



THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE SINISTER: LEITMOTIV AND DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION

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Abstract. *This paper explores interartistic relationships between literature and painting through the concept of the “cultural intertext,” proposed by Jesús Camarero, emphasizing how artistic expressions create dialogic networks of memory, influence, and reinterpretation. Drawing on Eugenio Trías’s theory of the beautiful and the sinister, the study analyzes an original illustration inspired by E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*, where beauty and death coexist as complementary forces. The artwork reveals the uncanny tension between the animate and the inanimate, highlighting how visual art transforms literary and philosophical ideas into symbolic and emotional imagery.*

Keywords: *interartistic relationships, cultural intertext, the uncanny, comparative textual journey, beauty and the sinister, visual symbolism.*

Interartistic relationships assume the existence of a link between discourses. The most recurrent form of this relationship has been expressed between literature and painting. In a particular way, painting has served to express thematic, formal, and narrative relationships associated with various literary texts. Gustave Doré's illustrations of the Bible or *The Divine Comedy* (*La divina comedia*) are some of the most famous examples of this relationship. In this way, the reinterpretation that pictorial texts offer on literary themes allows us to think of artistic expression as a complex network of relationships or allusions.

Jesús Camarero [1] states that textual networks assume the existence of dialogic relationships between the arts. These relationships constitute a «cultural intertext». This concept is associated with comparatist literary studies e “implies that different literatures enter into a planetary intercommunication transporting their respective cultures to an international and intreicultural domain” (p. 19). In general, a cultural intertext determines information, updates references that link one text with another. Thus, in an intertextual key, all travelers are Ulysses or Sinbad.

According to Camarero, the existence of these links allows memory to become “the object of other future readings” (p. 27). Every literary experience is lodged in memory and produces and promotes new forms of expression. This means that all reading can be transferred and that a text is a link that links a text with other artistic manifestations.

This transfer involves “a network through which the effective transfer from one place to another occurs in a beneficial and rehumanizing interactive interference” (p. 101). The intercommunication of texts supposes the appearance of a Comparative Textual Journey (TTC) that is classified into four large groups:

- myths and themes;
- sources and influences;
- cross-cultural relationships;

– new thematic relationships.

In *The Beautiful and the Sinister* (*Lo bello y lo siniestro*), Eugenio Trías [2] defines the sinister as “condition and limit of the beautiful” (p. 29). According to him, the sinister must remain hidden, veiled. As a condition and limit of the beautiful, the sinister “produces a rupture of the aesthetic effect” (p. 30), as it is associated with the strange, the curse and everything that is not one's own or belongs to the home.

Trías recovers the freudian proposal and identifies six inventories of the sinister. In these inventories, attention is drawn to the third: «The doubt that an apparently animated being is in fact living» (p. 49). According to Trías, the ambivalence between the animate and the inanimate produces a sensation of “promiscuity between the organic and the inorganic, between the human and the inhuman” (p. 49) this sensation is in the sphere of the sinister because it reveals something that should remain hidden.

The following illustration presents this coexistence between the animate and the inanimate and the way in which the characters that make up the image express the doubt that the inanimate comes to life or appears as a living form. This composition reveals the sinister.



Figure 1 – *Lo bello y lo siniestro* (source: own elaboration)



In relation to the references that activate the Textual Journey we can say that the enlightenment mixes two worlds: the beautiful and the hidden or disturbing. According to the Textual Journey, the “Source” is the idea of The Beautiful and the Sinister that Trías proposes and is associated with the story of T.T.A. Hoffman *Der Sandmann* (1817).

In the work of art, the young woman represents life and beauty, while death symbolizes the hidden that appears. Both characters hold a rose that indicates that beauty always has a shadow that limits it and gives it depth and that determines the limit that the sinister reveals. Cool colors (yellows, grays, and shades) make everything feel like something is about to happen. This sensation is a condition of “the sinister”.

The work of art is divided almost in half: on one side, the illuminated girl; in the other Death in shadows. Trías says that the beautiful and the sinister are two sides of the same mirror. There is no fight: they are together, coexisting. The roses indicate the border between both worlds. The limit where the sinister is hinted at. The night landscape and the castle in the background create an atmosphere between romantic and Gothic. This connects with the authors that Trías mentions (such as Hoffmann or Freud) where the “familiar” becomes strange.

References

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