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Literary Theories

Literariness in Stephen King's Bag of Bones: A Detailed Analysis on His Use of Metafiction, Poetic Functions, Stylistics, Symbolic Layering and Intertextuality

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Abstract: Literariness is (a merit upon which a literary works is judged,) a theoretical manifestation developed by Roman Jakobson, for that reason usually Stephen king's works are criticized, a theoretical framework upon which this paper investigates the metafiction, symbolic layering, narrative techniques, and stylistic innovations in Bag of Bones (1998). Despite being categorized as a horror - driven novel, it is drafted with an utmost detailing, rooted in rich literariness, through its powerful narration, explores the human experience such as memory, grief and trauma. The story telling and retaining of multi-layered symbols are made powerful by the act of foregrounding which makes texts to be more interpretive and aesthetic. This study investigates if Bag of Bones is just a horror fiction or it possesses the merit of serious fiction.

Keywords: Literariness, narration, foregrounding, interpretive, symbols, horror, haunting, human experiences, aesthetic, poetic function, discourse, trauma.



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Introduction

It has been a long debate between 'high' and 'low' fiction, especially writers like Stephen King's works are always standing between the two. But on the contrary, *Bag of Bones*, one of his novels has the rich ground to argue that it has all the elements of a serious literary work, as it acquired a pensive narrative, symbolic intensity, depth in theme, and innovative style. Stephen King is firmly of the belief that the art must possess a conscience, and it can manifest itself whatever way suitable. This belief is the difference between a work of serious nature and the works concerned about entertainment, as stated by Frank.N.Magill in his *Survey of American Literature*. This study investigates how far is literariness is present in the novel, laying emphasis on metafiction, symbolism, narrative techniques, thematic complexities, and intertextuality.

The Ethics of Writing

Writing is, as a process, a sort of reconstruction, where the act of narration is therefore, not just descriptions but transformations, twirling an individual trauma into a well-structured meaning. This novel acquired its literariness, as it interrogates whether literary work, especially a fiction should rather entertain or reflect the real world, therefore achieves both. This particular philosophical concern keeps the novel to a level of 'high' seriousness. The symbolic representations such as the house "Sara Laughs" represents itself as a gothic symbol of meaning, a site of psychological and historical haunting. Likewise, in "Water and Lake", water symbolizes submerged facts, emotional depth, and the unconscious, whereas the metaphor *Bag of Bones* deals with human flimsiness, and the emptiness of existence after losses. These are all the key indicators of literariness.

Literariness

A concept deeply rooted in Russian Formalism, Literariness encompasses with features such as foregrounding of language, defamiliarization, structural, and stylistic innovations. Applying this theoretical framework, *Bag of Bones* can be analyzed as a serious literary artifact. A psychological depth is created and a self-reflexivity is allowed by the act of foregrounding the consciousness, avoid being plot-centered alone, which are all the characteristics of the novel, as professed by Jakobson. According to him, literariness arises when the poetic function is effective in the discourse, rather than its referential meaning, the message gets its due attention for its own sake, which includes foregrounding of linguistic structures, defamiliarization of ordinary experiences, and symbolic representations. In this, metafiction and symbolic layering become prevalent, for it produces the literariness.

Metafiction and Its Poetic Functions in Bag of Bones

The leading character of the novel Mike Noonan, a writer, (novelist to be particular), drives the entire story as a metafictional device, through which the whole text gets its reflection upon its own structure. His opinion on writing transforms the narration into a self-conscious act. This reflexivity is a key feature of Jakobson's poetic function, and the same is seen in the narration of Bag of Bones as well. Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as a work which "self-consciously draws attention to its status as an artifact." This comes directly into terms with Jakobson's idea of self-reflexivity, which is explicitly available in Bag of Bones.

Another key fact about this work is, the novel after turns its focus from what to tell and how to tell. Noonan's way narrating illustrates truth's instability, the nature upon which the fiction is constructed, and the shaping of experience in terms of aesthetics. Such a kind of inward alignment of language epitomizes Jakobson's principle that when message becomes self-referential, there arises literariness.

Depressed Memories and Historical Trauma

The reordering of shattered memories, and the search for coherence as a result of losses are the symbolization of Noonan through narration. Bag of Bones is, especially after the death of Noonan's wife, deeply connected with emotional abyss, as it symbolizes the break down in narrative lucidity, and disintegration of identity. This is where the metafiction is extended to symbolism, as writing itself turned out to be a metaphor for overhauling. Therefore, metafiction acts symbolically rather being merely a structural operation. Through pattern and association, multiple meanings are created, which is explicitly demonstrated in Bag of Bones. Rich symbols in this novel retain not one single interpretation, instead act polysemically. 'Sara Laughs', the main setting upon which the plot is strengthened, acts as a symbolic structure, where the meanings are amassed. It has a psychological depth, has a rich background of historical trauma, and mirrors layering of the narration itself. It is clearly seen that, as the house itself becomes a text within the text, buttressing the concerns of metafiction.

Images of Water and Lake

The leitmotif of water typifies defamiliarization, which another mainspring of literariness. The lake is a symbolic place of representing the forbidden histories, sentimental oscillation, and the unconscious. This changeover of a natural phenomenon to a system of symbols lines up with Jakobson's aesthetic functions of language.

The title *Bag of Bones* is employed as a chief metaphor, as it limits the existence of humans to their stripped essentials, reflects the peeling back of narrative illusions, and representing the skeletal structure of storytelling. The title itself foregrounds the density with which the symbols and the linguistic precision are deployed.

Symbolic Layering and Metafiction altogether ensures the literariness of a literary work. Metafiction vanguards the construction of narration, while symbols enlighten the possibilities of multiple interpretations. This, they help shifting the focus from the theme to meaning – making together. This fortifies the view that the form and content are inseparable, as exemplified by Jacobson.

New Aesthetics in Stephen King's *Bag of Bones*

As an approach, largely indebted to Isobel Armstrong, whose *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford, 2000), emphasizes the 'subjectivity' and 'particularity' of the literary texts, motivates the debate, within the text and its readers. It is evident when Armstrong put forth in his *The Radical Aesthetic*: 'Evolving another poetics means challenging the policies of anti-aesthetic by re-making its theoretical base and changing the terms of the argument.' New aesthetics demands a slow burn moody atmosphere, blues based mythology, overstuffed combination of genres, and so on. These elements are the motivations for Stephen King's *Bag of Bones*.

The Slow-burn Moody Atmosphere

Unlike his previous speed – driven narratives, Stephen King's *Bag of Bones* is rather 'slow', and prioritizes sentimental plagency over horror-driven sudden shock. This paved the way for readers to comprehend the psychological dilemma of Mike Noonan. The threatening factors are not supernatural presence anymore, but an unease, silence, memory, and its absentia. Instead of phantoms, mundane objects such as a refrigerator magnets reposit themselves into enigmatic messages. It is a concept, which very much aligns with the Freudian idea of 'uncanny', which uplifts the psychological tension. Another technique which makes this novel to be considered serious is, it turns inside out into a writer's block, through which he exposes the nature of publishing industry, which invites the readers to integrate how much of this account is autobiographical.

Blues-Based Mythology

By the radical violence, for which Sara Tidwell, a leading character, becomes a victim, King made an attempt to bring to light the darker side Afro-American Blues tradition, here, it does not operate as background alone, but as a mytho-poetic framework, where music adds value to memory and torment. This makes the text not just a horror story, but a cultural entity to be remembered.

Dark-Tower Elements

The recurring leitmotifs links the Bag of Bones to the Dark Tower universe, which works as a symbolic linkage to other works of Stephen King, making this novel as a large part of matrix of intertextuality, and provides insights for the narrative to contribute to a broader mythos. It is also characterized by its multiplicity, as it has the elements of a ghost story, mysteries around murder, psychological trauma as in the case of Mike Noonan, and Commentary on social evils, which creates the potential to elevate the narrative. This mixture of genre is marked by 'high' literariness and aesthetics.

Intertextuality in Bag of Bones

As propounded by Julia Kristeva, intertextuality remains the foundational concept meaning making, in association with the reader, of how they relate themselves with the text, rather than merely being author created meaning which is, in most cases referential. Through the character of Rebecca, it is vivid in its theme and structure, that intertextuality is presented in Bag of Bones, which elevates the narrative to a standard of 'high' literature. When Mike Noonan returns to Sara Laughs, his lakeside house, he comes into terms with the abiding occupancy of the long dead, his wife Johanna in particular and haunting image of Sara Tidwell, progresses towards shaping the current narrative. This is the parallelization of Rebecca, to whom an unnamed narrator comes to Manderley, another house is still under the daunting influence of Rebecca, who is deceased. This is where the intertextuality is seen, as the aforementioned narrative presents layered meaning by providing references such as the echo of Rebecca, which adds another layer of meaning. The readers are made clearly comprehend that Rebecca is able to recognize the cliché of a house tormented not only by physical means but also psychologically by a dead lady. This is with utmost intensity, turning away from psychological torments to a sense of supernatural presence, is enlarged in terms of its meaning.

Conclusion

Through the enquiring lens of scholars like Jakobson, *Bag of Bones* must also be seen as a treatise in which literariness sprang up not in spite of its genre but by its overlooking of form and language. Therefore, this novel fulfills the necessities of poetic critique, by meeting the sense of metafictional awareness and symbolic involution foregrounding the flawless aspect of storytelling. Reinforcing Jakobson's concept gives away that *Bag of Bones* carries off literariness through the firmness of poetic function. Metafiction twirls the narration inward, whereas symbolic layering dilates its semantic range. A stylometric survey conducted by Andreas Van Cranenburgh provides stylistics evidences such as handling language, structure, and so on, Stephen King's *Bag of Bones* can be ranked high and serious literary work. Thus, these features uplift the novel beyond the typical gothic horror, placing it with an amalgamation literary critique.

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