



Analysis of The Elements of Symbolism in The Novel *Le Livre de Monelle* by Marcel Schwob

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the analysis of symbols within Marcel Schwob's novel, "Le Livre de Monelle," employing a semiotic framework coupled with a sequential study methodology. Symbolism in literary works embodies a myriad of connotations, contributing to the richness and depth of the narrative. The objective of this research is to discern and elucidate the symbolic representations encapsulated in Schwob's "Le Livre de Monelle", unraveling their profound meanings as articulated by the author. The qualitative approach undertaken here aims to decode the meanings underlying the symbols embedded within Schwob's narrative. Twenty symbols are identified and interpreted within the context of Saussure's theory. These symbols include the meadow symbolizing freedom and inner peace, the ember signifying destruction, the snakeskin representing embodiment, the duality of the baby basket and coffin denoting life and death, the dichotomy of white and black representing good and bad, the rose symbolizing beauty and courage, the phoenix bird emblematic of immortality, nudity as a symbol of honesty, the character *L'egoïste's* actions as a representation of greed, the brown back symbolizing hard work, the sun as a harbinger of glory and hope, the cross figure symbolizing divinity, the mirror reflecting loneliness, embers as a representation of passion, the black dress signifying sorrow, ashes as a symbol of grief, the actions of the character Morgane representing emptiness, the green finale as a symbol of sacrifice, the lamp embodying hope, and the cocoon symbolizing transformation. This examination not only identifies these symbols but also deciphers their contextual significance within the narrative, shedding light on the intricate layers of meaning woven into Schwob's literary tapestry.

Keywords: *Le Livre de Monelle, Marcel Schwob, symbolism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literary works cannot be separated from the use of symbols, figures of speech, and other figurative forms. Through literary works, there are usually so many symbols that the author wants to convey to express a meaning because basically, literary works are an overflow of feelings, thoughts, and desires that the author shows in the language in every word in his literary work (Setiawan, 2018). However, most people as readers often find it difficult to capture exactly what the author wants to convey. This can sometimes become a polemic in the community related to language, namely the desire to explore every meaning contained in it.

One example of polemics that exist in this society is the use of symbols in literary works that can lead to various interpretations for readers to understand the author's intentions in depth in his work. The symbols in a literary work are motivated by the complex reality of life and the surrounding cultural background of the author himself because literary works are the result of the author's creation as a member of society who was not born in a socio-cultural vacuum (Pradopo, 1995). Symbolism derived from the author's complex background is what creates diversity, uniqueness, and distinctiveness in every existing literary work. Symbolism in a literary work is used by the author as a way to display his ideas and emotions (Stanton, 2007).

However, a text in a literary work may or may not be seen as a symbol, it depends on the reader's interpretation (Luxemburg, Bal, Westeijn, 1992). This is what triggers the aforementioned polemic, symbols cannot be understood

directly, it requires a complex thought process. In the 19th century, French literary poets used symbols as a tool to convey various ideas in their poems or works.

Mayer André Marcel Schwob, known as Marcel Scwhob, was a French symbolist writer. During his lifetime *Le Livre de Monelle* (1894) was so widely recognized that it became the unofficial bible of the French symbolist movement that it inspired many great writers such as Guillaume Apollinaire and Jorge Luis Borges to Roberto Bolaño. One of Schwob's works also found favor with contemporaries such as Stephane Mallarmé, Alfred Jarry, and André Gide. Many readers who have read this book have found *Le Livre de Monelle* to be a very mysterious and haunting work. The book is also the fruit of Schwob's intense emotional anguish over the loss of his love, a "street girl" named Louise whom he befriended in 1891 and died of tuberculosis two years later. In the book, Scwob refers to Louise as Monelle, which translates to dia-ku in Indonesian and my-her in English. The book tells the story of Monelle's various sisters, including girls who succumb to disappointment, caught between the misleading world of childish fantasy and the bitter world of reality. The story in this book is beautiful in the heartbreaking agony that materializes from the words written by Schwob.

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Symbolism in literature refers to the use of symbols or symbols that have a deeper or figurative meaning beyond their literal meaning. Symbolism can be used to convey more complex ideas, themes, or concepts indirectly. A symbol according to Landy (1972) is something that contains more meaning than it actually does. In a literary work, symbols can be words, phrases, scenes, or episodes and actions that lead to something that can be seen directly but also lead to something else. Symbolism in literature can also take the form of concrete objects, such as flowers, birds, or houses that represent something more abstract or complex such as love, life, or freedom. In addition, symbolism can also be represented by colors, music, sounds, or even certain situations or scenes in the story.

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2. METHOD

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative analysis method and the approach used is descriptive qualitative analysis which is directed or focused on symbolism. The main data is from the novel *Le Livre de Monelle* (1894) by Marcel Schwob. Saussure's semiotic theory was employed by using an instrument in the form of data cards. The data card shown in Table 1 was used to analyze the symbols contained in the novel *Le Livre de Monelle*.

Table 1. Elements of symbolism in *Le Livre de Monelle*

No.	Data Number	Signifie	Signifier	Meaning

Data analysis was carried out in the following ways: 1) reading the entire content of the novel *Le Livre de Monelle*, 2) identifying data, 3) collecting data, 4) analyzing in descriptive form by understanding, 5) marking the signs, 6) writing the results of the research. This data analysis technique is carried out by content analysis which is carried out by close reading, identifying data, reading notes, and giving marks to the data carefully.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the analyses of the symbols along with their meanings contained in the novel *Le Livre de Monelle*.

3.1. Meadow as a Symbol of Freedom and Inner Peace

Data (01)

Monelle finds and grabs my character's hand in the meadow.

Monelle found me in a meadow where I was walking and took my hand.
 “Don’t be surprised,” she said, “This is who I am and this is not who I am;
 “You will find me again and you will lose me again;
 “Once again I will appear among you; for few men have met me and none have been able to understand me;
 “And you will forget me and you will recognize me and you will forget me.”

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:1)

Referring to the context, it can be seen that the meadow becomes a symbol of freedom and inner peace where my character feels free and calm when Monelle finds her to grab her back. My character’s inner peace can be illustrated when Monelle tries to calm her down with words about her presence.

3.2. Coal as a Symbol of Destruction

Data (02)

Monelle speaks of destruction where she says to burn everything on earth and in the sky.

“Take this coal,” he said. “and set it on fire. Burn everything in the earth and the sky. And destroy this fennel and extinguish the coals when you have finished burning, for no one should be infected.”

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:7)

In this meaning, referring to the context, coals symbolize destruction where life is actually not eternal because one day the coals will also be destroyed. And fennel, which is a plant for medicine, cannot even always be a cure for the pain or suffering he feels. In essence, the author conveys that nothing is eternal in this world and there are even some things that must fail, be destroyed, and even perish.

3.3. Snakeskin as a Symbol of Embodiment

Data (03)

Monelle talks about embodiment, which is likened to a snakeskin that changes shape.

The desire for novelty is merely the soul’s thirst for form. And the souls that shed their worn-out forms are no more than snakes that abandon old skins.

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:7)

By looking at the context of the snake skin symbol, it can be interpreted that after destruction occurs in life there is always a re-materialization just like the change of snake skin which is destroyed and then materializes again into a new skin.

3.4. Baby Basket and Coffin as Symbols of Life and Death

Data (04)

Monelle says something about time to appreciate it more.

Do not be late with time: you will end up suffering. Look: each moment is both a baby basket and a coffin: may all life and all death seem strange and new to you.

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:9)

In this interpretation, the baby basket is seen as a symbol of birth or life where time begins, while the coffin can mean death where time ends.

3.5. White and Black as Symbols of Good and Bad

Data (05)

Monelle says about death not to divide reality between life and death.

And Monelle said again: I will tell you about life and death. The times are like sticks, half black and half white; Do not arrange your life based on the picture made by the white beak. Undoubtedly you will soon find the picture made by the black beak; May all the black be crossed by the hope of the white in the future.

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:9)

In this meaning, black and white have often been a symbol of good and bad, especially by looking at the context of the quote above where Monelle hopes that all the bad can be crossed by the hope of good in the future. So black and white can mean good and bad, where white means good and black means bad.

3.6. Roses as a Symbol of Beauty and Courage

Data (06)

Monelle says that suffering is likened to a rose.

The rose of the season lives only one season; every morning it opens itself; every evening it closes itself. Be like those roses: offer your crowns to the voluptuous fall, to the trampling of suffering.

(*Le Livre de Monelle*, 1894:9)

The rose is synonymous with beauty and the color of the rose itself is synonymous with courage, referring to the context, the rose here becomes a symbol of beauty and courage to face suffering. Roses can also be interpreted as challenges in life that grow with thorns but are still beautiful because of their petals. The author asks the reader to live like the roses, to be brave by growing in peace with the thorns as suffering.

3.7. Phenix Bird as a Symbol of Immortality

Data (07)

Monelle speaks of all things dead to carefully burn away past deeds.

Burn anything that dies carefully, and scatter their ashes in the four cardinal directions of the sky. Burn the deeds of the past carefully, and destroy their ashes; for the phenylic bird that will rise from the ashes is exactly the same as the one before it.

(*Le Livre de Monelle* 1894:10)

The fenix bird is a mythological bird that symbolizes immortality. The meaning of this sentence is that we should discard past deeds that are bad and difficult to get rid of because they are often reborn, so we should discard them carefully.

3.8. Naked as a Symbol of Honesty

Data (08)

Monelle talks about being naked to be honest at all times.

When you take off your clothes by night, strip yourself of your daytime soul; make yourself naked at all times.

(*Le Livre de Monelle*, 1894:11)

Stripping oneself naked can mean revealing oneself honestly. In this sense, being naked symbolizes honesty. Naked literally describes the absence of clothing or coverings, which creates a sense of vulnerability and flawlessness. This symbolism leads to honest and open self-disclosure. The symbolism of being naked can also indicate the absence of social pretensions or guises. In this context, the author tries to reveal a sincere and honest character without hiding aspects behind falsehood.

3.9. L'egoïste Character's Actions as a Symbol of Greed

Data (09)

Monelle's sister *L'egoïste* acts greedily.

"No, no, no! I can't. I have to secure my pack; I want to take all my things with me. Selfish! Selfish! Go away! Look at you getting me wet!"

(*Le Livre de Monelle*, 1894:14)

In this interpretation referring to the context, actions, and characters in the narrative, the character *L'egoïste* becomes a symbol of greed because of his greedy behavior and only wants to take the package for himself.

3.10. A Brown Back as a Symbol of Hard Work

Data (10)

Monelle's sister Mahot is about to leave for the sun.

"To where there is sun?" said the little voice.

“So much that it’s enough to tan the backs of old men,” Mahot replied.

(*Le Livre de Monelle*, 1894:26)

The meaning based on the context here is that the sun can be interpreted as a goal to be achieved and to achieve this goal requires hard work through the words of scraping the backs of persistent old men.

3.11. The Sun as a Symbol of Glory and Hope

Data (11)

The little girl invites Mahot to find a beautiful place.

“You said I could come tomorrow morning, and it is already tomorrow morning. I want to go with you inside to the sun.”

“Into the sun?” said Mahot.

“Yes,” repeated the girl. “I know. Where there are green flies and blue flies that glow at night; where there are birds as big as your fingers that live in the flowers; where the grapes creep up the trees; where there is bread in the branches and milk in the nuts, and frogs that roar like big dogs and things... things... that move in the water, gourds... not-beasts that put their heads back in their shells.”

(*Le Livre de Monelle*, 1894:27)

In this interpretation, by looking at the context, hope emanates from the words of Monelle’s sister who wants to reach her goal of brightness or beautiful things. Here, too, the beauty of the universe is described in the novel to add to the aesthetics of literary writing.

3.12. The Figure of the Cross as a Symbol of Divinity

Data (12)

The bizarre green creature is unfazed by the priest.

But he did not retreat before the figure of the cross, and as he laid his hands on the holy wounds torn by the thorns, he seemed to grieve.

(*Le Livre de Monelle*, 1894:31)

This interpretation has a significant meaning, especially in religion and spirituality, that the cross is a symbol of divinity in Christianity. In history, the cross is also often used as a protective symbol to ward off evil spirits or symbolize protection from harm and evil.

3.13. Mirror as a Symbol of Loneliness

Data (13)

Sister Monelle Ilsée looks in the mirror and addresses herself.

As soon as her body was tall enough, every morning Ilsée would often stand before her mirror and say: “Morning my little Ilsée.” Then she would kiss the cold glass and purse her lips.

(*Le Livre de Monelle*, 1894:36)

Through this description of Ilsée’s behavior, it can be interpreted that Ilsée is a lonely person. She symbolizes this by addressing herself in front of the mirror while talking to herself.

3.14. Embers as a Symbol of Passion

Data (14)

Sister Monelle Marjolaine works hard.

Growing up Marjolaine was close to his father, who always wore a green apron, whose hands were always covered in clay, and whose eyes were always filled with burning coals.

(*Le Livre de Monelle*, 1894:39)

The author’s depiction of hard work through the expression of hands covered in clay and coals of fire can be interpreted as the character’s passion.

3.15. *Black Dress as a Symbol of Grief*

Data (15)

Marjolaine loses her nanny Jean.

So Marjolaine frowned every time he saw Jean, and Jean never appeared again. And the old governess was found dead looking quite happy. And Marjolaine put on a black dress, complete with a gloomy headdress, and she went back to spinning.

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:41)

Black dress is synonymous and often associated with mourning. This black dress can be used to depict loss, suffering, or death. It can be a symbol for a character who is mourning the loss of someone or something important, as it is clear here that the character Marjolaine is in mourning.

3.16. *Ashes as a Symbol of Sadness*

Data (16)

Monelle's sister Cice cries because of loneliness.

Cice slowly went downstairs to the kitchen, cried again, prostrated herself in front of the fireplace, her hands buried in the ashes.

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:42)

In this interpretation, ashes can be interpreted as immersed in sadness. The symbolism of ashes reflects the deep sadness that engulfs Cice's character.

3.17. *Morgane's Actions as a Symbol of Emptiness*

Data (17)

Sister Monelle Princess Morgane loves no one.

Princess Morgane loves no one. She has a cold directness, and lives among flowers and mirrors. She decorates her hair with red roses and watches herself. She did not look at other girls or other boys because it was only herself that was reflected in their every glance. Both cruelty and happiness were completely alien to her. Her black hair fell around her face like smooth waves. She only wished to love herself: but the reflection in each mirror showed a calm and distant frozenness, and the reflection on the surface of the pond was too grim and pale, and the reflection on the stream was blurred and trembling.

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:45)

The emptiness is depicted in Princess Morgane through her character and behavior where she does not love anyone and lives among the ephemeral beauty of flowers and mirrors.

3.18. *The End of Green as a Symbol of Sacrifice*

Data (18)

Lilly searches for Queen Mandosiane.

She spent the green years of her life standing in the white dust, wading through the mud accompanied by wheeled carts, and sometimes, in the evening, when under a sky swept with beautiful shades of red, he would be followed by large carts in which bundles of wheat and a few scythes wobbled.

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:50)

Green time can mean youth. In this context, the character Lily sacrifices her youth against all odds to find Queen Mandosiane.

3.19. *The Lamp as a Symbol of Hope*

Data (19)

Monelle meets a little girl selling lamps.

"They're not so sad," said the little girl in black, shaking her head, "as long as they don't grow up. But these little lamps I sell are not eternal. Their flames will dwindle, as if weighed down by dark rain. And when my little lamps are extinguished, the children no longer see the light in the mirror, and so they despair."

(Le Livre de Monelle, 1894:54)

In this meaning referring to the context, the lamp symbolizes hope for the children who depend on the little lamp-selling girl who will despair if the lamp goes out.

3.20. *The Cocoon as a Symbol of Transformation*

Data (20)

Monelle tells the story of her patiently waiting for the things she loves.

“Imagine, my dear (which I say is not true, but this is how I often think), I weave my cocoon with everything I love, the earth, toys, flowers, children, little words, and the memory of you, my dear;”

(*Le Livre de Monelle*, 1894:66)

A cocoon often symbolizes the process of change or growth from an imperfect state to a better one. In this interpretation, referring to the context, the cocoon becomes a symbol of transformation where Monelle fills it with the things she loves.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that symbolism can create diversity, uniqueness, and distinctiveness in literary works. The symbols in this literary work can be a means of parable to describe a beauty that contains difficulties. In this novel, there are twenty symbols described by Marcel Schwob through his writings in *Le Livre de Monelle*. The symbols found in the novel *Le Livre de Monelle* by Marcel Schwob consist of meadows as a symbol of freedom and inner peace, embers as a symbol of destruction, snakeskin as a symbol of embodiment, baby shells, and coffins as symbols of life and death, white and black as symbols of good and bad, roses as a symbol of beauty and courage, phoenix birds as a symbol of immortality, nakedness as a symbol of honesty, the actions of the egoist as a symbol of greed, the brown back as a symbol of hard work, the sun as a symbol of glory and hope, the figure of the cross as a symbol of divinity, the mirror as a symbol of loneliness, the embers as a symbol of passion, the black dress as a symbol of sorrow, the ashes as a symbol of sadness, the actions of Morgane as a symbol of emptiness, the end of green as a symbol of sacrifice, the lamp as a symbol of hope, and the cocoon as a symbol of transformation.

The findings of the study have a number of implications for the understanding of symbolism in literature. First, they suggest that symbolism can be used to create diversity, uniqueness, and distinctiveness in literary works. This is because symbols can be interpreted in many different ways, and they can be used to create complex and nuanced meanings. Second, the findings suggest that symbols can be used to create parables that describe beauty and other difficult-to-define concepts. This is because symbols can be used to evoke emotions and associations in the reader that go beyond the literal meaning of the text. These two implications are in line with the findings of the current body of literature (see Bakewell, 2005; Gascoigne, 2000; Holmes, 2020; Schluter, 2015; Sparks, 2010).

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