

**THE POWER OF ART: A READING ON RUTA SEPETY'S *BETWEEN SHADES OF GRAY***

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**Abstract**

Human thoughts, feelings, emotions, perceptions, and needs are expressions of art. In that sense, powerful art has the ability to shift one's understanding of truth and consciousness. Even though the stages of art are frequently expanded and assorted, art helps one to identify through it and it also constructs the social entity. These are the things which engaged in the successful and important thing of a great and artistic life. Some of the artworks endure with greater power and some of them will have power over our circumstances. In Sepety's "Between Shades of Gray", the protagonist, Lina acts as a central figure and her drawings clearly picture the incidents that happened in their lives seemed to be a pitiable one. Through her sketches, she communicates all the things to her father in the art form, when men were separated from the members of their family. By this way, art has been considered here as a powerful one in all over her situations and it is also used as a tool for communicating things with the other characters in the novel.

**Keywords:** expressions, consciousness, artistic, powerful, communication.

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According to Thomas Merton, one of the famous religious poet and a novelist, art is that as water is to fish. In view of the fact that both of his parents were artists, from the beginning itself he swims across in it like a fish. In Merton's *No Man Is an Island*, he defines art as "Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time" (34). The powerful art helps a person to identify by enabling them to find out who are they, what they like or not and how they believe about something through it. And it also helps one to lose all such worries in this world.

In Sepety's *Between Shades of Gray*, the protagonist of the novel, Lina brings out the sufferings of the people in Lithuania who were under the control of the Soviet Union. In August 1941, the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were officially seized by the Soviets. The huge mass of people from Lithuania was taken as slaves to another place. They arrived at a small train depot in the countryside. The Soviets trucks filled the rail yard and packed with people. The station is trapped in a deserted area, surrounded by dark woods. In this situation, Lina pictures the pitiable condition of Lithuanian people who were taken as slaves and they were forced to shift from their own land like "a rug is being lifted and a huge soviet broom sweeping us under it" (23).

Men were being alienated from their family members, children were screaming and mothers pleaded for their lives. Masses of Lithuanians crowded just before them with their belongings. Most of the people who were gathered in the train platform are the elderly one. Lithuania is a place which is cherished for its elders but now they were being driven like animals. And, they were taken in the cattle cars and treated badly for without doing any mistakes. Their faces speak about their future life and they all seem to be hopeless in that situation.

Lina too crammed with anger, fear, and confusion in her mind, but she also finds some courage in her. Hours pass like stretched days and the people also shed tears of heat and appetite. During that time, Lina expressed the agony and the miserable situation of the people through drawing by using her fingernail to carve drawings on the wall and sketch those images in a layer of dirt on the floor in the front of the train car.

By this way, When Lina happened to enter into the art museum, she brings into being a face which looks so captivating like not anything that she had ever seen in her life. It is nothing but a charcoal portrait of a young man whose painful face made her eyes well with tears. The portrait has been drawn by the artist named Edvard Munch and it admires her a lot in that museum. Thus, she appreciates the drawings of Munch by recognizing it anywhere through its emotional feelings in the paintings like her Papa will recognize her drawings anywhere because it is about the disgraceful position of Lithuanians.

Lina used her handkerchief as a paper to draw on the things that they were undergoing in their life to her Papa. While they were traveling in the train car, when it stops anywhere they

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usually start to count the number of dead bodies thrown out from it and it grows day by day. By noticing that, Jonas, brother of Lina makes marks with a stone on the floorboard of the car and he keeps tracking of the children who were dead in the car. When Lina looks at the marks of Jonas, she imagines herself and draws little heads at the top of each one by drawing hair, eyes, a nose and a mouth for it. And, when she passed through many places she writes all those names of the cities in her handkerchief to convey the message to her father. Each day, she adds more information as well as identifying clues for her Papa that he has to understand it in an easy way. And so, she believed that by sending a word to her father will pave the way to find them through those drawings and such information.

As an artist, Lina tries to reveal the sufferings of the Lithuanians by the Soviets through her drawings to the whole world. Lina's art teacher enlightens her, "...if you breathed deeply and imagined something, you could be there. You could see it, feel it" (163-164). In this way, whenever she used to draw the happenings in Lithuania to her father she imagined herself and feels it while drawing such things. With a hopeful note, she starts to recreate the things that she has seen and convey all her drawings with lots of descriptions to her Papa. Lina became so frightened when the NKVD killed a man who had written letters to the partisans. She feels very hard to forget the image of the dead man from her mind and thinks about her drawings which were lifelike and full of pain by hiding in her suitcase.

Then, Lina has been forced by the NKVD to draw the map of Siberia and the photo of a family. In the photograph, there is a black box which has been drawn around the man's head. While she draws the places on the map, she stares at it and tries to recollect it in her memory. And so, she recreates it on her own to do it later. Because, when she started to draw the map, she questions herself at first as: "I looked at the map of Siberia, shocked by its enormity. Where were we on the map? And where was Papa? I surveyed the details of the plot" (173).

Lina has a recurring dream about her father and says,

I saw a male figure coming toward me in the camp through the swirling ice and snow. I always woke before I could see his face, but once I thought I heard Papa's voice.

"Now, what sort of sensible girl stands in the middle of the road when it's snowing?"

Papa's face appeared, frosty and red. He carried a small bundle of hay.

"I'm not late," he said, putting his arm around me. "I'm right on time." (335-336)

The powerful imageries were given here the impressions of the imaginary character as a real one in his absence. While walking through the snow, Lina discovers a tiny sliver of gold come into sight between shades of gray on the field.

Thus, Lina expressed all her emotions and fear into an art form because it is their only way to express themselves by keeping their country alive in their hearts. According to them, paintings and drawings were not shared in public. Art has been passed furtively by encoded with messages and news from the various prison camps. Sketches of symbols from their homeland were sometimes enough to push a deportee onward to fight for another day. Here, the author brings out that the three nations of the Baltic States teach all of us that love is one of the most powerful armies. And, the drawings about the sufferings of the Lithuanians are also kept as a record of its history. In this way, art plays an important role in this novel as well as it is a powerful one to handle all the tough situations in life.

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