

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 11 : 6 June 2011
ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

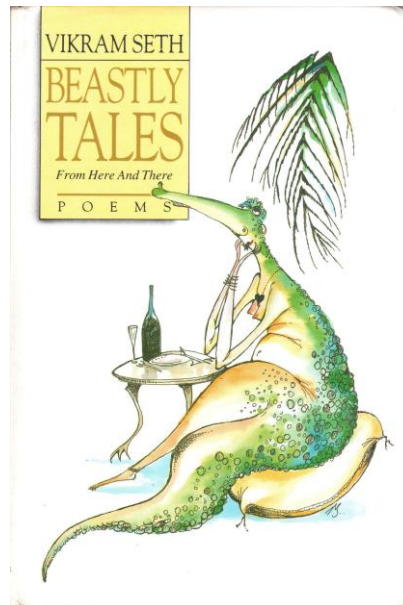
S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

**Anthropomorphism in Vikram Seth's Poem
"The Frog and the Nightingale"**

A. Poonguzhali, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate



1. Introduction

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 6 June 2011

A. Poonguzhali, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

Anthropomorphism in Vikram Seth's Poem - "The Frog and the Nightingale"

Anthropomorphism, referred as personification or *prosopopocia*, is the attribution to human characteristics features shown on inanimate objects, animals, forces of nature, the unseen author of things, and others. “Anthropomorphism” comes from two Greek words, *avopwttos* and *anthropos*’ implying human and *mopon* and *morphe* meaning shape or force. This paper analyzes the use of anthropomorphism in Vikram Seth’s poetic collection, **The Beastly Tales From Here and There**, especially the poem **The Frog and the Nightingale**.

2. Anthropomorphism in Literature

Anthropomorphized animals are frequently used to portray stereotyped characters with which the author quickly conveys the character traits. George Orwell’s **Animal Farm** and animated films such as **Disney’s Robin Hood** (1973 film) in which a lion is the king and the little character is a fox. Most famous children’s television characters are anthropomorphized funny animals such as Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny and Kermit the Frog as well as anthropomorphized inanimate objects such as Sponge Bob Square Pants.

3. Exemplification of Anthropomorphic Elements

Examples of anthropomorphic animals that are humanoid are in the Disney films **Bambi and The Fox and The Hound**. These anthropomorphic creatures share human language and idioms. However, they do not have fingers, human toes or other distinguishing features that would label them as humanoid. Television series intended for children often feature anthropomorphic animals. Video games too feature anthropomorphized animals. **Donkey Kong** and **Sonic the Hedgehog** are some famous examples. In personal computing, Os-tan personifies computer programs.

4. Anthropomorphic Evidences in “The Frog and the Nightingale”



Scriptures and fables incessantly convey the message, that the fruits of sincerity are always sweet but, if one were to view these sources from a deconstructive perspective, we will find that there are numerous examples to show that the wages of sincerity are far from being rewarding; they are in fact, fatal. The story discussed in this paper is **The Frog and the Nightingale** (TFATN).

The Poet's imagination blooms from the foot of the Bingle Bog's Sumac tree and gradually leads us on to the crass cacophony of the frog.

“Neither stones nor prayers nor sticks
Insults or complaints or bricks
Stilled the frog's determination
To display his hearts elation (TFATN 11-14:63).

When a nightingale sings in “full-throated ease”, perched on the sumac tree,
“Dumbstruck sat the gaping frog
And the whole admiring bog
Stared towards the sumac, rapt (TFATN 19-21:63).

The Nightingale feels very proud and is carried away by the praise.

“Bravo!” “Too divine!” “Encore!” (TFATN 29:63).

She sings the whole night without a pause. The next night when the nightingale cleared her throat to sing, the frog interrupts her and criticizes her song.

“Not too bad – but far too long
The technique was fine of course
But it lacked a certain force” (TFATN 48-50:64).

He doesn't stop with that but also includes,

“That not much to boast about”
Said the heartless frog. (TFATN 57-58:64).

5. Falling a Prey to Pride

Like most of us, the nightingale falls a prey to pride. Many professionals who puff themselves up with pride ultimately fall into the hands of their own relatives and friends who pretend to encourage them. Here, the frog behaves like the wicked exploiting patron or manager or agent of the professional. The main aim of the agent or broker is to make money, even as they may promote the professional's prospects.

“Well, I charge a modest fee”
Oh! But it won't hurt you'll see. (TFATN 66-67:65).

Inspired by the words, nightingale sang with huge sensation that her voice brought animals for miles around to the foot of sumac tree.

“And the frog with great Precision
Counted heads and charged admission” (TFATN 74-75:65)

6. Surfacing Problems and Issues

When the nightingale refuses to sing in the bitter cold, the frog compels her and makes her feel more fatigued. The audience enjoys the song. After all they paid what the frog charged for this experience.

The audience of the nightingale can be compared to the fans of cinema stars that pay more merely to catch a glimpse of their tinsel icons.

“Everyday the frog who’d sold her
Songs for silver tried to scold her:
You must practise even longer
Till your voice like mine, glows stronger” (TFATN 88-91:66).

When she got nervous at the second song, again the frog encourages her more platitudes, saying

“you must make your public happier
Give them something sharper, snappier
We must aim for better billings
You still owe me sixty shillings” (TFATN 96-99:66).

At her death bed also nightingale obeys the frog’s words and

“Puffed up, burst a vein, and died” (TFATN 119:67).

The Frog is self-righteous. He merely says:

“I tried to teach her,
But she was a stupid creature-
Far too nervous, far too tense,
For too prone to influence” (TFATN 120-123:67).

The Frog never regrets his action. He must have been full of self-justification and self-satisfaction.

7. Conclusion

Seth perhaps advises the children not to fall into the arms of stranger or a known personality in the name of friendship. But times have changed. Like the frog, we find some people surviving in a crafty manner. The nightingale pales into insignificance and makes the reader infer that perhaps these are the wages of sincerity and love for perfection.

Frogs seem to be greatly maligned in fairytales! We characterize people who are not informed of a situation as “a frog in the well”. They are shown to be crafty in folktales. Grimms’ folktale **The Frog King** portrays Frog as crafty and yet helpful. A noble yet ignorant person is cursed to become a frog in several fairytales.

Frog represents a stage of sinful existence in some sense. Redemption, however, is achieved for all those cursed to become frogs though some benevolent acts ultimately. In other words, “frog” seems to suggest that no one is destined to be evil all his or her life, redemption is at hand. However, it is not shown that this redemption is earned by a frog because of his or her own willful remorse. Yet, when they are redeemed, the frogs of fairytales come out with all beauty and virtues!

We must also note that frog is honored in some sense by accepting its normal posture as one of the difficult asanas in yoga. *Mandukasana* is a yoga posture simulating the normal posture of a frog. And this posture is a painful posture, so the yoga practices allow you to sit in this posture only until you start feeling the strain.

Seth takes the motif of frog and his craftiness to point out how the innocent and not so innocent could be trapped into doing things not appropriate or acceptable. Seth perhaps advises the children not to fall into the arms of strangers or even known persons in the name of friendship.

Nightingale often represents flawless singing in sweet voice, voice of love and passion, and yearning, and so on. Oscar Wilde’s **The Nightingale and the Rose** is a commentary on worldly attitudes and on failure to recognize true love. The Nightingale of Oscar Wilde willingly sings through the night to make the rose bud to blossom so that the young student in love could pluck it and take it to his girlfriend, who unfortunately throws it away saying it does not go with her dress for the dance. A tragic story of great wisdom. Seth also uses the motif of nightingale (and frog) to bring out great wisdom in a simple and delightful manner.



References

Seth, Vikram. “The Frog and the Nightingale”. *Beastly Tales From Here And There*. India: Viking, 1992. pp 63 - 67.

A. Poonguzhali M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Assistant Professor in English
JNN Institute of Technology
Ushaa Garden, No.90
Kannigaipair 601 102
Chennai – Periyapalayam Highway,
Uthukottai Taluk
Thiruvalluvar District
Tamilnadu
India
anandpoonguzhali@yahoo.com