

Analyzing Adrian Henri's Poems "Tonight At Noon" And "Any Prince To Any Princess": The Surrealism Approach

Dr. Husnat Ahmed Tabssam¹, Tayyaba Fatima², Dr. Saima Akhtar³

¹Senior Lecturer, Riphah International University, Lahore.

²M.Phil English (Candidate), Riphah International University, Lahore .

³Lecturer in English, COMSATS, Lahore.

Abstract

The aim of this research work was to present an extensive study of Adrian Henri's poems 'Tonight at Noon' and 'Any Prince to any Princess' with reference to surrealism. The research paper traced how techniques and themes of surrealism are incorporated in Henri's works. The research work was qualitative in nature and implied thematic analysis to the selected work. The poems were analyzed by examining the surrealist nuances such as inverted images, juxtapositions of contradictory ideas, and the illogical framework of the poems. The objective of this paper was to highlight how Henri despite being a modern poet has elements of surrealism in his poetry.

Keywords: Juxtaposition, Surrealist imagery, Dream, Contradictory ideas.

A Brief history of Surrealism

Following World War I, a cultural movement known as surrealism emerged in Europe where artists created intimidating, illogical scenes and developed methods to let the unconscious mind express itself. Its aim was, according to leader André Breton (1992), to resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality, or surreality. It produced works of painting, writing, theatre, filmmaking, photography, and other media.

Works of Surrealism feature the element of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions and non sequitur. However, many Surrealist artists and writers regard their work as an expression of the philosophical movement first and foremost (for instance, of the "pure psychic automatism" Breton speaks of in the first Surrealist Manifesto), with the works themselves being secondary, i.e. artifacts of surrealist experimentation. Leader Breton (1992) was explicit in his assertion that Surrealism was, above all, a revolutionary movement. At the time, the movement was associated with political causes such as communism and anarchism. It was influenced by the Dada movement of the 1910s.

Guillaume Apollinaire coined the phrase "Surrealism" in 1917. But the Surrealist movement wasn't formally founded until after October 1924, when French poet and critic André Breton's publication (1992) of the Surrealist Manifesto beat over a competing faction led by Yvan Goll, who had released his own surrealist manifesto two weeks earlier. Paris, France, served as the movement's most significant hub. From the 1920s onward, the movement spread across the world, having an impact on political thought and action, philosophy, and social theory, as well as the visual arts, literature, film, and music of many nations and languages.

Introduction

The aim of this research is to show how Adrian Henri's poetry can be perceived as subconscious writing that reverts images and ideas. The main objective of this paper is to analyze Adrian Henri's poem in the light of Surrealism. It attempts to explore the dreamlike sequence of the poem, the fragmented and juxtaposed images and the uncertainty of life that became a major concern post World Wars.

Born in 1932 in Britain, Adrian Henri grew up to be a famous poet and painter. Despite his poetry, Henri is remembered as the founder of poetry rock group, 'The Liverpool Scene,' He continued to write and paint simultaneously for a long period of his life. His work was influenced by pop art that was emerging in 1960s along with abstract impressionism. Thus, there are traces of these influences in his work both his arts and his poetry. Even though Henri was born post World War I however, he saw the horrors of the Second World War. Many people felt lost and disoriented after the atrocities of Great War. Therefore, his poetry is replete with juxtaposed and contradictory images and the hopelessness of the modern man.

This paper ventures to trace elements of surrealism in Adrian Henri's poems, *Tonight at Noon* and *Any Prince to any Princess*. The Surrealist movement was a literary and artistic movement led by Andre Breton in the twentieth century. The movement was a reaction against the rationalist movement after the World War I. Emerged in 1920s, this movement experimented with a new method of writing which is automatism (metmuseum.org). The idea of automatism or automatic writing is to show the writing of subconscious. Keith Aspley (2010) describes automatism as the collective term for the processes whereby Surrealist artists and writers sought to liberate the subconscious mind as they explored the nature of Inspiration (Aspley, 2010). The movement was influenced by Sigmund Freud's work *The Interpretation of Dreams*. While explaining Surrealism in *The Surrealist Manifesto* Breton talks about how logical methods are only use to solve "secondary interest." The world marred by post world war anarchy therefore could not be solved through logic and reason. Thus, the movement's aim was to liberate people from the constraints of rational thought and to liberate their emotional and psychic selves.

To accentuate the understanding of Surrealism, Breton in *The Surrealist Manifesto* gives a proper definition of Surrealism which is as followed: SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express -- verbally, by means of the written word, or in

any other manner -- the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

M. Randy Utama in his work *An Analysis of Surrealism in Haruki Murakami's novel 1Q84* writes that surrealism in poetry juxtaposes images of conscious and the unconscious mind. They use surrealist images, ideas and techniques to blur the boundaries between dream and reality. Thus, the images are usually fragmented and the flow of the poetry is similar to the technique of stream of consciousness.

Stylistic Analysis

Adrian Henri represents the age where increasing fear, political turmoil and tension were rampant. Henri not only proved his mettle in poetry but also in paintings. His works speak volumes about the indelible mark French symbolist and surrealist left on him and his art. His poem *Tonight at Noon* signifies the state of mind that sums up the condition of the Lost Generation. It finds great resemblance to the mindless blabbering of Lucky's speech in Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot". Often termed as a verbal diarrhea, Lucky's speech discloses the absolute meaninglessness that overpowered and engulfed the Lost Generation and how it mindlessly awaited the arrival of a promised messiah.

The surrealist movement gained momentum in Europe after the World War I. It projected the meaninglessness and hopelessness of the Lost Generation. The surrealist literature accurately depicts the fragmented mind and realities of those living through the times after the great war. Haskell M. Block, in his article *Surrealism and Modern Poetry: Outline of an Approach* highlights various characteristics of surrealist art and lists them as "fragmentation, violent juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated thoughts and images, free exploration of both the conscious and unconscious mind". Henri's poetry falls under the bracket of what is termed as a surrealist literature. The imagery he employs as well as the language used offer a great resonance with the surrealist literature.

The poem *Tonight at Noon* is full of juxtapositions and contradictions. The reality is inverted and the impossible is made possible. The title of the poem itself projects anomaly as noon cannot happen at night. Night and noon are two distinct time periods signifying light and dark; hence, they do not retain the power to merge. However, by melting these two distinct realities together, Henri has set the tone of the poem right from the beginning giving it a surreal and contradictory outlook. Moreover, the phrase "Tonight at Noon" appears repeatedly in the poem, asserting the poet's stance of breaking away from the defined realities and presenting his own truth and version of reality which reeks of meaninglessness and confusion.

Moreover, the stanzas of the poem *Tonight at Noon* do not enjoy coherence with each other. They appear to be highly disjointed and broken. The ideas presented in each stanza do not fuse together and lack logical connections thus accentuating "fragmentation" and incoherence. The speaker of the poem makes sudden shifts from children shifting homes to elephants telling stories,

pigeons hunting the cats to white Americans protesting for freedom and then abruptly jumping to the image of girls' moon-bathing; all the images incorporated by the poet do not have any connection with each other and are all muddled up. Therefore, standing true to the significant feature of fragmentation and broken imagery that defines surrealist literature.

Inversions hold a central position in the poem *Tonight at Noon*. The realities are inverted through the use of irregular imagery, thus making the impossible happen. Block, in his article *Surrealism and Modern Poetry: Outline of an Approach* adds "invocation of dreams, visions and hallucinations" to be of great importance in surrealist literature and poetry. The inverted imagery that Henri employs suggests a part of the world that is not true and the one that exists in the subconscious. It is a world of dreams and hallucinations where the impossible is made possible. The images of pigeons hunting the cats, leaves falling upwards, daffodils sprouting in autumn and the dead burying the alive; all refer to the realities being inversed.

This poem also leans towards a nonsense style of poetry where everything seems to be going the wrong way, therefore, standing true to the spirit of surrealist literature. Moreover, a shift in perspective is observed in the poem where the story is being told from the "other" side for example the image of white American protesting outside the "Black House". These inversions, however, introduce a comic sense to the poem as an alternate world/reality is presented where animated imagery is activated and impossible is possible. The language used and the imagery invoked is quite simple to cater to Henri's purpose of reaching the masses as he belongs to the age where pop/mass culture was gaining momentum.

The poem *Any Prince to Any Princess* also portrays surrealist images and contradictory ideas of fantasies related to the famous fairy tales. The first line of the poem is "August is coming". However, the later ideas and images contradict majestic dignity or grandeur marked by the word "august". He uses the phrases like no golden eggs, fallen below market price and remained froggish. These phrases are opposites of the majesty and dignity associated with the word "august".

Moreover, the feature of "Private vision" is also observable in this poem. The poet reverses the design and scheme presented in Jacob Grimm's fairy tales. He added the idea of golden eggs and amended it with their absence. Furthermore, imagery of the mirror and poisoned apple from *Snow White* is incorporated and reversed with the contradictory and private vision. The surreal imagery lies between imagination and reality. It is observable in the line, "The matter of poisoned apple has been taken by the Board of Trade".

Furthermore, according to Haskell M. Block, surrealist poetry also includes "Awareness of a world dislocated and falling away". In the same way, *Any Prince to Any Princess* also incorporates the modern imagery of the dislocated world and juxtaposes it with fantasies. As the poet merges the fantasy of "three wishes" with the modern dilemma of presenting a case to The General Assembly. Moreover, the fantasy of *The Elves and The Shoe Maker* is juxtaposed with the reality of Unions and factories. The Poet using the components of Surrealism includes his private vision of the National Union of Elves. He also adds contradictory imagery of "fact-finding at the golden river." Such images present in the poem follows the features of surrealism. Henri not only dislocates the fantasy and reality but also juxtaposes and transforms it.

He also presents the imagery of a goose getting fat and withered sedge. However, the goose is mostly considered thin and the sedge remains wet. Block mentions, "Imagery came to be increasingly obscure and disconnected". In the same way, an obscure connection of the fairy tales with reality represents the dislocation of both.

Henri portrays the obscure images of black wind, empty palace and littered bedchamber. Such imagery is not related to the fantasies. In fantasies, beautiful imagery is portrayed. Whereas, contradictory images alter the beauty of the palace mostly presented in fairytales. As in surrealist modern poetry, the imagination and reality are changed to shock and surprise the reader.

Poet also uses slang words like "froggish", which is also a feature of surrealist poetry. Block also mentions the slang language as an element of surreal modern poetry, "the vocabulary too came to be one of self-conscious modernity, marked by the slang". The poem has contemporary vocabulary like General Assembly, Union and Board of Trade. These reality-based institutions do not have any connection with fairy tales. Such disconnected and obscure imagery leads towards the nonsense style of poetry. It also merges the conscious and the sub conscious that is the basic feature of surrealism.

Conclusion

Surrealist ideas, themes and techniques can be analyzed in Adrian Henri's selected poems. He fuses the world of dream and reality to form surreal elements. Surrealist opposition to logic is a prominent feature in his poem Tonight at Noon. As he adds the phrases that are contradictory to reality like leaves growing upwards and pigeons hunting the cats. Moreover, He minimizes the conscious interference by writing everything that comes to his mind following the technique of automatic writing. Furthermore, surrealist juxtapositions, are prominently present in Any Prince to Any Princess. He uses the imagery of opposing unexpected and unrelated things from reality and fantasy for creating the absurd ideas.

Work Cited:

- "Adrian Henri." Poetry Foundation, Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/adrian-henri>
- Block, Haskell M. "Surrealism and Modern Poetry: Outline of an Approach". The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. 18, no. 2, 1959, pp. 174-182. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/427264>.
- Breton, Andre. First Manifesto of Surrealism in Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Ideas. Ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Woods. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992.
- Ibrahim, Wasan Hashim. "Techniques of Surrealism: A Study in Two Novels by Thomas Pynchon, V. and The Crying of Lot" 49. n.d.
- SRG, M. Randy Utama. "An Analysis of Surrealism in Haruki Murakami's novel 1Q84."

University of Sumatera Utara, University of Sumatera Utara, 2017.
repositori.usu.ac.id/bitstream/handle/123456789/5637/130705089.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

- Voorhies, James. The Met. October 2004. December 2021.
www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/surr/hd_surr.htm
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrealism>