



VOICES AND SYMBOLS IN REBECCA CURTIS' "HANSA AND GRETYL AND PIECE OF SHIT"

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ABSTRACT

In a depressing and derailing environment, Rebecca Curtis' short story "Hansa and Gretyl and Piece of Shit" introduces Gretyl , a girl coming from a middle class society. She is suffering from stomach ache , cramps , poor health and her mother , a typical , hysteric housewife is presented to be immersed in materialism . Mother's desire sticks to jewelries and adulthood picnic, which develops into an irresponsible attitude towards girl children. It is soon realized with the introduction of Hansa , Gretyl's elder sister and a Piece of Shit , pathetic to hear , sad to find as the name of a girl , who is middle among three sisters. Aspiring respiratory lurching dog like men Ogre haunt the dreams and nightmare of Gretyl .Her conversation and talk with her companion- a cat , suffocates the psyche of a reader to turn up pages in order to find what is happening it all ,in a house of puzzling wizard. Marred with poor quality nutrition , problems of constipation , worms in stomach , voices of menstruation towards low spirited adulthood diseases ; appendicitis , school dropping , telynol , betricide , urge for medicines, urge for a specialist and a doctor, crisis in relationship , girlhood, aging womanhood all have been boisterously knocked, exaggerated and drained badly to find warm blankets of pee , foul smell , farts , weaknesses and almost bleeding and dying heartbeats.

INTRODUCTION:-

Lost in a fragmented world and bone chilling air of mountains , meadows , long heightened trees , the story takes the reader towards far off places in isolation, where there is an urge to

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educate , to nourish , to feed and to identify basic human needs , desires and understanding towards the case of better human condition . Reviewing the text ,Grant Catton writes, “Rebecca Curtis takes certain elements of the fairy-tale to build a short story about a lonely teenager being raised in the woods by two impossibly self-centered and unaware parents, who gets appendicitis but has to suffer through it because no one will take her to the hospital.”

Grethilda , Gretyl’s mother had always been fascinated to the house decoratives. Referring to the lines of the story, we find “an ivory Tibetan-wool rug covers the floor of the living room. Bookshelves bear Encyclopædia Britannicas, Bibles, a stereo. Two couches, their cream-colored upholstery inlaid with hundreds of turquoise-and-gold-feathered peacocks, face each other. They are the mother’s pride and joy.” (p5). As a mother , she was least realized with her responsibilities to the girls’ nutritional growth ,their education , their dreams , their hopes and desires and expectations they had that led Gretyl and her sister in having “suffered a terrible childhood.”(p4). Hansa , after knowing Gretyl’s condition found appropriate to advise Gretyl and their parents to see an appropriate doctor who could treat Gretyl’s increasing problem of gut, stomach ache , indigestion and other related health issues that perhaps indicate symptoms of appendicitis because of which “Gretyl’s body curls into a ball.”(p8). Hansa explains that, “when an appendix gets infected, it must be removed. If not, it ruptures and leaks toxic goo into the gut, which causes sepsis, organ damage, and, within a day or two, death. Hansa says that she had these symptoms two years ago. She went to the hospital, she says, despite her partner’s skepticism. The doctors scoffed and tested Hansa for eight venereal diseases; eventually, however, they scanned her abdomen, spied her enlarged appendix, and removed it.”(p 6)Hansa even tried to procure the help of Piece of Shit, the third and middle sister, who she thinks can have a say and interference towards Getyl’s treatment of anticipated appendicitis. However Hansa and Piece of Shit could not convince their parents on the final treatment of Gretyl, and her visit to the E.R. Whenever Piece of Shit speaks to the parents they announce that “Hansa is a bossy harridan.” (p13). Piece of Shit had the idea, “that their parents won’t take Gretyl to the hospital.” As to make a communication to the readers and Hansa that “she ran away, at fifteen, to live with an aunt”, who threw her belongings into thrash bag, and putting all thoughts aside, she tried to keep peace with her job work of editing where she underlines in the manuscript that “ this is the cliché” putting a comment , “ what is the conflict ???”(p14), undoubtedly for the readers to meditate on the inner journeys of the three sisters; Hnasa , Gretyl and Piece of Shit’s existence as an unwanted space in their parents’ house.

The father wants to relax with his usual beer and saltines. However their living room starts smelling bad .He looks at his daughter but then hesitates to spend money to her treatment through E.R. Through the lines of the story, we find that, “he worked himself raw to buy her expensive clothes, food, art, music lessons. If he borrowed moments for himself sometimes, just a couple of times a week, when she was small, it cost her nothing; the things

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he allowed himself were always done with love.” (p17). However Grethilda decides with Gretyl’s father that they will take her to Doctor Blood, who again prescribes antibiotics and worms killing medicines that eventually worsened Getyl’s condition “her eyes bulge, she vomits”, and then the mother changes the foul blankets to let her swallow another pill. Gretyl was trembling and the father was scared of “her to die.” Gretyl realizes that her companion, the cat, is dead. She misses her sisters and realizes that the solution to her stomach ache, worm squirming and appendicitis lies in her sleep. “She is terrified” (p23). At the time when Gretyl’s parents were leaving the house to offer prayers in the church, Gretyl fanaticizes to be meeting a man with “spiky black hair and beard”. Finally the readers are made to meet with surgeons who will never “forget this child, with her oval face, violet eyes, Roman nose, and neatly plucked eyebrows, who’s alive when she should be dead.” (p26). The readers find a positive note in Gretyl’s being an anesthesiologist who chooses to work for Oakland. She preferred working through recession, protest and pandemic. “Gretyl lavishes her family with love, and she pays for her parents’ house cleaners, landscapers, vacations. But when-not often-she sleeps in her childhood bed she sometimes hears a cat yowl in distant woods. When she asks her husband, What was that? He says, I didn’t hear anything.” (p27) This is here where we find a new beginning from the end of the her world of intense chaotic thoughts and disturbing voices; this is how we perceive the pandemic environment. It is in the crisis situation, the pandemic like situation that people fear their own death, they also had the terrible feeling of being at the end of the world and understands how precious one’s life is. This immense panic often grows to an extent to generate horrifying and unprecedented environment coming with a stop in communication with the rest of the world which is a hopeless sign of death: It was revitalizing, astounding, to have set up this loss of communication with the world when Gretyl choose to work for the people in Oakland, especially the sufferers.

The journeys of the three sisters in “Hansa and Gretyl and Piece of Shit” bring forth woman’s sufferings , sacrifices , unspoken desires , wrapped under the cover of keeping calm and peace to elevate and inspire the heartbeats that opt to lose before extreme crisis , war challenges ,not less than a pandemic which is a call to live life in isolation , and emerge as independent winners . The author’s technique of fanaticizing reality lies in magic realism . It would be appropriate to put in the words of Philip K. Dick as:

Maybe each human being lives in a unique world, a private world different from those inhabited and experienced by all other humans. . . If reality differs from person to person, can we speak of reality singular, or shouldn't we really be talking about plural realities? And if there are plural realities, are some more true (more real) than others? What about the world of a schizophrenic? Maybe it's as real as our world. Maybe we cannot say that we are in touch with reality and he is not, but should instead say, His reality is so different from ours that he can't explain his to us, and we can't explain ours to him. The problem, then, is that if

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subjective worlds are experienced too differently, there occurs a breakdown in communication ... and there is the real illness.

It offers a pastiche, and makes a collage of smokescreen that blurs the boundaries between real and unreal. There are the trajectories of irony and paradox, intertextuality soaked in metaphorical understanding of the beauty of nature and its relationship with human being. Disconnected speech patterns, flashback subconscious techniques, pithy sentences and local and colloquial structures voice for the contemporary trends that have revolutionized postmodern reading .

Note: The page numbers mentioned in brackets refer to the Text “Hansa and Gretyl and Piece of Shit” by Rebecca Curtis.

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