bubble. The narrator had three ways open to him then. One was to take the route to the cremation ground and give himself up to the scorching flames, perhaps to be born again into a better world. There was another road which would lead to the city where harlots and other people of ill-repute lived. They drank and gambled and fornicated. Theirs was a world of sensation. The third one was to take the way back. He was perplexed and could not take any decision. He did not know whether to reach the world beyond or to Join the throng of sensation seekers or to retrace his steps to a humdrum existence bereft of the spirit of adventure and denuded of the lust for living.

The American poetess Emily Dickinson (her frequent topics were death and immortality) also had such a weird imagination. As Singh could see what happened after his death, the poetess could narrate the incidents which happen after her death. For, Death in the form of a gentleman suitor, stops and picks up the narrator and takes her on a ride in his horse drawn carriage. They move along at a relaxed pace and the narrator seems utterly at ease with the gentleman. They pass through the town. Children are playing happily. She could see fields of grain and the glory of setting Sun. When the dusk sets in, it becomes a little chilly as she is wearing a thin silk shawl for a coat. She was really unprepared for her impromptu date with Death when she got dressed that morning. They stop at what will be her burial ground marked with a small head stone.

*Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The carriage held but just ourselves
And immortality.*

The following lines also express strange incidents :

*We passed the school, where children strove
At recess – in the Ring –
We passed the fields of gazing grain
We passed the setting Sun –
Or rather He passed us.*

The Irish writer and poet Louis Macneice in the poem entitled ‘Prayer Before Birth’ expresses strange imagination in a different way. Here, the poet imagines to be a child not yet born and expresses weird ideas. The poem shows a mood of gruesomeness. The unborn child offers a harsh opinion of the world he or she will be born into.

*Let not the blood sucking bat or the
rat or the stoat or the
club – footed ghoul come near me.
I am not yet born, console me
I fear that the human race may with tall walls
Wall me,
With strong drugs dope me,
with wise lies lure me.*

The unborn child fears a life of being doped up by drugs. The child also fears that walls will be constructed around it so that it cannot live free.

In essence, this unborn child wants to grow up, after birth, to be a person with compassion, empathy, and love for others. However, he or she fears that he or she will become a robot, in a confused and chaotic world that will beat him or her down.

*I am not yet born, rehearse me
In the parts I must play and the cues I must
take when old men lecture me,
bureaucrats hector me,
mountains frown at me,
lovers laugh at me, the
waves call me to folly and the desert calls me to doom
and the beggar refuses my gift and my children curse me.*

The anguish of an unborn child narrated vividly.

In the poem entitled ‘Hide and Seek’ Tagore uses weird imagination. A child called Khoka dreams of becoming a champa flower without the knowledge of the mother.

*If I played a naughty trick on you, Mum
and flowered as a champa on a champa tree,
and at sunrise, upon a branch
had a good play among the young leaves,
then you'd lose, and I'd be the winner,
for you wouldn't recognise me*

In the morning when the mother walks under the champa tree. She could not know that her son has become a champa flower.

*from here you'd go to the chapel
and smell flowers from afar –
you wouldn't know that it was
the smell of your Khoka's body in the air*

At noon, the mother would take rest after lunch. The shadow of the tree and also the champa flower would fall on her. But she could not recognise that it is the shadow of Khoka, her son.

*I would bring my little shadow close to you
and sway it softly on your book –
you wouldn't know that it was
your Khoka's shadow moving before your eyes.*

It is really a strange imagination for a little boy to dream of becoming a flower and to think about different events interestingly.

To sum up, Khushwant Singh, Emily Dickinson, Louis Macneice and Rabindranath Tagore have narrated in their works the strange experience of different people in different ways. Yet the weird imagination of the writers makes the readers get similarly excited.