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Illustrating Power Relations through Symbolism in *The Prisoner*
Who Wore Glasses

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Abstract: Symbolism is a powerful tool employed by authors to convey ideas and thoughts through the use of symbols and signs, imbuing everyday objects with deeper meanings in their works of literature. In addition, symbolism can have political implications, as it can represent political institutions, hierarchies, movements, beliefs, or ideologies, through objects, people, words, performances, or gestures. Through a content analysis approach, this research examines the symbolism used in *The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses* and how everyday objects are utilized to depict power relations. The symbols analyzed in this research are glasses, fertilizer, and tobacco. Glasses were found to represent Brille's vulnerability/intellect. Fertilizer symbolizes Warder Hanneljie's weakness, and tobacco symbolizes authority. By analyzing the symbols portrayed in literary works, especially writings that have a political connotation to them, it goes to show that sometimes the objects portrayed in literature are not just depicted for creative intentions, but also for critical depth.

Key words: symbolism, literary symbolism, power relations, apartheid literature

Abstrak: Simbolisme merupakan teknik penulisan yang digunakan para penulis untuk menyampaikan ide dan pemikiran melalui simbol dan tanda, memberikan makna yang lebih dalam pada objek sehari-hari dalam karya sastra mereka. Selain itu, simbolisme dapat memiliki implikasi politik, karena dapat mewakili institusi politik, hierarki, gerakan, keyakinan, atau ideologi, melalui objek, orang, kata-kata, pertunjukan, atau gerakan. Melalui pendekatan analisis konten, penelitian ini meneliti simbolisme yang digunakan dalam "The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses" dan bagaimana objek sehari-hari digunakan untuk menggambarkan dinamika kekuasaan. Simbol yang dianalisis dalam penelitian ini adalah kacamata, pupuk, dan tembakau. Kacamata melambangkan kerentanan/kecerdasan Brille, pupuk melambangkan kelemahan Warder Hanneljie, dan tembakau melambangkan otoritas. Dengan menganalisis simbol yang digambarkan dalam karya sastra, terutama tulisan-tulisan yang memiliki implikasi politik, hal ini menunjukkan bahwa terkadang objek yang digambarkan dalam sastra tidak hanya ditampilkan untuk tujuan kreatif, tetapi juga untuk kedalaman kritis.

Kata kunci: simbolisme, simbolisme sastra, relasi kekuasaan, sastra apartheid

INTRODUCTION

A literary symbol is, in the simplest sense, a word, a character, an item, or even something with a variety of references beyond its literal meaning (Neimneh, 2017, p. 67). According to Abrams, symbols have a meaning or meanings that are distinct from the object's literal meaning. War, for instance, can represent chaos or the inability of authorities to maintain social peace in addition to being taken literally as the event of war (Elmar & Ananta, 2017, p. 179). According to Zohdi (2018), symbolism is important because it helps writers convey their thoughts and novel ideas through symbols and signs and abstractly represent their reality (p. 314). It also allows readers to comprehend how a writer could perceive commonplace objects and the larger connotations of those objects. Because complex ideas are disguised in simplified forms when they are represented by symbols, there is never a single interpretation of a sign that is universally accepted (Gill & Angosto-Ferrandez, 2018, p. 429). For instance, while some may view glasses as a sign of intelligence, others may view them as a sign of physical weakness due to short-sightedness.

Symbolism can also be political. Anything that represents a political institution, hierarchy, movement, belief, or ideology can be referred to as a political symbol, including people, things, words, performances, and gestures (Theiler, 2017, p. 2). There are three-way political symbols that remain significant. Firstly, symbols can simplify and condense complex political structures and practices into a single, easily recognizable representation. This simplification helps individuals to understand and interpret political concepts and ideas more readily. Secondly, political symbols can evoke strong emotional responses such as pride, a sense of moral duty, or a willingness to make personal sacrifices in support of a political cause. These emotions are associated with the beliefs and institutions that the symbol represents. Thirdly, political symbols can contribute to the cohesion of a political movement by providing a multi-layered and ambiguous meaning that allows for diverse interpretations among its members. This complexity serves to unite people under a common banner while simultaneously allowing for a range of individual interpretations and understandings.

Bessie Head's *The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses* is a short story set in South Africa during the apartheid era and depicts the harsh realities of life for political prisoners. The plot centers around two main characters: Brille, a highly intelligent black political prisoner who is known as the prisoner who wore glasses, and Warder Hannetjie is a cruel prison guard responsible for the brutal torture and interrogation of Brille. Throughout the story, readers witness the shifting power relations between these two characters. Initially, Hannetjie holds all the power and can subject Brille to inhumane treatment. However, due to a mistake on his part, Hannetjie finds himself at Brille's mercy. This turn of events leads to surprising consequences, and readers see how Brille navigates his newfound power over his former oppressor.

Bessie Head, who was born in South Africa, had a firsthand experience of the impact of apartheid. Her mother, who was white, was institutionalized during her pregnancy, and her black father disappeared shortly thereafter. Due to her mixed-race heritage, Head was denied full citizenship in her native country because of the rigid apartheid regime. She was raised by a child welfare organization and later by foster parents. She was never given the chance to meet her parents. She received her education at a missionary school and spent several years working as a journalist and teacher before relocating to a little village in Botswana, a nearby nation governed by the British. After a few years of teaching, Head retired to a peaceful life of writing and farming.

The purpose of this study is to advance knowledge of how literary symbols serve as indicators of the relations of power between characters in literature. To examine how they are used to convey changes in power relations between characters, this research will pay particular attention to a few particular symbols mentioned in *The Prisoner Who Wears Glasses*, such as glasses, fertilizer, and tobacco. This study aims to contribute to the research on how symbols are employed in literature and how they can be used to indicate changing relationships between characters, especially within certain contexts where one character has more power than the other.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Symbolism

Symbols and symbolism are traditionally defined as an object, either animate or inanimate, that 'stands for' or represents something else (Cuddon, 2015). For instance, scales are generally associated with justice; the lion stands for strength and courage; the Cross symbolizes Christianity. Besides objects, actions and gestures can also be considered as symbols. To raise your arms means to surrender, a clenched fist shows aggression, and in Turkish culture, moving your head slowly upward while closing your eyes simply means 'no'. The realm of literature is no stranger to symbols. A literary symbol is the combination of an image with a concept. In *Macbeth*, the recurring blood imagery is meant to represent guilt and violence. The clothes in *King Lear* are used to symbolize appearances and authority. Also in *King Lear* is the storm scene, which can be acknowledged as a symbol that represents the chaos exposed to the 'unaccommodated man'.

Research on symbolism in varying literary works has been carried out by Elmar & Ananta (2017), Elmahdi & Hezam (2020), Neimneh (2017), Andrews (2019), and Lei (2015). Analysing the symbolism in a literary work is not merely the process of pointing out random objects in a story. Elmar and Ananta suggest that to identify a symbol in a literary work, a reader needs to carefully examine the work for specific details that are "repeated, emphasized, and strategically positioned", which may suggest that an object holds important symbolic meaning within the story (2017). The use of an object as a symbol must also be supported by the story's context since the symbol's significance must be established inside the narrative. It's crucial to remember that an object's symbolic meaning transcends its literal interpretation and stands for something bigger, like an idea or feeling connected to the object. However, a single object may have several meanings, each of which is supported by the narrative context that is pertinent to it.

Through Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, Elmahdi & Hezam (2020) analyze the story's symbolism to highlight the impacts of the 1948 tragedy in Palestine and its effects on the populace. The narrative centers on a group of Palestinian refugees who endured a difficult journey to Kuwait in search of employment only to perish slowly in the back of a water tank truck. The water tank itself was one of the symbols chosen, which Elmahdi & Hezam say is done so ironically. Water represents one of the essential components of life, however instead of filling the tank with water as it should have done, the water decided to make it empty of life. The tank, intended for water transportation, becomes a vessel of death (p. 36). As such, it represents the Palestinian people's entrapment and confinement, as they are steered towards despair by their corrupt Arab leaders, symbolized by the driver who guides the tank to the people's death. Symbolism serves a purpose beyond being a mere literary device or an artistic expression. It grants writers the liberty to articulate their ideas indirectly and circumvent the threat of persecution by political authorities (Elmahdi & Hezam, 2020, p. 33).

Neimneh (2017) also concentrates their study on literary symbolism using the novel *Men in the Sun*. Specifically, they explore the symbolism of the sun as a naturalistic emblem standing for the harsh realities the Palestinian refugees encounter, and then they use the sun as a political metaphor to show how inhumane life for Palestinians in exile is. The sun is a symbol of light, life and new beginnings, hope, strength, and development in literature. The sun, however, departs from this conventionally upbeat description and is used with a pejorative meaning. The sun is not only employed as a naturalistic emblem to depict the harsh and gritty realism the Kanafani's characters have to physically endure, but it also emphasizes their pain, alienation, and suffering (p. 68). The sun helps to bridge this external realism with the characters' psychological realism. Rather than symbolizing hope, the merciless sun represents torture to characters living in exile or under occupation. For instance, the sun accentuates the destitution of those residing in refugee camps within tents. Eventually, the sun becomes the harbinger of death for these exiled individuals, as it causes them to perspire, suffocate, and meet a gruesome fate in a scorching tank.

Lei (2015) proposes that names can be employed as symbols to communicate thoughts and beliefs in addition to things, actions, or gestures (p. 2164). Lei investigates the name of the main character, Hester Prynne, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester is similar to the mythological goddess "Hestia," a lovely virgin who rules over the hearth, the built environment, and the correct administration of family, society, and the state. It is indicated that the name Hester refers to the character who is "beautiful as a goddess" through Hawthorne's description (Lei, 2015, p. 2165). In hindsight, it should be noted that the name "Hester" is akin to "Esther," the name of the Jewish queen of Persian King Ahasuerus who is famed for her beauty, wisdom, and dedication to upholding the rights of her people. Esther's journey from exile to empowerment as she becomes a key player in her own and her people's destiny is told in her story. Similar to Hester, who is also banished from New England by the Puritans because of her infidelity, Hester decides to stay, put up with the severe punishment, and look for forgiveness through deeds of compassion.

B. Power Relations

Power is defined as a social phenomenon that permeates every aspect of an individual's life. It is an organized system that forms a network and operates by spreading and absorbing through all social connections. It follows specific rules and involves a range of issues and influences. Citing Foucault, power relations exist not only between individuals and authorities, but also between different body parts, family members, genders, teachers and students, and educated and uneducated individuals. These relations do not arise solely from the power of authorities over individuals but rather from the support of the underlying power (Ningtyas, 2021, p. 54). In other words, power arises from the relationship between entities that have differences. It involves a set of actions that can incite, induce, seduce, make things easier or more difficult, and can constrain or forbid absolutely. However, where there is power, there is also resistance (Rahmasari & Nurhayati, 2019, p. 20).

Hook suggests that the field of power relations is a complex and uneven territory characterized by constant tensions, fractured alliances, and flexible maneuvers (Rahmasari & Nurhayati, 2019, p. 20). This dynamic interplay of forces and resistances cannot be reduced to simple binary logics of force. Additionally, power relations are not centralized at a certain point, and although some parties may occupy top or bottom positions, power does not directly originate from specific interests (Ningtyas, 2021, p. 54). Instead, power spreads in many directions, present

in the intersections of life, and traps individuals within its control like a net that is scattered everywhere. It is not confined to a single point, top, center, or inside.

In a power relation, two parties are involved and each has their objectives. Therefore, they may use various strategies to dominate the other party to achieve their goals. One of these strategies involves using it as a means to win. The procedures that are implemented during a confrontation aim to deprive the opponent of their means of combat and to force them to give up the struggle. Every strategy that is used in a confrontation aims to establish a power relation, and every power relation tends to become a winning strategy, both as it develops and when it encounters resistance head-on (Rahmasari & Nurhayati, 2019, p. 20-21).

Power relations are noticeable in literary works, particularly in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's short story "Istana Tembok Bolong", where Ningtyas examines how power operates on the female body. The story depicts a low-class woman's body as a commodity, subjected to suppression by an unnamed character who uses her body as an extension of the power exerted by capital owners. This imbalance of power creates a gap between social classes in society and is particularly detrimental to the proletariat, especially women who are often objectified. Despite this, power relations shift when the protagonist, Tumirah, decides to confront the circle of capitalism by working as a street prostitute (Ningtyas, 2021, p. 55). Even though her body remains a target for exploitation, Tumirah's conscious decision to oppose submission defines her route to freedom. She reclaims power for how her body should be investigated, keeping power and the impact of authority in control.

C. The Usage of Symbolism to Illustrate Power Relations

Symbols can depict changing power relations between characters. In *Kings of the Water*, Michiel, a homosexual man who left South Africa under apartheid and returned there in 2001 to attend his mother's funeral, tells his story. Michiel's opposition to ingrained patriarchal structures is emphasized throughout the book as he speaks out about his previously suppressed dissent. Fathers commonly play a highly politicized role in pre-apartheid and apartheid-era literature, serving as arbiters of either pro- or anti-apartheid beliefs and demonstrating a position of importance and power within the family. The story's destabilization of the father's authority is mirrored by the use of the water symbol, as Andrews demonstrates.

Water may represent a strong natural force, change, regeneration, or instability (Andrews, 2019, p. 86). Water seems to represent the father's influence over Michiel at first. Water is connected to Michiel's father's authority and patriarchal institutions of violence in general, according to his decision to join the navy and the ocean's armed forces. Michiel sees a lady being kept underwater as she is being tortured while acting as an officer, which supports the notion that water serves as a channel for the father's (and the apartheid government's) authority, brutality, and control over Michiel's life.

However, Michiel's perspective changes significantly and the significance of water in the book changes when he returns to the farm after apartheid ends and has already come to terms with his homosexuality. Michiel's father requests Michiel to assist him in taking a shower as his first request. Michiel is in a position of authority when evaluating this scene. Michiel is no longer prepared to put up with his father's contempt for him as he is "heightened," looking down at his naked and frail physique. Michiel takes care of bathing his father because he is elderly and feeble. The boy obtains some control over his father's influence during the bath scene. Michiel can look closely at his father's body and only detect weakness and frailty, which is indicative of a

deteriorating patriarch. Water then becomes a metaphor for the antagonistic power relations between a parent and son.

The above studies on symbolism in literature have helped lay the foundation for what constitutes a symbol, the process of analyzing symbols, and how symbols can shift power relations. This research helps to fill in the gap of how power relations can be examined in literature set within the context of imprisonment under South Africa's apartheid regime through the usage of symbolism.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research method to examine the symbolism in *The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses*. The type of method used is qualitative content analysis, which is done by "systematically investigating texts" (Leavy, 2017, p. 121). Qualitative research employs content analysis to comprehend the meanings conveyed through texts. Unlike merely examining the textual content, qualitative content analysis considers the context in which it was generated. Leavy cites Roller & Lavrakas, defining qualitative content analysis as a methodical simplification of content to recognize themes and derive meaningful interpretations, with special attention given to the context in which it was created.

The process of content analysis typically involves immersing oneself in the content to grasp the overall picture, defining units of analysis, coding, analyzing, and interpreting. In this case, the units of analysis would be the symbols used in *The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses*. After determining the units of analysis, researchers generate a code for each unit and assign meanings to analyze further. For instance, one unit would be the symbol of glasses, and the codes would be vulnerability and intellect, and this will proceed with analyzing the meaning further. Essentially, qualitative content analysis enables researchers to investigate the implications concealed in texts, including the symbolism used in this short story.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study show that the symbols illustrating power relations in *The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses* are glasses, fertilizer, and tobacco. With a qualitative content analysis, these symbols shall undergo a systematic approach to uncover themes and meanings within texts. Additionally, the method allows for interpretive flexibility, acknowledging the meanings can vary based on individual perspectives and experiences. This flexibility enables researchers to capture the richness and complexity of symbolic representations within the text. The analysis of how the symbols is portrayed in the story, their meanings, and how indicate the power relations between characters are as follows:

A. The Usage of Symbolism to Illustrate Power Relations

The word glasses appeared in *The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses* four times. The first time was when the story introduced the main character, Brille (who has yet to be introduced by his name), as "one of the prisoners who wore glasses." (Head, 2000, p. 234)

The trick the clouds were playing with the sun eventually caused one of the prisoners who wore glasses to stop work, straighten up, and peer shortsightedly at them. He

was a thin little fellow with a hollowed-out chest and comic knobbly knees. (Head, 2000, p. 234)

In these two sentences, the glasses symbolize the physical weakness of the main character who wears them. The phrase “peer shortsightedly” (Head, 2000, p. 234) suggests that he has a type of visual impairment that requires glasses to help him see better. Additionally, the fact that he is also described as a “thin little fellow” with a “hollowed-out chest” and “comic knobbly knees” (Head, 2000, p. 234) suggests that he has a very frail physique, making him an easy target in prison conditions. His glasses represent his physical inability, which relates to his lack of power and agency within the prison system. This eventually gets him into trouble with one of the prison guards, *Warder Hanneltjie*.

Trouble began that very day between *Span One* and *Warder Hanneltjie*. It was because of the shortsightedness of *Brille*. That was the nickname he was given in prison and is the Afrikaans word for someone who wears glasses. *Brille* could never judge the approach of the prison gates, and on several previous occasions he had munched on cabbages and dropped them almost at the feet of the warder, and all previous warders had overlooked this. Not so *Warder Hanneltjie*. (Head, 2000, p. 234)

This is the second time in the story that glasses are mentioned. The glasses represent the main character's vulnerability and lack of agency within the prison system in this context. Because of his nearsightedness, he is known as "*Brille*," which translates to "someone who wears glasses" (Head, 2000, p. 234) in Afrikaans. Because of his glasses, he is forced to adopt this new identity, further erasing his original identity and distinguishing him from the other prisoners in *Span One*. The prison system further deprives the main character of his agency and individuality by renaming him after his glasses. His real name is unknown and is not used, reinforcing his status as a prisoner without a distinct identity. The glasses themselves become a symbol of identity loss and vulnerability to power relations within the prison system.

Because of *Brille*'s physical limitation, he is more likely to be caught breaking the rules and punished by the warders. The fact that he has dropped cabbages at the feet of the warder on previous occasions, and been let off by previous warders, suggests that he has been lucky to escape punishment in the past. However, his shortsightedness is the reason why he “could never judge the approach of the prison gates”. On the day *Brille* dropped cabbages, it just so happened to be *Warder Hanneltjie*.

The next thing *Warder Hanneltjie* whipped out a knobkerrie and gave *Brille* several blows about the head. What surprised his comrades was the speed with which *Brille* had removed his glasses or else they would have been smashed to pieces on the ground. (Head, 2000, p. 235)

The passage emphasizes the symbolism of *Brille*'s glasses by mentioning them for the third time. It describes an incident in which *Warder Hanneltjie* physically assaults *Brille*, the prisoner who wears glasses. The use of a knobkerrie, a traditional African club, by *Hanneltjie* highlights the power dynamic in the prison system, where warders have the authority to use violence to control prisoners. *Brille*'s ability to quickly remove his glasses despite being hit by the knobkerrie demonstrates his resourcefulness and quick thinking. It also underscores the importance of his glasses for survival in the prison system. The glasses are not only a symbol of vulnerability and weakness but also a crucial tool for navigating the environment.

The passage suggests that Brille's fellow prisoners were surprised by his swift reaction, which may indicate that they underestimated him or did not fully appreciate his abilities. However, their observation of the violence from a distance highlights their vulnerability and powerlessness within the system.

While the passage above may have hinted at Brille's resourcefulness, it is the passage below and its aftermath that encapsulates Brille's intellect that is often overshadowed by his shortsightedness.

For about two weeks Span One lived in acute misery. The cabbages, tobacco, and conversations had been the pivot of jail life for them. Then one evening they noticed that their good old comrade who wore the glasses was looking rather pleased with himself. He pulled out a four-ounce packet of tobacco by way of explanation, and the comrades fell upon it with great greed. Brille merely smiled. After all, he was the father of many children. But when the last shred had disappeared, it occurred to the comrades that they ought to be puzzled.

"I say, brother. We're watched like hawks these days. Where did you get the tobacco?"

"Hannetje gave it to me," said Brille.

There was a long silence. Into it dropped a quiet bombshell.

"I saw Hannetje in the shed today," and the failing eyesight blinked rapidly. "I caught him in the act of stealing five bags of fertilizer, and he bribed me to keep my mouth shut." (Head, 2000, p. 237)

Brille's glasses in the passage could represent a variety of traits, such as intelligence, observation, or insight. Brille's ability to obtain tobacco while others were suffering suggests that he possesses some insight or observation skills. Brille's role as a responsible and wise father to many children could also be represented by his glasses as a symbol of his character.

The revelation that Brille caught Hannetje stealing fertilizer and took a bribe to remain silent, on the other hand, could add another layer of symbolism to the glasses. Brille's glasses are no longer a source of weakness, but rather one of his greatest assets. Brille's glasses could represent his ability to see through people's actions and motivations, as well as his willingness to disregard them in the long run. Brille takes advantage of his newfound power and gains control of Hannetje.

B. Fertilizer

The word fertilizer appeared in "The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses" thrice. The first time was during the plot twist of the story, where Brille told Span One that he caught Warder Hannetje stealing five bags of fertilizer.

"I saw Hannetje in the shed today," and the failing eyesight blinked rapidly. "I caught him in the act of stealing five bags of fertilizer, and he bribed me to keep my mouth shut." (Head, 2000, p. 237)

In this passage, fertilizer represents a valuable resource that is desired to the point of theft. In the context of the story, fertilizer is suggested as a valuable commodity, and people, including

ostensibly law-abiding prison guards, are willing to go to great lengths to obtain it. Fertilizer can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the story's corrupt system. The fertilizer represents the resources and benefits that those in power control and that others must obtain through unethical means. The story implies that this type of power dynamic has corrupted the prison system and that individuals must resort to extreme measures to meet even basic needs. Brille's comment below emphasizes this point even more:

“Prison is an evil life,” Brille continued, apparently discussing some irrelevant matter. “It makes a man contemplate all kinds of evil deeds.” (Head, 2000, p. 237)

Brille and Warden Hanneltjie's power relations are also represented by the fertilizer. Brille, who was previously subjected to brutal oppression by Warden Hanneltjie, captures him in the act of stealing fertilizer and uses it as blackmail. Warden Hanneltjie attempts to use his power by bribing Brille with tobacco to keep his mouth shut, but Brille uses his newfound power by betraying him. Warden Hanneltjie may also be one of the lower-ranking warders who lack access to the resources they require to do their job effectively, according to the passage. Brille, on the other hand, appears to wield more power within the prison system and is willing to betray Hanneltjie without fear of retaliation. Brille's remark about Hanneltjie being "just a child and stupidly truthful" implies that he regards Hanneltjie as naive and easily manipulated, reinforcing the notion that Hanneltjie may not be particularly competent or effective in his role as a warden.

“You know, comrades,” he said, “I’ve got Hanneltjie. I’ll betray him tomorrow.”

“Forget it, brother. You’ll get shot.”

Brille laughed.

“I won’t,” he said. “That is what I mean about evil. I am a father of children, and I saw today that Hanneltjie is just a child and stupidly truthful. I’m going to punish him severely because we need a good warden.” (Head, 2000, p. 237)

Later on, fertilizer is mentioned for the second time in the passage below:

The following day, with Brille as a witness, Hanneltjie confessed to the theft of the fertilizer and was fined a large sum of money. From then on Span One did very much as they pleased while Warden Hanneltjie stood by and said nothing. But it was Brille who carried this to extremes. (Head, 2000, p. 237)

Hanneltjie's downfall and loss of power are symbolized by his capture and confession to the theft of fertilizer. He is fined heavily, implying that he is being punished for his actions, and he becomes a figure of tension among the prisoners in Span One. This loss of power is also reflected in Span One's ability to act freely while Hanneltjie stands by and says nothing. Brille, in the end, carries Hanneltjie's downfall to its logical conclusion by using knowledge of his corruption to assert his power and autonomy within the system. Hanneltjie's downfall is a symbol of the prison system's corrupt and oppressive nature, as well as how those in power can be brought down by those who can navigate and exploit the system's flaws.

And it wasn't only taking from their side. They were good at stealing commodities like fertilizer which were needed on the farm of Warden Hanneltjie. (Head, 2000, p. 238)

Fertilizer is mentioned for the third and final time in the preceding passage. Hannetje has had enough of being under Brille's control. Brille and Hannetje eventually reached an agreement in which he helped Span One's interests. Meanwhile, Span One returned the favor by obtaining commodities for Hannetje, such as fertilizer. The fertilizer represents Hannetje and Span One's mutual trust and cooperation. Fertilizer, which initially symbolized Hannetje's demise in the story, now serves as the thread that connects the two opposing parties.

C. Tobacco

While tobacco is mentioned a total of nine times, there are only five instances where tobacco symbolizes power relations in the short story.

For about two weeks Span One lived in acute misery. The cabbages, *tobacco*, and conversations had been the pivot of jail life for them. (Head, 2000, p. 237)

To begin with, tobacco is more than just a commodity; it is a necessity that allows Span One to survive prison life. Tobacco, for one thing, represents comfort and community within the prison system - members of Span One "chatted and smoked tobacco." (Head, 2000, p. 234). When Warder Hannetje punished the entire Span One, their access to tobacco was cut off, and the prisoners were deprived of what little they had in prison.

He pulled out a four-ounce packet of *tobacco* by way of explanation, and the comrades fell upon it with great greed. (Head, 2000, p. 237)

The phrase "fell upon it with great greed" (Head, 2000, p. 237) emphasizes the rarity and high value of tobacco within the prison system. The fact that tobacco is so highly valued indicates that even minor pleasures are highly valued in this prison setting. Because tobacco is such a prized possession, anyone who has it or can confiscate it has more authority and control. As a result, tobacco also represents power.

On another occasion Brille was seen to be walking about the prison yard, openly smoking *tobacco*. On being taken before the prison commander he claimed to have received the *tobacco* from Warder Hannetje. All through the tirade from his chief, Warder Hannetje failed to defend himself, but his nerve broke completely. (Head, 2000, p. 237)

Brille violated prison rules by openly smoking tobacco and was brought before another prison commander. Brille, on the other hand, is no longer the meek character introduced at the beginning of the story. Brille can avoid punishment because of his knowledge of Hannetje's corrupt actions. Brille, who is supposed to be helpless and at the mercy of the guards, instead blames Hannetje. Meanwhile, Hannetje, who is supposed to be powerful, is unable to defend himself and loses his nerves, rendering him desperate and having no choice but to negotiate with Brille.

"The whole of Span One wants something from you."

Warder Hannetje brightened with relief.

"I think I can manage if it's *tobacco* you want," he said.

Brille looked at him, for the first time struck with pity and guilt. He wondered if he had carried the whole business too far. The man was a child.

“It’s not *tobacco* we want, but you,” he said. “We want you on our side. We want a good warder because, without a good warder, we won’t be able to manage the long stretch ahead.” (Head, 2000, p. 238)

The ability to navigate and manipulate the corrupt system, rather than official roles or titles, determines power in the prison system. Tobacco represents shifting power relations that occur during an exchange between Brille and Hannetjie in the preceding passage. Brille is attempting to gain Hannetjie’s support to make their time in prison more bearable, thereby shifting power from Hannetjie to Brille and the rest of Span One. Brille assumes the role of leader, attempting to rally the prisoners around the idea of having a “good warder” (Head, 2000, p. 238) their side. This exchange also reveals more about Brille’s intellect, as previously discussed concerning the symbolism of glasses. Brille can see the big picture and wield power wisely. Instead of seeking immediate gratification, such as resources, he takes something far more valuable, in this case a prison guard, under their wing.

CONCLUSION

Up to this point, I have demonstrated how symbolism can effectively depict power relations among characters in *The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses*. Symbolism offers writers a means of encapsulating their ideas and thoughts within everyday objects, imbuing these objects with broader implications that readers may not have considered. Due to its subtlety, symbolism serves as a clever device for illustrating the status of characters or situations without having to spell out the entire story to readers. This is particularly advantageous for authors who aim to make political statements through their writing. As seen in *The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses*, symbolism is employed to represent the existing hierarchies, beliefs, and ideologies that are portrayed in the short story.

Glasses symbolize Brille’s vulnerability and intellect, which enable him to exert control over Hannetjie, while fertilizer represents Hannetjie’s weakness that prompts a shift in power relations. Tobacco, on the other hand, symbolizes power. Overall, symbolism adds a layer of depth to literature that is not only from a creative writing perspective but also from a critical standpoint.

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