

The significance of the black rose in fragrance of roses by peter carey



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‘ The locals will now tell you that when they visited the old man’s glasshouse, they discovered the most beautiful rose that anyone could ever dream of. It was twice the size of a man’s fist and was almost black in colour, with just the faintest hint of red in its velvety petals.’

Fragrance of Roses is about a pitiful foreign old man who had lived in a poor village for twenty-five years. His only work was breeding roses in a glasshouse behind his house. After two Israeli agents arrested him, the villagers who disliked him openly finally discovered his past as the former commandant of Auschwitz and his beautiful black rose, which became their prized possession and tourist attraction.

Auschwitz was a deadly Nazi concentration and extermination camp in Poland during the Second World War. Prisoners were either killed in gas chambers, or died from malnutrition or overwork. The majority of them were Jews. It was operated due to the Nazi idea of ‘ purifying’ the Aryan race in Germany. People of the white Caucasian race were deemed the superior master race. The final solution to the idea was a six million people genocide.

In many literary works, roses are symbols of romance and love. Just one example is the short story, ‘ A Rose for Emily’, by William Faulkner, where the rose represents the idea of eternal love and faithfulness, as in the story, Miss Emily had killed her lover who had no wish to marry, in order to keep him beside her at her will until she died.

The symbolism of the black rose in the short story, ‘ Fragrance of Roses’, however, is much darker and harrowing.

In the short story, the villagers named the rose, ' the Auschwitz Rose' and insisted that it emits a heavy sweet odour of death and mass graves of Auschwitz. It is possible as the black colour of the rose may symbolise death, while the ' faintest hint of red' may symbolise blood. However, I believe that Peter Carey had used the rose to represent the old man rather than Auschwitz.

The black, almost sinister colouring of the beautiful rose symbolise the cruelty and fatality of the over glorified and enchanting Nazi Regime, and moreover, the cruelty and fatality of the old man when he was the Commandant of Auschwitz, under the cover of superiority and power then, and pitifulness and fragileness now.

Black roses are not of a naturally occurring specie of roses, they are hybrid plants that have been genetically manipulated by cross breeding programs. Now, the hybrid property of the rose was the factor that cemented my idea that it is a representation of the old man rather than Auschwitz. The hybrid property suggests the co-existence of innocence and evil in him. At the beginning of the story, we feel pity for the old man, who is friendless and dislikes in the community. However, by the end, when we discover his past as the former commandant of Auschwitz, he is no longer the pitiful victim in the reader's eyes, instead he is the antithesis to a victim, and in my view, a heartless murderer.

Essentially, the rose is a inner reflection of the old man, alike to the portrait of Dorian Grey, in the novel, ' The Picture of Dorian Grey', by Oscar wilde. While Dorian remain youthful and beautiful, his portrait is hideous like his

corrupt morals. And in 'Fragrance of Roses', while the old man's physical appearance seems pitiable, his corrupt morals and past is revealed in the dark, ominous colouring of the rose.

'Fragrance of roses' consists of many ironies. The first one is actually the title. The villagers describes the rose to have an 'odour' of the mass graves of Auschwitz, however Peter Carey had used 'fragrance', a pleasant smell, in the title instead. I believe that he is suggesting that the rose is what it is, and not entirely what the villagers claim.

Another irony is the fact that the black rose is a hybrid plant. It seems that the former commandant just cannot let go of his enjoyment of manipulating nature. Except, this time, he can only use plants instead of people for his experiments. The interesting note to this irony is that while he worked at Auschwitz, the Nazi goal was to purify the German Aryan race by eliminating the inferior races and forbidding intermarriage between Aryans and Jews, but with the roses, he polluted the genes of a rose specie by cross breeding it with various other species, in order to form a hybrid.

The end of the story is all together an irony. Instead of being offended by the shocking significance of the rose, the locals are fascinated by it and made it their pride and 'good fortune'. Although the villagers have promoted awareness of Auschwitz by showcasing the rose, they did it for money and fame, not out of sympathy for the victims

They have essentially commercialised and exploited the rose and a dreadful history irrelevant to their town. They assigned a terrible historic significance to the rose and discredited its true significance to its breeder. Through their <https://assignbuster.com/the-significance-of-the-black-rose-in-fragrance-of-roses-by-peter-carey/>

insensitivity and lack of sincerity, Peter Carey shows us that people can easily forgets horrific memories in order for self-gain. Perhaps, Peter Carey is trying to suggest the similarities between the villagers and us as human beings, that we are so self-centred that we can look past the offensive in order to exploit what we can. This idea is accentuated by the objective tone of the narrative, so that we can feel the disgust and ridicule Peter Carey has for the villagers.

In conclusion, through the black rose, I believe that Peter Carey had tried to present the ideas that we should not judge a person at first glance, as all individuals have secrets, that a person cannot alter his preferences, as the old man had continued to control natural breeding to old age, and that we humans can be selfish and insensitive when it comes to self-gain.

Fragrance of Roses ends with a final irony to ridicule the callous villagers further. The villagers were so pleased with the black rose that they had printed a cheap colour postcard featuring it. The interesting questions are: Why did they print a cheap postcard if the rose was their 'good fortune' and represents a highly socially and economically costing genocide? And why did they print it in colour, when the rose was black and represents a dark and evil history?