

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ



Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi
The Journal of International Social Sciences
Cilt: 29, Sayı: 1, Sayfa:71-77, OCAK – 2019

Makale Gönderme Tarihi: 19.10.2018 **Kabul Tarihi:** 21.12.2018

THE REFLECTION OF THE IMAGERY OF COLDNESS IN ANN BEATTIE'S "SNOW"¹

Ann Beattie'nin "Kar" Adlı Kısa Kısa Hikayesinde Soğuk İmgelemin Yansıtılması

Zennure KÖSEMAN²

ABSTRACT

This article intends to highlight how the usage of images and symbols reflect the inner psyche of individuals in the natural setting as in Ann Beattie's "Snow." The coldness in the depths of the forest like setting pulls two lovers to the landscape to have a rest and happiness. The language spent sounds all the coldness. At the end, the snowplow scraps all the snow outside as if cleaning the darkness of the inner psyches of individuals living there. The language used is poetic enough to keep all the secrets in itself. The male lover abruptly leaves the female lover by creating the questions to find the reasons for departing. The house they accomodate reflects all the hidden messages having solely three belongings: a library, a fireplace and a wallpaper. The snow, snowplow, ice, cold water, fireplace sound coldness as a whole in the context of the open-ended short short story which reflects poetic messages in depth.

Key Words: Snow, Natural life, Coldness, Imagery, Transformation

ÖZ

Bu makale, doğal çevrede imgelerin ve sembollerin insanın iç dünyasını Ann Beattie'nin "Kar" adlı kısa kısa hikayesinde olduğu vurgulamayı amaçlamaktadır. Orman benzeri bir mekanın derinliklerinde, soğukluk, iki sevgiliyi huzur olma ve dinlenme için çekmektedir. Kullanılan dil bu soğuk havayı hissettirir. Hikayenin sonunda, kar küreme aracı orada yaşayan insanların iç dünyasındaki karanlıkları temizlercesine karı temizlemektedir. Kullanılan dilde saklanan sırlar varmışçasına şairane bir anlatım vardır. Erkek sevgili, arkadan "Neden böyle oldu?" sorularını bırakarak isimsiz kadını birden terk eder. Yaşanılan ev, sadece üç şey barındırarak saklanan mesajları yansıtır: bir kütüphane, şömine, ve duvar kağıdı. Kar, kar küreme aracı, şömine bir bütün olarak açık uçlu kısa kısa hikayenin içerisinde derinlerde şiirsel mesajları yansıtmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kar, Natural yaşam, Soğukluk, İmgelem, Değişim

The truth is people are kind of scared very very short stories—just as they are by long poems.

Grace Paley

Grace Paley emphasizes the poetic language kept in the depth of short short stories. Ann Beattie's "Cold" conveys the portrayal of profound meanings related to two unnamed lovers who experience a fragmented psyche as well as the state of alienation and isolation in their inner worlds. As the reflection of the language is through a natural condition of coldness and purity of snow, Beattie solely explains everything in the depths of her mind through a restriction of words in "Snow," i.e., the heart of the darkness of her mind is extensive so that great quantity of information is kept in the

¹ This article is the extended form of the presentation entitled as "The Language Sounds all the Coldness and Purity in Ann Beattie's 'Snow'" in 2nd International Conference on Research in Applied Linguistics in Inonu University in 2018. It was also presented in a different perspective entitled as "Efficient Imagery of Inner Psyches" in IDEA in Akdeniz University in Antalya, 2018. This article has not previously been published in any of the means of publication.

² Assist. Prof. Dr., Inonu University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, The Department of Western Languages and Literatures. E-Mail: zennurekoseman@yahoo.com.tr

restricted way of narration. Despite the existence of a pessimistic mood of narrating the plot, the unknown narrator of this short short story particularly depicts the coldness in an ecocritical perspective. Hence, the present study highlights that the natural environment reflects the inner psyche of individuals in respect to their psychological disorders as reflected in Beattie's "Snow."

In this case, it is better to note what Grace Paley and Dewitt Henry express about the real meanings of short short stories: As slow as a short short story is read repetitively (Shapard, 1986: 254), one can find out various meanings in a word in the context. Similar to this interpretation, as much as a natural environment is slowly and repetitively visited, various meanings in the natural landscape are possibly discovered. Therefore, a short short story, like "Snow," is profoundly interpretative in accordance with the psychological situations of the major characters: if the person is exactly sad because of some arguments in her/his inner world, it expresses coldness and the sense of hard conditions. On the other hand, if the person is happy in her/his surrounding, then, that person considers the snow to represent whiteness and purity in a relaxed life full of happiness. Hence, this indicates that the creation of self-confidence follows the happy observation.

Interpretations become extensive as repetitively and slowly comprehensive reading is achieved. In addition to Paley, Dewitt Henry expounds that "there is completeness [in short short stories], and when it is achieved a fullness of reference [then] that is self-sufficient" (Shapard, 1986: 254). In this case, Henry also comments on its form as Paley does. There is unity in short short stories in which the unity will be destructed if one of the words is taken out. The complexity of the unknown protagonist's mind will be misunderstood if different word is used instead of wallpaper which represents hiding its confusion.

As the individuals play the end of the annual climate in their relationships in this short short story so that they are about to end the close connection, then, the ecocentric circumstances respond the end of a per annum climactic process. The winter season plays a significant role in this short short story because it is a great symbolic element that represents the end of a relationship. It signifies the coldness of the dual dependence: there lies a pseudo close connection that hints at strong interaction behind the actual connection. Hence, the winter process is a clue for the approaching final of a love affair. Such a writing perspective of pessimism prepares the authors advance in their maturity as they observe natural circumstances in each season and express their feelings in their literary texts. Personifying nature as a person, its climactic variations within different seasons reflect psychological fluctuality.

In order to support the argument how natural environments mirror psychological states of individuals and how the natural events adapt themselves to human beings' inner psyches, two main environmentalists, Edward Abbey and John Muir's ideas will be underpinned to emphasize the main reasons why the two lovers prefer to be in an isolated wild environment.³ Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* reflects nature as a personified existence that has alienation and isolation to have tranquility in wilderness. He reminds the reading public that the book is not concerned about a desert but describes it as a natural scene in which there is accuracy of life, a kind of truth in simple fact of loneliness. Moreover, everything in it, as Grace Paley underlines, is closer to a poem (Shapard, 1986: 253): as it has profound meanings in depth, it is not a desert at all, because, the deserts are the vast areas, deep in their ways and complex condition (Abbey, 1968: x). However, nature, on the contrary, is not a place of meaninglessness and nothingness: similar to a poem, different interpretations are kept within its extensively interpretive natural events. To illustrate, as a high acclaimed writer and natural observer [John Muir,]⁴ expresses through his walking and picturing his observations in his writings, the female character in "Snow" unites with the natural environment, and becomes content with it as

³ As an American author and essayist, Edward Abbey deals with the environmental cases in his literary studies.

⁴ John Muir was a writer who had walked a thousand miles or more when he reached San Francisco in 1868 (Muir, 1987, p. vii.)

John Muir is. In this case, like a Transcendentalist writer, John Muir becomes a part of nature by diving its depths, feeling and responding to the transformations in it in his literary work:

As soon as a vulnerable spot is discovered on man or beast, they stand on their heads and sink their jaws, and though torn limb from limb, they will yet hold on and die biting deeper. When I contemplate this fierce creature so widely distributed and strongly entrenched, I see that much remains to be done ere the world is brought under the rule of universal peace and love. (Muir, 1987: 44)

This quotation implies that nature pursues the natural states of the individuals who portray the dark side of their inner worlds through their behaviors and attitudes. Hence, nature responds to the fluctuations within their inner worlds and outside appearance. Accompanying the transformations on human beings, the natural environment perceives the fluctuations within the emotional world of the characters. To illustrate, when individuals are disturbed by their surroundings, even their tone of skin color alters. This signifies that man and nature go hand in hand. As individuals tremble throughout their problematic human psyches, then, "the universal peace and love" of the life in wilderness senses human beings' turbulences. This emphasizes that natural incidents become the voice of the natural world of man on earth.

Taking Edward Abbey and John Muir as a theoretical basis on how nature responds to human psychology, it is significant to underline that the wild natural environment is as sensitive as human beings so that it has various images to accompany its visitors. This indicates that it feels the way human beings evaluate and sense individuals in their environment. Edward Abbey supports the argument of this study that the depths of nature, most of the time, are the necessary parts of the peaceful universe in which there is innocence, ease, comfort and tranquility in it: "There will be other readers, I hope, who share my basic assumption that wilderness is a necessary part of civilization and that it is the primary responsibility of the national park system to preserve intact and undiminished what little still remains." (Abbey, 1968: 58). In this quotation, Abbey refers to the sense that the anxiety of the destruction of natural wilderness becomes inevitable and, thus, the requirement of the improving national park systems should be saved to protect the natural landscape hidden in wilderness. Thus, a natural setting is a necessity for most individuals to discharge themselves within the rush of the competitive world, therefore, an exile towards the rural environment should be concerned. As the unnamed narrator and her lover pursue a life to attain freedom and happiness in the rural environment in "Snow," such an exile is the emphasis of the alienated and isolated feelings as well as the emotional world of the human beings.

Grace Paley's definition of the short story in respect to its depth due to having a prose-poetic structure supports the argument of this study since it implies a condition of having an interpretative thinking behind reading. The nature concurrently has a similar construction so that it is full of various profound meanings for everyone. Wilderness of nature is like a personality and trembles within the natural incidents reflecting the transformations in natural settings as if an individual is intensely affected by social changes in his/her surroundings. This conveys that the natural events revive as the visitors dive into the depths of the natural environment.

In addition to Abbey and Muir, when Raymond Williams defines the reasons behind why individuals prefer the country life instead of the city life, he pinpoints the contradiction between two ways of lives. He highlights why individuals are on a way for transforming themselves for the rural settings as in Ann Beattie's "Snow." Williams' highly-acclaimed study depicts that there are some thematic reasons behind the contradiction:

On the contrary settlements, which in the rural history have been astonishingly varied, powerful feelings have gathered and have been generalised. On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre; of learning, communication, and light. Powerful hostile associations have also been developed: on the city as a place of noise,

worldliness and ambitions; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life reaches back into classical times. (Williams, 1973: 1)

As the quotation reflects there are two contradictory ways of living in these two aspects of life. The permanence of moral values are significant in the country whereas material prosperity and various opportunities of living cause the destruction of ethical values in the heart of the city centre. However, as each individual has the so-called opportunity to uprise in social setting of urban life, therewithall, a rise in “hostile associations” are confronted in urban environment because of the urban ethos that focuses on the financial gain. Hochfield comments on the creation of a new social structure that destroys most individual values because of the hostile situation of the capitalist world as:

The means of capitalist production was incompatible with the democratic ideal of individual freedom. Private property tended to destroy the social equality on which freedom was based; it seemed to be creating a new class system and new forms of dependency in which masses of men were the helpless victims of economic power controlled by a few. . . . [becoming] a cause of anxiety and insecurity, [urban life] threatened..... to revive a state of primitive warfare in the midst of civilized society. Toward machinery they were generally hostile. (1973: 48)

Hochfield implies the tremendous structure of the city working center in which most individuals become trapped by the hardship of the working circumstances. Accordingly the opportunities of urban life become disastrous for some individuals who have lack of adequate individual characteristics to strive in its working rush most of the time. In “Snow,” Ann Beattie implies that individuals become alienated, isolated and fragmented in their inner psyches in such a living environment and experience their thoughts of antipathy in their inner worlds. Martha Sherrill explains that Beattie deals with the social subproblems of a certain group of generation:

Being understood and misunderstood, is an artist’s lot. Through the years, critics who marveled at her beautiful prose that her characters are spoiled, too white and too contemporary (like the complaining one hears about the TV show “thirtysomething”), that Beattie is only interested in detailing the lives of the ‘60s generation drifting through and surviving ‘70s and ‘80s. (Sherrill, 1990: 3)

As this quotation emphasizes, Beattie is a voice of the ‘70s and ‘80s generation and specifies how human psyches deal with the complications through diving into the wild depths of nature in which the extensive environment just responds with the swift changes as in the mental world of the female and male major characters in “Snow.”

Beattie explains nature through some figures of speech such as imagery and symbols, concerning coldness and purity that strike the complexity of her mind she used to experience in the urban life standards. The female protagonist recounts her memories that occupied her mind in winter: the coldness has a particular role throughout her creative writing. She conceives her former lover and reflects her dramatic explanations in her memorial pessimistic narration. All the past prevalent deathless events reoccur through the profound imagery and symbolism as if they were noticed at that time.

In her retrospectivity, what is consistent is that Beattie prefers the usage of minimalist life style in any way: it is inevitable to interpret that she supports a simple way in the modern period as Henry David Thoreau selected once to live for a particular period in *Walden*. This indicates that she requires a “relaxing human mind in free settings.”⁵ Therefore, minimalism plays a significant role in her life. In the interpretative analysis, it is possible to express that a minimalist is an individual who knows the rules how to lead her/his life with the less. Thus, less quantity, as Barc Botha notes, is the main

⁵ Zennure Köseman indicates in “Henry David Thoreau: Free Mind in the Garden” that vast garden in the wild settings support human mind’s tranquility and security as well as happiness and self-reliance (2018: 161).

element of minimalism (2014: 2): as there are solely three belongings of a fireplace, a library and a wallpaper in the house in which the two lovers accommodate, they mysteriously hide the secrets of their inner worlds and reflect the simplicity of their way of living in the new environment.⁶ This simplicity reminds purity and coldness in itself, because it gives the sense of emotional coldness to the readers. Living in this simple life style, the lovers are on a way from the city to the country life in their love affair and they prefer a simple and peaceful rather than a complex way of living. Simplistic living style in the country life is just opposite to the confused life style of urban life for them. However, as their love relationship ends abruptly even in the country landscape, she tries to reflect on what went wrong so that such a really so-called strong relationship ended. Accordingly, this is how short short stories are effective in their narrative structure so that sudden changes appear to drive the readers to estimate the reasons behind the abrupt transformations. Thus, minimalist relationship also appears in her sudden love intercourse. Accompanying the coldness of the relationship, snow is really meaningful in this atmosphere as it covers the surface and reflects the influence of coldness in the surrounding. It was effective for a process of time with its purity of whiteness that hides the complicated situations in the natural sphere. As it suddenly melted after the relationship ended, cold water covers everywhere and the hidden secrets under the snow are all on surface as the female character is left alone when the male abandons her.

When Beattie goes between back and forth in time through reminiscence, she depicts how love is found and lost. The readers feel how those memorial days left unforgettable traces in psyches and subconsciousness. In her creative storytelling, sudden changes in time create efficient reader pursuit. This indicates the meaningful estimations in short short stories: the events maintain various depth of meanings as in Beattie's efficient imagery and symbolism.

When she explains that her lover and she were on the way for the country to lead a country way of life for calmness, peacefulness and purity, she implies their search for contentment and hopefulness to have a simplistic social improvement in their lives. However, a sudden change happens in their livelihood and she abruptly has an abandoned life: her lover leaves her alone in the coldness of the preferred environment to settle. Although she has unity of coherence in the unknown narrator's short short story, she tries to interpret and comprehend what went wrong in the relationship so that they are separated from each other. Questioning herself about the past incidents and diving into past memories indicate how "complex and complicated" mind she has (Lee, 1995: 231). When Lee analyzes Beattie's works stylistically and structurally, he concludes how mixed mind Beattie has in her inner psyche similar to the unknown narration (*Ibid.*). Her unnamed protagonist represents her mixed mental life and mirrors this complexity with that of the coldness of nature. This implies that the natural events describe the changes within the characters. Thus, this implies that the snowfall in nature is a means to direct the narrator into the memories that involve an outline of the events in her life composed of the growth of the narrator, falling in love and spending a winter of process with her lover (Beattie 1995: 23). The snowfall is hard and the memories are lasting: her falling in love to a lover, and spending a whole period of winter with a short love dependence in the cold weather circumstances. Hence, both natural coldness and relationship's coldness follow each other.

As recalling all the events, there is the cold night which implies that the incidents she remembers just shake her in the darkness of her psyche. Therefore, most of the applied words in the context of this short short story sound coldness and the need for purity. It is interesting that the snowfall reminds everyone different retrospective events which imply that the meaning of each scene in nature is different for all. This indicates that the snowfall is basic nostalgic event for her to remind the previous days.

Beattie's structural differentiation in her storytelling reflects her stylistic variations over the years. To illustrate, Beattie published *Park City*, a collection of old and new short stories about which Christopher Lehman-Haupt wrote in the *New York Times* in 1998:

⁶Beattie's literary style of writing also pursues minimalism: Few objects are listed to form stories either in novels or in short and short short stories.

[The stories] are arranged chronologically, which allows the reader to trace the development of the author's technique. It also lets one see the contrast between the latest stories and the earliest, an experience of sufficient subtlety and complexity to reduce one in this limited space to the following gross generalizations: Gone is the deadpan style of the early and middle stories, in which Ms. Beattie lays out on a dissecting table the behavior of her disaffected post-counterculture yuppies and then leaves it up to the reader to do the anatomizing. Gone, too, are the stabs of lyricism of the middle period, particularly the endings that try poetically to recapitulate the story's action but feel tacked on and artific. (Lehman; 1998)

As this quotation indicates, Beattie changes her writing style in her literary history. The last style she uses is the poetically storytelling as she experiences in "Snow:" it is prose poetic so that the readers are fond of reading her short short stories. In such an effective writing, her usage of imagery and symbols become instrumental so that they reflect the inner psyche of the narrator. The figures of speech she applies are highly influential to estimate her genius in wide semantic structure in each wording. They are used as if they are a part of a poem: broad meanings exist in each word, however, it is only a prose poetic that sounds as if it is a poem.

Snow plays an extensive role in describing what kind of a psyche the narrator has. Snow is cold, and white: as the short short story starts, the female character reminds her previous unforgettable lovely days in which she and her former lover were together in a house in which there is purity, happiness and innocence. A library, a fireplace, wallpaper, and a sudden chipmunk entering the house reflect the simplistic formation in this minimalist short short story⁷. However, the chipmunk tries to find the same way to escape from there: this reflects that it is also a symbolic element in this relationship, because, it tries to escape and disappear as the male partner does in the improvement of the plot. It moves very quickly and is a means to symbolize the time and the immediate love relationship experienced in the natural landscape. Therefore, the chipmunk has a future prophecy related to the matter in the relationship that disappears suddenly as the chipmunk does. In the house, fireplace is as significant as the chipmunk due to representing an active position. It stands for the assumed sweet home and symbolizes the hearth and the united peaceful living. When there is "just a dots a few white" she was shocked by noticing "no field of snow." (Beattie, 1995: 23) This implies that by the end of the relationship, the natural atmosphere responded contrarily to what used to happen in the previous days which become so significant for the female narrator: Hence, the natural environment responds the changes in the attitudes and the behaviour of individuals:

This is a story, told the way you say stories should be told: Somebody grew up, fell in love, and spent a winter with her lover in the country. This, of course, is the barest outline, and futile to discuss. It's as pointless as throwing birdseed on the ground while snow still falls fast. Who expects small things to survive when even the largest get lost? People forget years and remember moments. Seconds and symbols are left to sum things up: the black shroud over the pool. Love, in the shortest form, becomes a word. What I remember about all that time is one winter. The snow. Even now, saying "snow," my lips move so that they kiss the air. (Beattie, 1995: 23)

In this quotation, "shortest form" also implies for the coming coldness in the process of the relationship: the love affair is in its "shortest form" and reminds the approaching end. Snow reveals the actualization of the hidden matters and reflects how the occurring incidents pursue each other. It reminds how the narrator feels the sense of the lack of sentimentalism (love is only a word for her, but nothing else) and how she is alone, isolated and fragmented is the main case. There is the coldness of the snow that becomes a means to recognize her actual strong identity trying to find other solutions for the complex relationship. This indicates that snow prepares the opportunity for her to revive herself and consider her new social environment: she just listens to the stories that her neighbours

⁷ Chipmunk is an animal that has sudden movements in the environment.

narrate around the fireplace (Beattie, 1995: 22). Hence, she recognizes the significance how her social matters destruct her, therefore she has to have immediate decisions to find out a new way of life for herself. In her desperate love relationship full of alienation, isolation, fragmentation, and anxiety, she avoids having meaningless interactions. In order to express her self decision, she states: "No mention has been made of the snowplow that seemed always to be there, scraping snow off our narrow road—an artery cleared though neither of us could have said where the heart was" (Beattie, 1995: 23). The snowplow signifies her scraping her old memories and becoming ready for new hopeful days. In this short quotation, "[their] narrow road" is the road of their short love affair so that it should be reconsidered in the new evaluations. As a short short story based on minimalism in life, "Snow" is a call for all to preserve their personal values in the simple way of living that provides each individual to evaluate the value of their belongings in tranquility, silence, peace and natural loveliness. This is a hint that a regeneration of thoughts of self determination and strength occur in the inner world of the unknown female major character.

As a conclusion, behind the open-endedness in "Snow," readers find out various conclusions themselves. As the readers view an abandoned female narrator who is in a pole of meaninglessness and void simple living, they create new plausible conclusions to reflect how the female narrator is shocked by her lover. Yet, by the time the snowplow scrapes the snow on the landscape, she has an epiphany of new consideration of assessments about her psychological situation so that she should revive herself and reawaken in the post of such complex relationship. Although she intended to lead her life in that simple living with her former lover, as the snowplow scrapes snow, she has to scrap the old memories in her mind. Thus, she evaluates her own isolated, alienated and fragmented psyche caused by her so-called dear lover. In this case, the snowplow is a means of regeneration and reawakening. The open-ended case of the final lines indicates that there is a powerful woman from then on who tries to prepare herself for new relationships. This indicates that she returns her inner psyche and evaluates her strength in her natural environment which proves how she is purified from the old memories. As a whole, she revives herself at the end of all her alienation, isolation and fragmentation.

References

- Abbey, Edward. (1968). *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Beattie, Ann. (1995). "Snow." *A World of Fiction: Twenty Timeless Short Stories*. New York: Addison Wesley Publishing Company.
- Botha, Marc. (2014). "Why Minimalism Matters: Radical Quantity and the Respresentation of Immanence." (2014). *Textual Practice*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2014.969300> on October 15, 2018.
- Hochfield, George. (1973). "An Introduction to Transcendentalism." *American Transcendentalism: An Anthology of Criticism*. London: University of Notre Dame Press. Pp.: 35-31.
- Köseman, Zennure. (2018). "Henry David Thoreau: Free Mind in the Garden." *Enchanted, Stereotyped, Civilized: Garden Narratives in Literature, Art and Film*. Würzburg: Verla Königshausen & Neumann GmbH. Pp: 161-173.
- Lehman-Haupt, Christophe. (1998). "Dissecting Yuppies With Precision" *New York Times* (8 June) Retrieved April 04, 2018 from <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/08/books/books-of-the-times-dissecting-yuppies-with-precision.html?sq=%22park+city%22+%22ann+beattie%22&scp=4&st=cse>.
- Muir, John. (1987). *My First Summer in the Sierra*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Shapard, Robert and James Thomas. (Eds.). (1986). *Sudden Fiction: American Short-Short Stories*. Utah: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc.
- Sherrill, Martha. (1990). "Ann Beattie, Reluctant Voice of a Generation." *Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1990/02/04/ann-beattie-reluctant-voice-of-a-generation>, October 7, 2018.
- Williams, Raymond. (1973). *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press.

