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Sacrificial Scapegoat Archetype in Edward Albee's *The Goat or who is Sylvia?*

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to argue sacrificial scapegoat archetype in *The Goat or Who is Sylvia*? by Edward Albee, one of the famous American dramatist. For gaining this aim, first, a summary of the play is given. Second, tension and problem which is oriented round a sexual transgression in this play will be discussed. Third, the situation in which recognition and revelation of the problem occurs is to be exposed. Fourth, the role of vehicle which in this play casts on the goat as a scapegoat will be considered and fifth, the significance of sacrificial scapegoat on the play will be argued.

Introduction

Choosing publicly unpleasing themes, Albee was a public notoriety for a while. But both critics and audience gradually come along with the novelty embedded in his plays that manipulates their consciousness. His drama tries to dramatize reality of man's condition. Albee deliberately tries his hand in writing the plays that focus on illusions and false hopes that deviate man from reality. In his plays, he represents the process in which these illusions collapse. In this way, his drama makes the audience and even the characters in the plays face with the reality of life screen behind the illusion. In some of his plays, Albee exposes the family life and marital relations and his rendered families are mostly in distress. Family members erode emotionally by a kind of unpopular trouble hard to reveal publicly.

Statement of the Problem

An important theme reflected in some literary works, is removing disaster in the form of reflecting it on an animal or a person. This animal or person must be killed or discarded to atone for the people's sins and restore welfare, peace and fruitfulness. This sacrificial act has a root in human beings' collective unconscious and can be subcategorized under the broad category of archetypes. Similar to all archetypes, sacrificial archetype is stored in the collective unconscious. In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Carl Jung proposes that human cultures share a collective and impersonal psychic system, consisting of pre-existence forms. Jung defines these pre-existence forms as archetypes. He argues that the subject can be aware of such forms only when they are given specific personal psychic forms. This means that these archetypes can find a channel of expression in art, myth, dream, religion and even the eventual facing of death.

Although sacrificial ceremonies may be slightly different from one another, they mostly are similar in their origin and original experience. This original experience intends to remove tension and calamity from human life and for regained peace, prosperity and fertility. From ancient samples, one can mention an offering in the form of an animal or a human being in order to appease the wrath of gods. Throughout different times and in different communities, the sacrificial victim was an animal, a king, the hero of a tribe, or a deformed person.

In *The goat or Who's Sylvia*? the architect's wife concludes that the existence of her husband's unusual beloved disturbs their ordinary and normal process of familial life. She tries to kill the goat, her husband's beloved.

This play deals with human fears and weaknesses. In certain situations, people put their problematic burden on a person or an animal and banish or kill him or it to relieve their tension. This kind of displacement can be considered as a kind of sacrificial archetype that is a subcategory of the general category of archetypes residing in a collective unconscious.

Research Questions

In order to provide an acceptable interpretation of these two plays, the study attempts to answer the following questions

- What are tensions and crisis in this play?
- Which elements of sacrificial scapegoat does *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?* contain?
- How can tension be removed and peace restored by sacrificing a scapegoat?

Methodology

Albee exposes fundamental realities common among human species. So, his writings seem to be suitable cases for reading in the realm of mythological and archetypal studies. Discussing Albee's selected plays by means of the mythological and archetypal approach, the researcher tried to offer a general knowledge on the main proponent of archetypal theory in the twentieth century, i.e. C. G. Jung who exposes collective unconscious, archetypes, and primordial images. Jung posits that in addition to individual's immediate consciousness and also distinguished from personal unconscious, there exists a universal and collective psyche system identical in all individuals. He calls it collective unconscious. The Unconscious plays a profound role in his archetypal theory. The language of unconscious mind is symbolic. Therefore, it uses images and

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symbols to convey its messages. This part of the psyche that is shared by all individuals consists of latent and instinctive patterns of thought and feeling. It has no tendency to become conscious under normal situations. In fact, it is a potentiality inherited from the primordial times in the form of symbolic images and can be assured of through its actualized effects in art, literature, religion and so forth. He believes that collective unconscious is made up of myths and archetypes. For him, the archetypes are active only when they find their corresponding environmental incidents or context. By finding their suitable corresponding stimuli, they are actualized and entered to the consciousness.

Another noteworthy contributor to archetypal approach is Frazer with his monumental book, *The Golden Bough*. Frazer has had a wide influence on men of letters and Euro-American thinkers for his endeavors to make a vast range of primitive customs appear. One of the archetypes that Frazer exemplifies in details is the sacrificial scapegoat archetype with its relevant rituals and beliefs such as the belief in the transference and expulsion of the evils that is tended to be performed publicly either occasionally or periodically, the rituals associated with the choosing a vehicle or a victim, the material or immaterial vehicle, and so on. He demonstrates that regardless of the subtle variations among the sacrificial scapegoat rituals, they occur in the situations that have some similarities in common. These similarities can be summed up as spreading calamity, inability of the community member to control it, attributing it to God's or gods' wrath created as a result of their sinful actions, finding a representative of their group with some distinctive features from the rest, casting the blame of their sin or guilt on their chosen victim as their scapegoat and dismissing it from the community in hope for regeneration, rebirth and welfare.

Summary of the play

The Goat or Who is Sylvia? which is consisted of three scenes shows two days of Gray family. Martin who is a well-known architect and also the protagonist of this play has just received the Pritzker Prize which is the world's top prize for architecture equivalent to Noble Prize for his profession. He is at the pinnacle of his career. Furthermore, he is selected for an important project of designing a twenty-seven billion dollar World City in the wheat fields of Kansas and now, he is celebrating his fiftieth birthday. He has a 22-year-old marriage and it seems that he has wonderful relationship with his wife, Stevie. As an ideal wife for supporting him emotionally and mentally, Stevie is suited to Martin's accomplishments. They tolerantly come to term with the fact that their 17-year-old son, Billy, has gay inclination.

When the play begins, Martin is confused. He complains the state of his memory to his wife. Martin tells secret love-affair to Stevie but she did not consider him serious. Admiring him, Stevie considers his mental distraction as a sign of his advancing age. Ross Tuttle, Martin's best friend for 40 years who is a television journalist, enters to have a public interview with Martin on his recent achievements. Ross finds Martin distracted and confused, too. So, as a friend, he tries to persuade Martin trusting on him as a confident.

Martin confesses to him and all that Ross understands is Martin's falling in love, having a 6-month affair with a goat whose name is Sylvia and his wish is to go behind the barn in rustic Connecticut to visit her.

Ross thinks that it is his duty to inform Stevie about Martin's affair by letter. Stevie confronts Martin with a letter in his hand. Once enamored with her husband, Stevie changes to the enraged woman experiencing bewilderment and disbelief. The family confronts with this secret. Stevie who is highly strung and angry reacts to the revealed fact with scream, rage and destruction by smashing plates and overturning furniture.

In scene two, Stevie tries to understand Martin's action through his bestial revelation and explanation but she can not stand or sit to hear without expressing her anger. Martin who does not feel guilt for doing something wrong sits quietly and listens to Stevie's speeches. Gradually, Martin's temperature rises, too.

Martin is frustrated in convincing his wife about the purity of his love for Sylvia and on the other hand, still being in love for Stevie. Stevie both by words and action tries to affect on Martin. She speaks about their comfortable and calm life that they had been content with. She tells him that he brought her down and she will bring him down with her and rushes out.

Martin lashes out at his anger at Billy when the boy tells him of having the task for confession and admission. Billy is horrified by his father's action and is frightened with inevitability of the damage threatening their family life.

The final scene focuses on Martin's relationship with his gay son who is confused about his parents. The son who is presented as an angry and vulnerable teenager shows his erotic and needy desire for his father with a kiss. Ross accidentally witnesses this scene on his return.

At last, Stevie returns dragging the corpse of the goat, Sylvia. Unable to accept her husband's infidelity and transgression in having interspecies relationship which leads to destroy their marriage, Stevie slays the goat.

Tension in Family

The Goat or Who is Sylvia? depicts a prosperous family with health, wealth, professional and social success that degenerates into anxious situation by a calamity produced by sexual transgression. The family's fundamental problem arouses from Martin's deviation from "a spectrum of human sexuality that overlaps with a larger range of social and private behaviors.(Bottom, 200)" This underlying tension emerges from the consequences of Martin's action in trampling the values, his marital infidelity, repressing the social taboo, acting against the rules of nature and civilization and so on.

In fact, the values that are hold by others are no longer valid for Martin. As a convention-thwarting character, he transgresses them. Although Martin is a creative person, he is in the way of decadence because of repressing socially accepted values.

On the other hand, reality of the tension caused by him presses on family relationship and transmits beyond Martin's individual life. In fact, his infested behavior in having love-affair with a goat and perusing irrational ecstasy defects his relationship with other members of his family and to a larger scale his friend as a member of society.

His acting on such irrational desire is against the rules of social commodity internalized by men through the dominant social order as rules of cultural conduct and companionship. They all accept it as bestiality. With such bestial action, his marital relationship goes awry. Transgression in the rules of marriage, sexuality and having amino-sexuality which is considered as a social taboo is an unbearable fact for everyone who is in close contact with him, even for his gay son who has a degree of transgression from social norms of sexuality.

From another view point, Martin's distinct form of love-making causes tension because it tramples nature and

civilization. One reason that makes Martin's action out of tolerance is that bestiality, generally accepted, is an action mostly done by people who have no other choice for sexual fulfillment not a man like Martin whose wife loves him and embraces him sexually. Furthermore, he deviates from the rules of nature in having relationship with an animal which belong to inferior species in comparison to man.

Recognition of the Tension

When the play starts, Martin has been having a love-affair with a goat for months, but it is recognized as a problem when it is disclosed by himself to his wife and his close friend. All characters in the play are irritated by Martin's confession to his digression. Both Ross and Stevie consider it as a serious problem. They feel a kind of responsibility for saving Martin and his family life from this problem. When, for the first time, Martin confesses to Stevie, she considers it as a joke not a serious matter. Ross who sees Martin's indifference to his recent accomplishments tries to find out the reason;

Ross: probably the most important wee to your life …

Martin: (Impressed, if uninvolved.) Really!

Ross: … and you act like you don't know whether you're coming or going, like you don't know where you are.

Martin: (self-absorbed, almost to himself.) Maybe it's … Love or something. (30)

With such remarks, Ross recognizes Martin's falling in love. At first, Ross thinks Martin makes love with a woman but when he shows his beloved's photo, he is shocked.

Ross: THIS IS A GOAT! YOU'RE HVING AN AFFAIR WITH A GOAT! YOU'RE FUCKING A GOAT!

Martin: Yes. (46)

Ross, who symbolizes the social voice in this play, directs in opposition to Martin's act. In fact, Ross believes that Martin's professional success, public self and peaceful family life is depended on the quality of his personal life. He writes a letter to Stevie;

Ross: … because I love you both … I can't stay silent at a time of crisis for you both, for Martin's public image. (49)

But after Ross' revelation to Stevie, she totally infuriates and mixes up. Stevie considers Martin's act as "bestiality". (59) Amazed and distressed from their misfortune, Stevie can not perceive how Martin can love both her and the goat.

Stevie: But I'm a human being; I have only two breasts; I walk upright; I give milk only on special occasions; I use the toilet. (Begin to cry)You love me? I don't understand. (52)

This tension creates a kind of tragic situation controlling their life.

Martin: What are you doing?

Stevie: Being tragic … (81)

Her destruction of her surroundings and furniture as Everett Evans explains change "their perfect living room into a visible manifestation of their shattered marriage."(P. I.) It shows that coming to term with such disastrous misfortune is too difficult for Stevie.

Belly's reaction to his father's revealed fact is one of confusion. After Stevie's departure he has a battle scene with his father.

Regaining peace

Being disturbed by Martin's act, Ross, Stevie and Billy try to restore the previously peaceful and calm situation in their own ways. For instance, Ross by informing Stevie from this devastating fact, Stevie by her agitation, strong reaction and uproar that she has done for threatening Martin and Billy by having a battle scene with his father after his mother's departure. But, the most severe stroke is blown by Stevie's act of slaughtering the goat to eradicate their problem from its very root.

Vehicle (Sacrificial Scapegoat)

The Goat or Who is Sylvia? shows Martin's Cross-species relationship. In this case, the goat can be considered as other, one from another species that because of her differences from the other characters is secluded as a scapegoat. In fact, the burden of Martin's "self-indulgent mess" (Gardner, P.3D) and digression casts on the goat who is sacrificed eventually by Stevie for ridding the tension in their family and bringing back their previous peace. Although the goat is the least blameworthy creature in this play, Stevie projects "the physical projections of an internal rage" (Bottom, 212) on the goat. If there is a mistake or guilt in Martin's side, it is the goat that is killed for his atonement. On the other hand, being visible to the Common eyes, the goat can be considered as a material vehicle or scapegoat. She also plays the rule of family scapegoat holding the responsibility of their multitude problems.

The Significance of Sacrificial Scapegoat

Gray's family, once has been living as a prosperous family, is disturbed by Martin's unapproved and bestial love-making that disintegrates the family. Stevie's act of killing the goat shows her unconscious belief in transferring the burden of Martin's irrational love-affair, his sexual transgression, his trampling of cultural taboo, violation of nature and civilization, infidelity to his wife, shattering the limits of the other's tolerance, and so on. All these can be estimate as diseases cast on the goat in order to be eliminated. So, the sacrificial goat is offered in order to gather together this wounded family.

Conclusion

It seems that *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?* represent characters captured and imprisoned in their tension and distress. Albee, in this play offers a presentation of misfortunes in the marital life and love. He expresses the frustrations and calamities of the lives deviate from the norms of living.

In *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?* Gray's family, once prosperous, are encountered with infamous news about Martin's transgression in having improper and sexual love-affair with a goat. Consequently, tension and uproar spread among the family members. Martin's friend and his family estimate his practice as a disdainful shame. Marin's infidelity to his wife and irresponsibility to his duty as a father and a husband, his deviation from the social and cultural norms and trampling the marriage laws create turmoil unbearable to endure for every one even himself. His tendency to continue his manner makes his wife kill the goat in a particular occasion for saving their nearly disintegrated life to its former peace. As a scapegoat, the blameless goat bears the burden of Martin's guilt. Killing the goat is considered as an immediate or immaterial expulsion of their supposed evil because of the visibility of the goat to the common eyes.

It is evident that in this play, Albee has skillfully exploited the structural capabilities like language, atmosphere, setting to render both a troublesome situation before sacrificing and a peaceful situation after sacrificing the family scapegoat.

Suggestion for Further Research

Many critics have investigated different concepts in Albee's plays but his works still have much more to reveal. Since Albee's deep interests are in revealing unresolved tension in middle-class Americans, mixing darkness and light, fearless

search for meaning, focusing on the American family and its problems, characters' deep fear of something, etc. Therefore, his drama contains many new subjects. And as it is a fact about all literary analysis, no theory is broad enough to cover all the critical issues of a literary work. Indeed, his major plays can be analyzed from different perspectives. As for future studies to be done on Albee's works, the researcher suggests some worthwhile aspects of his drama.

Although the researcher of this article has chosen one especial archetype, i.e. sacrificial archetype for discussing a play written by Albee, the possibility of existing other archetypes like the death and the rebirth, the initiation, the archetypal woman, quest, hero archetype, etc. can be surveyed in this play and Albee's other plays to provide a better understanding of his drama.

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