

Animal Imagery in Jose Saramago's *Blindness*

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Abstract

*As opposed to New Criticism and Russian Formalism's contention regarding the meaning of a text as the result of literary devices as well as Structuralism and Poststructuralism to which it is merely the product of plays of signification, Reader-Response criticism stresses that meaning is constructed in the process of reading and is determined by the reader's mind. Drawing upon Reader-Response theories, this study explores the gap created and linked between the strong animal imagery in Jose Saramago's *Blindness* and the idea of spiritual blindness of human beings as symbolised in the physical blindness of the characters to assert that meaning is indeterminate and shaped by the reader's realization of it. In addition, the researchers try to fill in the gaps created by the resemblance between the idea expressed in the novel and that found in previous literary works to discuss if the expectations raised in this light are fulfilled.*

Keywords: Spiritual Blindness, Animal Imagery, Death, Horizon of Expectations, Deterioration of Humanity

1. Introduction

As opposed to New Criticism and Russian Formalism's perspective, the meaning of a text is not just the result of literary devices. Nor is it merely the product of plays of signification as Structuralism and Poststructuralism assert; it is rather the result of the process of reading and is determined by the reader's consciousness. As Guerin et al (2005) have it, "[r]eader-response critics see formalist critics as narrow, dogmatic, elitist, and certainly wrong-headed in essentially refusing readers even a place in the reading-interpretive process" (p. 351), whereas Reader-Response critics emphasise the active role of the reader in the process of reading. Accordingly, this study aims at exploring the significance of animal imagery in Jose Saramago's *Blindness* by drawing upon Reader-Response criticism that brings into consideration the active role of the reader in the act of interpretation.

Since Saramago's *Blindness* received great critical and public acclaim, it has been voluminously discussed and approached in terms of characterisation and themes, especially the significance of blindness. For instance, in "Saramago's *Blindness*" Kevin L. Cole (2006) explores the significance of the dog of tears as having human characteristics. Being concerned with the heroic acts of the doctor's wife and the dog of tears as the only saviors, he indeed focuses upon the humanity of the animal in the novel. Nevertheless, the animosity of human beings and its significance in connection with the idea of the loss of humanity are not touched upon in the article. In addition, Michael Keren (2007) takes a philosophical perspective in approaching the novel by establishing his ideas upon social contract theories and contenting that Saramago's *Blindness* matches to the theories to enhance the idea that philosophy as well as literature contributes to coping with difficult "moral problems of our time" (p. 463). Moreover, the blurred distinction between animals and human beings are pointed out by David Bolt (2007). He also explains that "animalization also takes the form of an extraordinary sense of smell" and "as uncleanness" (p. 45). He in consequence explores the forms that animalisation takes throughout the novel rather than stressing the relation between this animalization and lack of humanity and morality. His article is mainly pointed towards confuting Kevin Coles's contention.

Nevertheless, the importance of the strong animal imagery of the novel that implies and enhances the idea of the deterioration and loss of morality as well as humanity in the modern world has greatly been overlooked. Thus, a reader-response reading of the novel that highlights the active role of the reader in filling in the gaps including the one between the strong animal imagery of the novel and the idea of the deterioration morality is deeply required.

In addition, thanks to the approach, the readers explain to what degree the novel creates expectations that match the previous literary strategies and themes in two literary works. For that reason, from a perspective far too frequently ignored this study endeavors to expound upon this relation to highlight the significance of the prevalent animal imagery in support of one of the novel's central themes: spiritual blindness in the modern world.

2. Theory

Reader-Response criticism and theory can be said to have burgeoned at the beginning of the twentieth century. It can be viewed as a reaction against the text-centered approach of New Criticism and Formalism and the passive role of the reader in the act of interpretation as assumed in realism. In addition, it is a reaction against the objective view of the existence of final truth, an idea that emanates from modern philosophies of science. As Raman Selden (1989b) paraphrases David Bleich, "modern philosophers of science (especially T. S. Kuhn) have correctly denied the existence of an objective world of facts" (p. 130). In Reader-Response criticism, it is claimed that science is a good means of achieving truth, whereas poetry "can produce 'pseudo-statements' about the nature of reality" (Bressler 2007, p. 77). In other words, as it is inferred, arriving at a final truth determined either by the author or by the text is an impossibility. However, to Stanley Fish "the effective fallacy is still a fallacy, since our readings are always governed not by the text but by the personal assumptions and interpretive protocols that we start with" (Leitch et al 2001, 1671).

Along its emphasis upon the active role of the reader, Reader-Response criticism holds that any literary text is always intentional. That is, it is directed towards an outside reader or audience. This has sprung from Edmund Husserl's idea of consciousness which "is a unified intentional act" by which he means "it is always directed to an 'object'; in other words, to be conscious is always to be conscious of something" (Abrams 1999, p. 255). Therefore, the presence of an observer, a reader, becomes of great significance. Consequently, setting up an opposition to modernists, Structuralists, and Poststructuralists' postulation of the existence of a text which is best expressed in Jacques Derrida's (1976) words "there is nothing outside the text" (p. 163), for Reader-Response criticism a text exists only if it is acknowledged by a reader. In other words, a text does not exist until it is read, attested, and perceived by the reader. Accordingly, Reader-Response criticism emphasises the perceiver's (the reader's) role in any perception (the reading experience).

This bringing the reader's consciousness into consideration implies that the act of interpretation is not understanding only of the written words on the page, but of the unwritten parts as perceived by the readers' consciousness. Reader-Response critics and Phenomenologists' concern with human consciousness and the way it perceives the outside world is heavily indebted to Gestalt psychology according to which "human mind does not perceive things in the world as unrelated bits and pieces but as *configuration* of elements, themes, or meaningful, organized wholes" (Selden, 1989a, p. 114). In other words, human consciousness cannot understand the constituent parts of an object separately. Consequently, we can never ascertain the existence of objects, phenomena, outside our consciousness. What is important is the way objects "*appear* to our consciousness" (Selden, 1989b, p. 103).

By the same token, the function of the reader in the act of reading becomes of great significant. A text cannot be analysed regardless of the way human consciousness works. Accordingly, what happens in the process of reading is "the dynamic TOTALITY of the literary text" (Castle 2007, p. 177) as perceived by the reader. In this regard, Wolfgang Iser's (2000) constellation analogy shall be illuminating. He compares the words on a text to stars and the total meaning of it to the constellation the lines between which are drawn by the observer. As he interjects, "[t]he 'stars' in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable" (p. 195). Consequently, in Reader-Response criticism the focus is upon the ways the reader's consciousness apprehends the totality or the gestalt of the text, that is, the process of perceiving the unwritten parts of the text based upon the written parts and the links between them which are variably drawn by readers. Then, the result will be the meaning of the text which is naturally indeterminate, for any reader may see the whole of the text differently.

Accordingly, meaning of a text is not only produced by literary devices, as modernists hold, or as the result of language structures, as Structuralists and Poststructuralists have it. It is rather produced in the process of reading and is determined by the reader. That is, "[i]t is readers . . . who give it [the text] its meaning" (Guerin et al 2005, p. 351).

Indeed, as opposed to modernists who deprive the reader of any central position in the act of interpretation, Reader-Response critics stress that “the reader creates a text as much as the author does” (p. 352), that is, “it is the reader who should say what a text means” (p. 351) by involving his or her consciousness in understanding the text. This also implies the rejection of the idea of the autonomy of the text put forward by modernists. The act of reading is hence active or as M. H. Abrams (1999) says is “co-creative” (p. 256). This does not mean any interpretation of a given text is possible and tenable. Therefore, Reader-response critics’ major concern is the interaction of the text with the reader.

As mentioned earlier, act of reading is a process in which the reader plays a significant role in interpreting and creating the meaning(s) of a literary text. In this light, the artistic literary text together with the realisation of it by the reader highly counts. In other words, the way the text is realised or concretised by the reader which is referred to as “the aesthetic” (Iser 2000, p. 189) highlights the active role of the reader. Moreover, the process of concretisation or realisation is an indication of the active role of the reader. This implies that the act of reading is not static but dynamic. That is, it is the collaboration of the written parts of the text, set by the author, and the unwritten parts as realised and imagined by the reader that makes the meaning of the text. However, as Iser states, “the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications” (p. 190).

Here lies the significance and function of both the reader and the text. As the reader reads a literary text, his or her responses are evoked by the text. It is the reader who comes to modify his or her expectations aroused by the text. Literary texts are replete with “unexpected twists and turns, and frustration of expectations” (Iser, 1974, p. 279). Any sentence, which is regarded as the written part of the text, within a literary work evokes a response or expectation in the reader. These expectations, as Iser interjects, can be confirmed or changed by the following sentences (p. 192). In other words, sentences in the text evoke expectations of what may come later. When later statements change and modify the readers’ expectations, they should go back to read early parts once more to correct them. That is, readers should go to and fro several times to modify their expectations. This indicates the dynamic process of reading and the active role of the reader in the process.

Arriving at meaning in the process of reading is indeterminate, for literary texts necessitate readers’ participation. When an expectation aroused in the reader is confirmed easily, the text is that of minimal indeterminacy. If the anticipation has to be modified, it is the text of maximal indeterminacy. Most modern works can be regarded as texts of maximal indeterminacy, since they constantly shock the readers and frustrate their expectations and anticipations. To Iser, “a good literary work usually frustrates our expectations” (Habib 2008, p. 725). In “Indeterminacy and the Reader’s Response,” Iser (1997) elaborates upon the idea by presenting texts as being texts of maximal indeterminacy or minimal indeterminacy. This is the determinant aspect between a scientific text and a literary text in that literary texts are indeterminate, whereas scientific texts are determinate. In a sense, literary texts do not refer to an outside object but constructs their own object. As he interjects, “[i]f a literary text presents no real objects, it nevertheless establishes its reality by the reader’s participation and by the reader’s response” (p. 196). In other words, it is upon the reader to decide upon the meaning of a literary text which consists of different gaps. Consequently, the meaning of a literary text is indeterminate. The only difference lies in the amount of indeterminacy.

This indeterminacy is the very gaps which help reader fill in. As Iser (1997) affirms, “every literary text invites some form of participation on the part of the reader” (p. 198). It involves the reader, because for the creation of its world it is dependent upon the reader’s imagination. It needs the reader for acknowledging and realising its world and meaning. It requires readers to fill in the gaps, for “[i]t is only through such an interactive reading of words, phrases, verses, or pieces of narrative that the gap between the overt and the covert nature of the word can be bridged” (Iser 2000, p. 22). These gaps are referred to as indeterminacy of a text which enables the reader’s imagination. The reader is always in the search of bringing these fragmented elements together to arrive at a consistent interpretation.

Indeed, it is the cooperation between the reader and the text that gives it its life and meaning. As Iser (1974) asserts, “[t]he convergence of the text and the reader brings the literary work into existence” (p. 275). In other words, meaning of a literary work does not exist independent of its reader. It is itself a process, or as Fish (1972) calls it, an event. He describes “*meaning as an event*, something that is happening between the words and in the readers’ mind, something not visible to the naked eye, but which can be made visible (or at least palpable) by the regular introduction of a ‘searching’ question (what does this do?)” (p. 389).

Similarly, Guerin et al (2005) declare that “[a] text’s meaning depends on the symbolization in the minds of readers. Meaning is not found; it is developed” (p. 358). Therefore, meaning of a text is first and foremost indeterminate and is the result of the interaction between the reader and the text. As Selden (1989a) clarifies, according to Iser, “[w]hat we grasp as we read is only a series of changing viewpoints, not something fixed and fully meaningful at every point” (p. 120); hence, meaning as indeterminate. However, the range of interpretations is determined by the written parts of the text. Thus, not all interpretations can be tenable but only those which are determined and demarcated by the text. As it is generally agreed, “literary texts take on their reality by being read, and this in turn means that texts must already contain certain conditions of actualization that will allow their meaning to be assembled in the responsive mind of the recipient” (Iser 1978, p. 25). As Iser (2001) asserts, “if communication between text and reader is to be successful, clearly the reader’s activity must also be controlled in some way by the text” (1676).

In addition, Hans Robert Jauss refers to the idea of horizon of expectations that a reader has whilst reading a literary text. It refers to a set of assumptions and conventions that readers are familiar with which may influence their interpretation of a text as the readers try to perceive a literary work. It is indeed shared assumptions and conventions dominant in a given historical period which “may or may not be shared by the writer. If the horizon is shared, the writer will be immediately understood and easily interpreted by his contemporaries” (Selden 1989b, p. 127). In other words, the reading process is affected by what the readers already know about literary genres and conventions. Readers in any historical period have certain sets of conventions by which they judge a literary work. Each era may differ in the set of conventions and assumptions. These conventions and genres in literary criticism cause readers to judge a literary text. That is, each era has a different horizon of expectations by which readers appreciate a literary work. Horizon of expectations can be defined as “all of a historical period’s critical vocabulary and assessment of a text” (Bressler 2007, p. 84). These account for changes in a text’s evaluation from one historical period to another. Accordingly, since each historical period’s horizon of expectations is different from that of other periods, an ultimate, fixed, universal meaning cannot be achieved. A given literary text has more than one true meaning, since “its supposed meaning changes from one historical period to another” (p. 84). Consequently, relying upon Reader-Response theories, this study is to explicate the significance and relation between a strong animal imagery of Jose Saramago’s *Blindness* (1997) and the idea of the deterioration of humanity along with spiritual blindness.

3. Animal Imagery and the Deterioration of Humanity in Jose Saramago’s *Blindness*

In Jose Saramago’s *Blindness*, the deterioration of humanity and morality is depicted by analogies made between the people and animals. In other words, the novel attributes animal characteristics to the characters which is intensified by the animal imagery that is dominant throughout the text. To Iser, throughout the process of reading “the work’s efficacy is caused by its evocation and subsequent negation of the familiar; in other words, the reader thinks her assumptions are affirmed by the text; she is then led to see that these assumptions are overturned and she enters the assumptions of the textual world itself” (Habib 2008, p. 727). Accordingly, the researchers should fill in this gap which is created and linked between this strong animal imagery and the idea of the deterioration and loss of morality as well as humanity. These animal characteristics are attributed to both the ordinary people and the government together with the military forces. For instance, as the narrator explains the condition of the doctor, “he lowered them, when he thought he was alone, but not in time, he knew he was dirty, dirtier than he could ever remember having been in his life. There are many ways of becoming an animal, he thought, this is just the first of them” (p. 36). The novel shows the process the people go through to get close to an animal status.

This brutalization, in a sense, can also be viewed in the act of the soldiers who are supposed to protect the people. After several blinds are shot by soldiers, “[t]he sergeant’s only comment was, It would have been better to let them die of hunger, when the *beast* [emphasis added] dies, the poison dies with it” (p. 33). Although the soldiers see the inmates as beasts, they themselves are acting like beasts. This is why they become blind too, for they do not realise their own brutality. Likewise, the prisoners are compared to “pigs” (p. 37) and “imbeciles” who move like “lame crabs” (p. 39). This intensifies the idea of the downgrade of human nature and humanity. This process through which human beings approximate animals is accompanied with the loss of reasoning amongst the people. It is best reflected in the scenes in which the officials, who are blind, are presenting lectures before a throng of blinds. The absurdity and stupidity of the officials’ words and deeds are best expressed in the words of the military forces.

As the narrator describes, “but the word of a regimental commander, once again figuratively speaking, is worth its weight in gold, no man rises to so high a rank in the army without being right in everything he thinks, says and does” (p. 39). The regiment commander stands for any official of high rank in the government. It is a critique of the people who ignorantly and *thoughtlessly* accept whatever the officials tell them. That is, it is a critique of the people who are blind to whatever they are told and given without *reasoning*. In general, one of the most salient differences between human beings and animals is the fact that the former is highly capable of reasoning. Nonetheless, the scene as well as the strong animal imagery undermines the idea, since people, who are representatives of modern people, have ceased to be rational, orderly. As the doctor’s wife says, “[t]hese blind internees, unless we come to their assistance, will soon turn into *animals*, worse still, into blind *animals* [emphasis added]” (p. 50). In the novel people, who are representatives of modern men, seem to have fallen into indifference towards each other, grabbing any time to use for their own, and only their own, benefits whilst being reluctant to others’ needs.

As the doctor’s wife realises, “[i]f we cannot live entirely like human beings, at least let us do everything in our power not to live entirely like animals” (p. 45). Perhaps this is why the only person who is not blind is the doctor’s wife. She is aware of the loss of morality and humanity in the society. This becomes more significant if we compare her words to the events occurred earlier. For instance, the narrator describes a scene in which a blind man is going to have intercourse with a woman. The man is compared to a hyena and the woman a carcass: “[t]he blind woman suffering from insomnia wailed in desperation beneath an enormous fellow, the other four were surrounded by men with their trousers down who were jostling each other like hyenas around a carcass” (p. 67). The image is that of a group of hyenas besieging their victim. The narrator’s description of the man who is raping a woman is equally illuminating: he “panted like a suffocating pig” (p. 67). To the narrator, “it seems impossible that the animal drive for sex should be so powerful, to the point of blinding a man’s sense of smell, the most delicate of the senses” (p. 66). Yet, what the characters do testifies the possibility of this animal drive. When the doctor’s wife kills the blind man who is going to rape her, “[h]is cry was barely audible, it might have been the grunting of an animal about to ejaculate, as was happening to some of the other men, and perhaps it was, and at the same time as a spurt of blood splashed on to her face, the blind woman received the discharge of semen in her mouth” (p. 70).

This image of brutalisation continues its dominance. The people in the streets are also compared to ants: “they were constantly bumping into each other like ants on the trail” (p. 84). In addition, describing the doctor’s wife, the narrator says, “[s]he raised the suddenly dislocated body, the legs covered in blood, her abdomen bruised, her poor breasts uncovered, brutally scarred, teeth marks on her shoulder where she had been bitten” (p. 68). She is described in a way that it seems she has been bitten by ferocious dogs. The main characters excrete in the yard, making noises like animals. They are “[s]cattered throughout the back garden, groaning with the effort, suffering whatever remained of futile shame” (p. 94). Gradually, one loses his or her shame if one forsakes morality and humanity. The people in the streets are also compared to dogs. As the doctor’s wife says, “some of the dogs here are eating another dog. Are they eating our dog, asked the boy with the squint, No, our dog as you call him, is alive, and prowling around them but he keeps his distance” (p. 97). Accordingly, another link is made between animals and human beings which aims at disclosing the loss and deterioration of morality and humanity.

The scene where some blind men ask for money in return for food is very absurd, since money in this situation is of no use for the blind. They want to kill others if they do not comply with their rules. This shows the stupid, frivolous wishes and desires of human beings which can sometimes be seen in a society. They exploit others for foolish reasons. This highlights the animosity of human beings, for animals may fight with each other over food. However, they do not ask for anything else including money or jewelry. Ironically, some blind people in the hospital ask for money and sex for food. The writer tries to show how much abject human beings can be, much inferior than animals. Animals may kill each other for food and cease to do so when they are very well fed. Nonetheless, it seems that it is only human beings who kill for reasons other than food, reasons which are depicted in the novel as absurd and futile.

Nevertheless, the presence and actions of a dog that accompanies the main characters and those done by the doctor’s wife are in contravention of the all mentioned before. The dog reveals behaviors that we can associated with kindness, love, passion, support, and the like towards the group that it follows. It always licks tears on the face of characters as an act of condolence and love. In addition, the doctor’s wife who manages to kill a hoodlum who tries to rape her is the only person who can see.

She shows a high amount of humaneness throughout the novel which is expressed in her keeping after the group, providing them with food and warm cloths, washing them, and keeping their hope alive, to name but a few. These make our previous interpretations concerning the relation between animal imagery and inhumanity indeterminate which testifies to the idea of the novel as a text of maximal indeterminacy. By indeterminacy is meant the gaps including “actions that are not clearly explained or that seem to have multiple explanations – which allow or even invite readers to create their own interpretations” (Tyson 2006, p. 174). Therefore, the strong animal imagery of the novel as a gap produces a high degree of indeterminacy.

4. *Spiritual Blindness in Blindness*

Closely related to the idea of the deterioration of morality and humanity as evident in the strong animal imagery of the text is the spiritual blindness of the modern world. From the very beginning of the story, the researchers were searching for a cause for the abrupt blindness of the characters. It seems that there must be a physical cause and a cure for it. This expectation continues its dominance in the mind for several pages. As a case in point, the doctor who has been in contact with the first man who got blind turns blind. Also, the man who helps the first blind to find his home turns blind too. Consequently, the hypothesis that the illness is physical and contagious seems to be tenable. Nonetheless, the expectation is not going to be fulfilled, for, going on reading, the readers realise that the novel is replete with images and ideas that associate the idea of blindness to a spiritual blindness. Furthermore, associations are made between the spiritual blindness and death. For instance, the idea that the ophthalmologist is blind is very ironic. It also reveals that this blindness is spiritual, not physical. As the narrator says, the eyes of the ophthalmologist “had stopped seeing, eyes that were totally blind, yet meanwhile were in perfect condition, without any lesions, recent or old, acquired or innate” (p. 13). Moreover, his wife never gets blind throughout the novel although she is in close contact with the blind. This indicates that it is not a physical illness. Therefore, one of the significant gaps to be filled in by the readers is the idea of spiritual blindness that can only be concretised and realised after subsequent readings.

In addition, after a second reading of the first several pages, the researchers realise hints and clues implying that the illness is not physical. This is supported by the fact that the doctor himself is a specialist in ophthalmology. Checking the first blind man, he finds no symptom of physical illness. This is best clear in the following discussion between the doctor and the man:

The doctor asked him, Has anything like this ever happened to you before, or something similar, No, doctor, I don't even use glasses. And you say it came on all of a *sudden* [emphasis added], Yes, doctor, Like a light going out, More like a light going on, During the last few days have you felt any difference in your eyesight, No, doctor, Is there, or has there ever been any case of blindness in your family, Among the relatives I've known or have heard discussed, no one, Do you suffer from diabetes, No, doctor, From syphilis, No, doctor. From hypertension of the arteries or the brain cells, I'm not sure about the brain cells, but none of these other things, we have regular medical check-ups at work. Have you taken a sharp knock on the head, today or yesterday, No, doctor, How old are you, Thirty-eight, Fine, let's take a look at these eyes. (pp. 7-8)

Having checked the man's eyes meticulously, the doctor says with bewilderment that “I cannot find any lesion, your eyes are perfect” (p. 8). Thus, the text creates a gap to be filled in by the reader. The gap is accordingly the spiritual blindness in the society which is embodied as a physical illness with no physical cause and cure.

Furthermore, the abrupt outbreak of the blindness itself indicates it is not a physical affliction. The man was able to “feel the contact of the metallic frame on his eyebrow, his eyelashes brushed against the tiny lens, but he could not see out, an impenetrable whiteness covered everything” (p. 4). The solid metallic frame can signify death, the death of humaneness.

The researchers can also find clues implying that the cause of the blindness is spiritual rather than physical. The man who steals the car turns blind. A gap is made here in that the researchers can associate the blindness to the man's wrongdoing. Moreover, the doctor sometimes keeps the patients who protest waiting. As the mother of a child protested, “[t]he other patients supported her in a low voice, but not one of them, nor the woman herself, thought it wise to carry on complaining, in case the doctor should take offence and repay their impertinence by making them wait even longer, as has occurred” (p. 7). Hence, the researchers can fill in the gap and conclude that the doctor turns blind as a result of his unethical behavior towards the patients.

The readers can also apprehend the girl with black glasses turns blind because she is now atoning for her misdeeds. An association is made here between prostitution and blindness:

[S]he discreetly knocked on the door, ten minutes later she was naked, fifteen minutes later she was moaning, eighteen minutes later she was whispering words of love that she no longer needed to feign, after twenty minutes she began to lose her head, after twenty-one minutes she felt that her body was being lacerated with pleasure, after twenty two minutes she called out, Now, now, and when she regained consciousness she said, exhausted and happy, I can still see everything white. (p. 12)

The blind man sees everything white too; in addition, the girl with the dark glasses turns blind too immediately after having sex with a man. Furthermore, it is said that the girl's blindness is not something new. This makes sense only if her blindness is not construed as a physical illness. As the narrator says, she realises "that her loss of vision was not some new and unforeseen consequence of pleasure" (p. 12). She is already blind before noticing her blindness. This spiritual blindness is the result of the absurdity and evilness of their deeds, as the researchers perceive, which is now embodied in the form of physical blindness.

However, the fact that the doctor may sometimes keep those patients who protest waiting does not seem to be a convincing justification for his blindness. This makes our interpretation of the phenomenon indeterminate. That is, keeping the patients waiting cannot be regarded as a retribution for such a dominant blindness in the whole society. In this light, the novel can be considered as a text of maximal indeterminacy which implies and requires the active participation of the reader, for as Guerin et al (2005) realise, "a text does not tell readers anything; there are gaps or blanks, which he [Iser] refers to as 'indeterminacy, of the text. Readers must fill these in and thereby assemble their meaning(s), thus becoming coauthors in a sense" (p. 355). At first glance, the cause of this blindness seems to be contagious. Then, it turns out it is not. After that, we think it is related to the characters' deeds, as retribution. Yet, the child's blindness rejects the idea, for he is only a child. Therefore, the dominant blindness in the novel is more likely a symbol of the corruption of morality and the spiritual death in the society. Thus, the researchers cannot arrive at a determinate interpretation of this phenomenon.

Blindness can be interpreted as the loss of humanity, morality, or spirituality in the society that may also come in the form of people's ignorance and indifference towards each other. As the doctor observes, "I've spent my life looking into people's eyes, it is the only part of the body where a soul might still exist" (p. 51). As it can be implied, blindness is equal to lack of soul and consequently lack of humanity. It is a veil that obstructs our sight and vision. It may come in different forms including prejudice, selfishness, and gluttony. As the narrator says, "blindness, as everyone knows, has no regard for professions or occupations, but a policeman struck blind is not the same as a blind policeman" (p. 52). Blindness knows no social class. Anyone at any social level may suffer from the same problems, being stymied by selfishness, inhumanity, gluttony, etc. After spending a great deal of time in the hospital, the doctor's wife notices a strange silence, "a silence that seemed to occupy the space of an absence, as if *humanity*, the whole of *humanity* [emphasis added], had disappeared, leaving only a light and a soldier keeping watch over it" (p. 58). This lack of humanity is intensified by silence and the coldness of the night. All these phenomena are not new, but are now made strange: "[t]he night was *cold* [emphasis added], the wind blew along the front of the building, it seemed impossible that there should still be wind in this world, that the night should be black, she wasn't thinking of herself, she was thinking of the blind for whom the day was endless" (p. 58). Accordingly, the blindness of the characters has its roots in the loss of humanity and morality.

The devastation of morality and humanity in the modern world is also depicted as having its roots in the whole system including the government. Depriving the prisoners (the blind) of antibiotics is shocking! It is inhuman. The conversation between a soldier and his sergeant is equally revealing: "[d]o you think the man's dead, asked the sergeant, He must be, the shot struck him right in the face, replied the soldier, now *pleased* [emphasis added] with the obvious demonstration of the accuracy of his aim" (p. 30). The sergeant takes pleasure in killing the blind man. It is said that the soldiers' only duty is to keep them "under guard" (p. 41). This is what the soldiers and the whole military force are supposed to do. Nevertheless, as it can be seen the contrary occurs in the story. The answer to the question illuminates this gap within the story which is best expressed in the narrative's voice: "[t]he proof of the progressive *deterioration of morale* [emphasis added] in general was provided by the Government itself" (p. 47). The society is corrupt, for the whole system is corrupt. This illness, blindness, is the symbolic symptom of the spiritual and moral corruption prevalent in the society.

Lack of love which is associated with lack of humanity and morality is another gap to be filled by the implied reader. It is manifest in the horrible scene in which the blind have sexual relations. Their abuse of women by some hoodlums as an exchange for food highly intensifies the fact that the relation is for economic needs. Consequently, an association is here made between the profession of the girl with black glasses as a prostitute and the whole community in the hospital who do the same for food. As the narrator says, “it is not only the voice of blood that needs no eyes, *love* [emphasis added], which people say is blind, also has a voice of its own” (p. 58). Also, the notion of the spiritual blindness and the death of morality are best evident in a man’s comment on providing the hoodlums with their women. As he says, “[a]ll I know is that we would never have found ourselves in this situation if their leader hadn’t been killed, what did it matter if the women had to go there twice a month to give these men what nature gave them to give, I ask myself. Some found this amusing, some forced a smile” (p. 72). He sees no problem if women sleep with the hoodlums! Very ironically, other people’s reaction is astonishing! Some smile and some are amused. This shows the degree of immorality in the society. No difference is made between the girl with black glasses as a prostitute and the people in the hospital. They let their wives sleep with the men for food. The relation is that of a prostitute and her earning money as well as food.

In this regard, whilst checking the girl with black glasses, the ophthalmologist observes that “[s]he has . . . a profession, and, also like ordinary people, she takes advantage of any free time to indulge her body and satisfy needs, both individual and general. Were we not trying to reduce her to some primary definition, we should finally say of her, in the broad sense, that she lives as she pleases and moreover gets all the pleasure she can from life” (p. 26). The narrator is describing what a prostitute does; this is exactly what women in the novel do later on. The narrator’s comments upon the girl is illuminating: “today she had someone waiting for her, an encounter she had every reason to expect would lead to something good, as much in terms of *material* as in terms of other *satisfactions* [emphasis added]” (p. 11). Women in the novel act like this prostitute; they sleep with men for material (food) and the men for satisfaction (sexual pleasure). In both cases, the relationships are made not based upon passion and love but only based upon material interests and physical satisfaction.

The people indeed have undergone a metamorphosis which is another gap to be filled in. Drawing upon Jauss’s idea of horizon of expectations, an expectation is raised in the mind of the researchers that there is a similar problem in *Blindness* as it is in Frantz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* in that people gradually and very slowly come to acknowledge their spiritual downgrade, their metamorphosis. The narrator’s description of the blind walking in the streets highly resembles the act of metamorphosis in Kafka’s story. As the narrator describes, “[s]tumbling through the streets, everyone fleeing at the very sight of him, his family in a panic, terrified of approaching him, a mother’s love, a child’s love, a myth, they would probably treat me just as I am treated in this place, lock me up in a room and, if I was very lucky, leave a plate outside the door” (p. 41). Like Gregor Samsa who is locked in the room left a plate outside, people suffer from the same problem. As Selden (1989b) paraphrases Jauss, “[a]ll we can expect to achieve when studying the sequence of horizons and reading of a particular text is a ‘fusion’ of horizons” (p. 128). Hence, fusing the expectations evoked by the novel, the researchers can conclude that their expectation raised as a consequence of a previous literary text is fulfilled.

Death is a leitmotif in the novel that is closely associated with spiritual blindness. In other words, a parallel is made between the idea of spiritual death and spiritual blindness in the society. When the first man turns blind he says, “I am blind, I am blind, he repeated in despair as they helped him to get out of the car, and the tears welling up made those eyes which he claimed were *dead* [emphasis added], shine even more” (p. 3). Therefore, the gap the readers should fill in is the idea that blindness is equal to death. Indeed, death continues its dominant image throughout the story. As a case in point, the blind man says “[i]f I have to stay like this, I’d rather be dead” (p. 6). The leitmotif of death is also evident in references made to Homer’s *Iliad*: “he was still capable of remembering what Homer wrote in the *Iliad*, the greatest poem about *death* [emphasis added] and suffering ever written” (p. 13). Likewise, the person in charge in the hospital tells the ophthalmologist that “*blindness* isn’t catching, *Death* [emphasis added] isn’t catching either, yet nevertheless we all die” (p. 15). Accordingly, associations are made between death and blindness to indicate that spiritual blindness is on par with spiritual death. In other words, a blind society in terms of spirituality and morality is a dead society. As the girl with dark glasses says, “we’re *blind* because we’re *dead*, or if you would prefer me to put it another way, we’re *dead* because we’re *blind* [emphasis added]” (p. 93). Another gap to be filled by the reader is that between corruption in the society and the blindness amongst the people in the novel. It is a chaotic corrupt society that yields no fruitful product. The blind’s wallowing in their own excrement and slime on the ground can be used symbolically.

In other words, the people in the novel are living in their own production which is nothing but a filthy material that brings no fruit. It is the outcome of their own deeds they are harvesting. This scene is highly contrasted to the one depicted in the painting: a field with corns. They are in fact living in a corrupt, fruitless society. They are blinded by many things including ignorance, indifference, corruption, or as the narrator says “they were blinded by lust” (p. 63). The idea is also supported by the paralysis which is dominant in the novel. The blind are described as “[d]eaf, blind, silent, tottering on their Feet” (p. 68). Moreover, the ophthalmologist has a discussion with the person in charge in the ministry of health. After the person in charge hangs up impudently, the ophthalmologist says, “[t]his is the stuff we’re made of, half indifference and half malice” (p. 14). It is the realisation of the corrupt relation amongst people in the society which comes in the form of an illness, blindness, of the society.

The idea of chaos and corruption of the society in the novel brings about expectations whilst recalling Jauss’s idea of horizon of expectations. The reader’s reactions, as Habib (2008) puts it, “do not occur in a vacuum but are situated within a horizon of expectations (a framework of assumptions) that can be objectified” (p. 722). In the same vein, the novel evokes our (the readers’) horizon of expectations in order to destroy them. It makes implied allusions to Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*. In the play, the order which is not supposed to be transgressed is violated. The result of the corruption and chaos in the society is reflected in the form of an illness, plague. In the play, the order is re-gained. Regarding the play and the present novel, in some respects the researchers’ expectations are fulfilled and in others they are not. Furthermore, in the play we have a blind seer who, although physically blind, can see the truth. On the contrary, Oedipus is not physically blind but cannot see the truth. Nonetheless, at the end of the play when he knows the truth, he blinds himself. In *Blindness*, similar to the play, the illness is used symbolically to indicate the chaos, disorder, and corruption in the society. As the narrator says, “there are no supplies of any kind, this must be what *chaos* is, this is what is really meant by *chaos* [emphasis added]” (p. 94). Yet, their blindness has a direct connection to their awareness. As soon as they gradually shift from a sense of ignorance to a sense of awareness, their blindness disappears. In addition, contrary to the play, no order is re-gained here. The only change in the novel is a shift from ignorance to awareness which occurs to just a few characters but not the whole society. In other words, the ending of the novel seems to be artificially fabricated.

5. Conclusion

Put shortly, reading the novel brings about expectations in the mind of the researchers. Some of these expectations are fulfilled, others not. The novel also provides the readers with gaps including corruption, chaos, death, and spiritual blindness to be filled in. The deterioration of morality is depicted by a strong animal imagery throughout the text. People including the military force and the officials are either compared to animals or attributed animal characteristics. Consequently, people’s physical blindness can be accounted for their abandoning humanity towards brutalisation. Moreover, horizon of expectations including two previous literary texts helps the readers to better understand the novel. As discussed, in these texts there can be found similarities that intensify our perception of the novel’s themes including the spiritual blindness and loss of humanity as well as morality which is symbolised in the physical blindness of the characters. Nonetheless, the researchers cannot arrive at a determinate interpretation concerning some of the expectations. The expectations raised in the mind of the researcher are not totally fulfilled. In other words, the novel can be regarded as a text of maximal indeterminacy. Hence, the active role of the reader together with the indeterminacy of the text is highlighted.

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